“When They Were Taken… They Always Returned:” *The Regulator*, Maritime Slavery, and Conflicting Visions of Freedom in Eighteenth-Century Bermuda and Boston

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Archives, Abbreviations, and Periodicals

MSA: Massachusetts State Archives - Boston, Massachusetts
MHS: Massachusetts Historical Society - Boston, Massachusetts
MHSOC: Massachusetts Historical Society Online Collections
NA: British National Archives - Kew, England
BA: Bermuda National Archives - Hamilton, Bermuda
RBML: Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library - New York, New York
CWMSC: The College of William and Mary Special Collections - Williamsburg, Virginia

BHQ: *Bermuda Historical Quarterly* - Published in Hamilton Bermuda by the Bermuda Historical Quarterly

Boston Gazette (Boston, MA)
Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics (Portsmouth, New Hampshire)
Freeman's Journal or New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth, New Hampshire)
Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet (Newburyport, Massachusetts)
Massachusetts Spy (Boston, Massachusetts)
Essex Gazette (Salem, Massachusetts)
Salem Gazette (Salem, Massachusetts)

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Cover Image: "Hall of History," Grant Foster, National Museum of Bermuda, https://www.bermuda.com/500-years-four-walls-national-museum-bermuda/.

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A Note on Sources

This thesis draws upon a wide array of primary sources from throughout the eighteenth century, both published and archival. Photocopying services at the British National Archives and the College of William and Mary Special Collections also provided manuscript sources I was unable to access myself. Many of my sources include conventions of spelling, grammar, and capitalization which have become irregular as standardized modern English developed over the past 300 years. In some cases, these forms would have been common in eighteenth-century writing, and in other instances these 'errors' resulted from varying levels of literacy among those creating the documents. Whenever possible, I have maintained the original form of the sources when providing quotations except for necessary changes in tense. In a few, very rare instances where I feared the direct transcription would have been so incomprehensible that it might impede the readers' experience, I substituted the original with the modern form (for example, turning "hanecum" into "handsome"). While endlessly rewarding, the transcription of hand-written documents was at times difficult and tedious. Thankfully, throughout this process I grew more confident in my ability to make sense of eighteenth-century handwriting and written conventions. Still, there were moments where I struggled to make perfect sense of the sources I was working with, especially those accessed via blurry or unclear scans. I have therefore only directly quoted sources when confident in my transcription.

Introduction

On May 9, 1782, the *Regulator*, a Bermudian privateering vessel fighting for the British in the American Revolutionary War, was captured in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean by the American warship the *Dean*. For the next week, the *Regulator*'s crew sailed behind the *Dean* en route to Boston, where the ship and its cargo would be condemned by the revolutionary Maritime Court on June 11. Unlike many privateers, however, its cargo consisted of more than weapons, rum, rice, and ammunition. Also on board were seventy enslaved Bermudian men, who, alongside the *Regulator*'s five white officers, manned, sailed, and performed upkeep on the ship while fighting bravely in its engagements and sharing in the profits of its successes.

Upon their arrival in Boston, the revolutionary authorities posed an extraordinary offer to these enslaved boatmen: their freedom in exchange for remaining in Massachusetts. While in most cases, enslaved privateering captures were sold into slavery in the South or Caribbean, a recent Massachusetts law prevented the *Regulator*'s captors from treating the enslaved sailors as property. In what might seem a puzzling decision, though, every single man opted instead to return to Bermuda, rejecting legal manumission in Boston for continued slavery at home. So desirous were these men to return that during their voyage from Boston to New York, from whence they would then be sent home, the *Regulator*'s former crew rose up, seized the transport ship, and turned its course towards Bermuda. Only six weeks after their initial capture, sixty of the *Regulator*'s seventy enslaved crew landed back in Bermuda, where they presumably continued to live in slavery and work on the water as sailors, soldiers, fishermen, or pilots.[1]

[1] Nine others returned soon after, while one passed away at some point during the ordeal. *Book of Protests*, I: 16-17, 121-122, 129-130, BA; *Boston Gazette*, May 27, 1782; *Boston Gazette*, June 17, 1782; For the precedent of selling enslaved people as privateering prizes: Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 148.

When the *Regulator*'s crew arrived in Boston that May, they entered a city which had been deeply transformed by political turmoil, revolutionary agitation, and war over the past two decades. Central to the political rhetoric which proliferated throughout the city in the leadup to the American Revolution were descriptions of tyrannical and illiberal British policies, which politicians and intellectuals believed stripped Massachusetts of its right to self-rule and condemned its citizens to a state they often described as "slavery."[2]At the same time, thousands of enslaved Black people continued to live in actual bondage in and around Boston, where chattel slavery had been foundational to the city's eighteenth-century expansion. This irony was not lost on many, as white and Black writers alike asserted the incongruity of Massachusetts "pleading for [its] own rights and liberties" while continuing to "deprive others of theirs."[3] Thus, after the British Army abandoned Boston in March 1776, the revolutionary legislature and judiciary began to slowly delegitimize slavery. When the Massachusetts Constitution boldly proclaimed that "all men are born free and equal" in June 1780, many enslaved people successfully sued for their emancipation, culminating in the gradual, although unofficial, end of slavery in the state.[4]

This thesis will place the story of the *Regulator* in the context of eighteenth-century urban and maritime slavery in Boston and Bermuda. Further, it will put the crew's rejection of the atypical offer of emancipation in conversation with the abolition movement's motivations and the visions of a post-slavery Massachusetts it presented. In other words, how does the *Regulator* reflect the differing conceptions of freedom and the divergent histories of slavery and abolition in both Boston and Bermuda?

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[2] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 165; Blanck, *Tyrannicide*, 31–37; Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, 37, 52.
[3] Belknap, "Queries Respecting Slavery in Massachusetts with Answers (Manuscript Draft)."
[4] "Massachusetts Constitution," 1780.

While a relatively inconsequential moment in the history of the American Revolution, I believe the story of the *Regulator* to be an illuminating incident in the study of slavery in the British Atlantic. In the eighteenth century, complex systems of maritime slavery developed in both Boston and Bermuda, two of the most important cogs in the British transatlantic trading empire. In both places, enslaved men worked as porters on the docks, as artisans in shipyards, and as crew aboard the countless Boston- and Bermuda-based vessels which traversed the Western Atlantic. In Bermuda, where the entire economy became predicated upon shipbuilding and maritime trade, and where not enough white men lived to work its ships, an overwhelmingly enslaved crew like that of the *Regulator* would have been quite common, as two thirds of the island's sailing force by 1770 was enslaved.[5]

Although enslaved people never constituted as significant a proportion of Boston's population or workforce, enslaved men nonetheless remained a common presence on its wharves and aboard its ships. Even for those Black Bostonians who did not labor on the sea, the orientation of the city around its harbor forced nearly all enslaved men into frequent contact with sailors, ship captains, and other members of the maritime labor force.[6] After the gradual abolition of slavery, Black men remained heavily involved in Boston's maritime trade, as the constant need for capable sailors provided them with employment difficult to find on land.[7] The story of the *Regulator*, then, arose out of these two Black maritime cultures, the experiences of the enslaved individuals working within them, and the wider perceptions of their labor in Boston and Bermuda.

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[5] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 149; Fisher, "Manuscript Materials Bearing on the Negro in British Archives," 88.
[6] Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, vii.
[7] "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 400; Aptheker, *A Documentary History*, 21; Scott, *The Common Wind,* 58–59.

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Despite being the British Empire's second New World colony, the first place of landing for enslaved Africans in the British Atlantic, and the location of the world's first English-language law specifically governing Black behavior, Bermuda has largely evaded the attention of scholars of slavery. The study of Bermudian slavery is indebted to Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, a Bermudian librarian and historian who wrote the first book-length study of slavery on the island in 1975.[8] Packwood effectively challenged previous descriptions of Bermudian slavery as either peripheral to the island's history or as beneficial to the enslaved. Virginia Bernhard's 1999 monograph made valuable contributions through its depth of research, but her main arguments of close ties between the enslaved and slave holders and white Bermudians' reluctance to reinforce slavery's racial hierarchy fall into the trap Packwood critiqued.[9] In recent years, Michael Jarvis has become the preeminent scholar on early Bermuda, and he has more persuasively established both Bermuda's centrality to British Atlantic trading networks and the unprecedented role enslaved labor played in those maritime enterprises.[10]

These studies prove Bermudian slavery to be worthy of further study and quite distinct from better-understood systems of plantation and urban slavery throughout the Atlantic. Upon initial settlement, the British, desperate for colonial wealth, envisioned Bermuda as a tobacco colony. No plantation economy survived the seventeenth century, though, as tobacco ruined Bermuda's soil and the importation of white settlers and enslaved African and Indigenous laborers quickly overpopulated the tiny island. This overpopulation led Governor John Heydon

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[8] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock.*
[9] Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*.
[10] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*; Jarvis, "Maritime Masters"; Other recent studies include Dawson, "Enslaved Ship Pilots in the Age of Revolutions"; Maxwell, "Enslaved Merchants, Enslaved Merchant-Mariners, and the Bermuda Conspiracy of 1761."

to prohibit the further importation of enslaved Africans into Bermuda in 1676, a stark contrast to the late-century expansion of the slave trade in most New World colonies. So, by 1700 and until slavery's abolition in 1834, almost the entirety of Bermuda's enslaved population was born and raised on the island. Heydon's subsequent order exiling all free Black Bermudians further limited the possibilities for freedom among Bermuda's Black population.[11] This combination of a multi-generational creole enslaved population, relatively stable enslaved family life, and an almost non-existent free Black community distinguishes Bermuda from much of the Atlantic and suggests the island's potential to deepen and complicate understandings of enslaved community, self-conceptions, and definitions of freedom.

In many ways, Bermudian slavery came to resemble urban slavery throughout the Atlantic, as white families owned a smaller number of slaves, enslaved men were hired out to labor in various industries, and the enslaved often maintained relatively greater levels of mobility and independence. At the same time, though, Bermuda's lack of a major urban center meant that its workshops and wharfs were dispersed throughout the island, preventing a somewhat autonomous interracial working class, like that in Boston, from developing.[12] After the failure of tobacco, Bermuda's economy turned almost entirely to the sea, leading many enslaved men to work as shipbuilders, fishermen, pilots, and sailors. While in much of the Atlantic, maritime labor served to support more lucrative plantation economies, maritime slavery became Bermuda's preeminent economic enterprise, with enslaved labor building the foundation of its trans-Atlantic trading empire.[13] Certainly, Bermuda's enslaved mariners were not unique in their existence, as enslaved men worked as sailors throughout the New World, but their overwhelming

[11] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 590.
[12] For Boston's interracial working class, see: Hardesty, "Unfreedom," 93.
[13] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 105, 148–49; For a comprehensive study of this transition, see Jarvis, "Maritime Masters."

presence aboard ships and Bermuda's complete reliance upon their labor differentiated Bermudian maritime slavery from that elsewhere.

In their explorations of maritime slavery, Packwood, Bernhard, and Jarvis all briefly mention the *Regulator* and propose explanations for the crew's decision to return home. Until Packwood's book, historians and politicians used the *Regulator* as evidence for the benevolent treatment of Bermuda's enslaved. Such references began in 1788, when Bermuda Governor William Browne informed the Crown that the "behavior of the Blacks in the late war," including the *Regulator'*s return, revealed the supposed righteousness of slavery there.[14] Similar arguments prevailed until Packwood instead emphasized the importance of the men's family ties to the island in drawing them home. If they remained in Massachusetts, he argued, their wives and children would go unprovided for or be sold by "a vindictive master" into plantation slavery in the Caribbean or American South.[15] Jarvis further complicated the decision by arguing that the relative autonomy and privileges granted by Bermuda's system of maritime slavery might also have made a return home attractive.[16] None of these works, however, place the return in conversation with the political developments and history of slavery in Boston, both of which would have factored into the crew's decision. By approaching the *Regulator* from an Atlantic context, this paper will examine not simply the factors which pulled these men back towards Bermuda but also those which pushed them away from a 'free' life in Massachusetts.

In that vein, I am building upon the work of Jeffery Bolster, Julius Scott, Marcus Rediker, and other scholars of the Black Atlantic who have shown that enslaved and free Black labor on the sea, the wharves, and in coastal port cities played essential roles in the Atlantic

[14] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," CO 37/40/44, Folio 134, NA.
[15] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, 45.
[16] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783," 621.

economy and the transnational communication networks which linked Black people living in disparate colonies together.[17] While these studies often mention Bermuda and Boston in passing, they tend to focus on the more well-studied regions of the Caribbean or early America. I hope to show that Bermuda and Boston also deserve recognition as important centers of Black Atlantic connection. As Black Bermudian and Bostonian sailors traveled from port-to-port, where they socialized, shopped, and built relationships, they became some of the best traveled and informed members of the communication networks Bolster, Scott, and others identified. And, when they returned home, they relayed information or gave gifts to their friends and family, further incorporating their communities into the Black Atlantic.

This Atlantic focus also provides an important alternative approach to slavery and abolition in New England. While scholarship on Bermuda remains limited, slavery in early New England has attracted increased attention in recent years. Several works have demonstrated the prevalence and significance of slavery in New England, disproving images of the region which had long allowed it to evade associations with American slavery. These works mention the reliance on unfree labor in maritime industries, but their focus on uncovering the specifics of slavery within Massachusetts means that they did not fully investigate enslaved sailors and their experiences outside of the colony.[18] Abolition in Revolutionary Massachusetts has attracted perhaps more attention. Again, however, these studies are narrowly focused on the local origins of the abolition movement and its effect on enslaved people in the state.[19] The fact that

[17] Bolster, *Black Jacks*; Scott, *The Common Wind*; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra.*
[18] Examples include: Warren, *New England Bound*; Hardesty, *Unfreedom*; Whiting, *Belonging*; Peterson, *The City-State of Boston*.
[19] Allegro, "Increasing and Strengthening the Country"; Stanton, "The Freedom Petitions"; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*.

Massachusetts' courts extended freedom to enslaved people captured at sea, however, reveals that the state's emancipatory rhetoric and action also impacted those beyond its borders.

The comparative approach of my paper will therefore allow for a better understanding of enslaved maritime labor, the impact of Massachusetts' abolition movement, and the nature of freedom in the western Atlantic world. By placing the goals of white and Black abolitionists in conversation with the experiences of the *Regulator*'s crew, I will show how enslaved individuals did not necessarily share definitions of freedom, especially in an Atlantic world where slavery remained ubiquitous. Many scholars of maritime slavery have argued that enslaved mariners engaged in overt resistance, such as escape, at a higher rate than others.[20] While this might have been the case in Boston, the crew's decision to return home will force a reevaluation of the free-enslaved dichotomy which assumes emancipation to be the sole and universal goal of the enslaved. Instead, I emphasize the importance of studying the ways in which enslaved people learned about and thought of the Black experience in distant colonies, and how those interpretations impacted their reflections on and hopes for their own lives.

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To better understand how seventy enslaved men could serve aboard a Bermudian privateer, why a Massachusetts court offered them their freedom, and what led those sailors to instead return to slavery, this thesis takes a two-chapter approach to the *Regulator*. Using legal documents, letters, newspaper notices, and travel narratives from Boston, Bermuda, and the British Atlantic, the first chapter will trace the divergent developments of maritime slavery in both colonies. How did Black sailors and maritime laborers view, resist, and operate within their

[20] See: Hall, "Maritime Maroons"; Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song*; Dawson, "Enslaved Ship Pilots in the Age of Revolutions;" Schneider, "A Narrative of Escape."

specific conditions of enslavement? In what ways, either more subtle or overt, did they take advantage of their skills as sailors or access to seabound vessels to build transatlantic connections or make claims on their freedom? Chapter 1 argues that, even as enslaved maritime labor became economically indispensable in Boston, an association developed between enslaved mariners and resistance, communicated through runaway advertisements, the explicit anxieties of enslavers, and actual seabound escapes aboard Massachusetts-based vessels. In Bermuda, however, no such association or even threat of overt resistance by enslaved sailors on vessels or in foreign ports developed. Instead, Chapter 1 will demonstrate that enslaved Bermudians exploited their relative mobility abroad to become important cogs in a transatlantic communication network, carve out relative autonomy and privilege within slavery, and provide materially for themselves and their families. These differing perceptions and experiences of enslaved maritime labor greatly informed the actions and expectations of the sailors, courts, and onlookers involved in the *Regulator*.

Next, to examine the rejected offer of emancipation, Chapter Two will question the goals and motivations of Massachusetts' abolition movement in contrast to the Bermudian slavery to which the crew returned. What motivated the Revolutionary Government and courts to refuse to treat enslaved ship crews as property, and how might the *Regulator*'s crew have reacted to abolitionist visions of post-emancipation Massachusetts? In answering these questions, I will analyze writings by white and Black abolitionists, freedom petitions filed by enslaved Bostonians, the court cases which established the precedent of freeing enslaved people captured at sea, and reflections upon abolition by influential revolutionary leaders. Chapter 2 argues that Boston's revolutionary focus on liberty led the legislature to offer freedom to enslaved people captured at sea, like those aboard the *Regulator*, turning Boston into free soil for those enslaved

abroad. However, the grim prospects of free Black life in Massachusetts and the misalignment of the goals of abolition with the experiences of the Bermudian sailors apparently made ‘freedom’ not worth starting a new, uncertain, life in Boston and led the crew to instead return home.

The crew’s decision to return to Bermuda cannot simply be explained by examining their lives before their arrival in Massachusetts. Certainly, they did not return home because of Bermudian slavery’s ‘benevolence.’ At the same time, isolated explanations of family ties to Bermuda or the unique characteristics of Bermudian slavery do not suffice. Only by understanding the nature of the freedom the men were offered in Boston, alongside the lives they had lived in Bermuda and aboard its vessels, can we truly attempt to grasp their calculated decision to reject emancipation.

1.
"Their Ability as Sailors… is Truly an Edifying Sight:" Boston and Bermuda's Divergent Histories and Perceptions of Maritime Slavery

On May 2, 1777, Samuel Welles of Natick, Massachusetts wrote to Hector McNeil about Welles' enslaved captive named Caesar. McNeil had hired Caesar, described by Welles as "an Artful Fellow" and a "very good Seamen," to serve aboard the privateer he owned and operated during the Revolution. Despite Caesar's likely indispensable service, Welles instructed McNeil to "prevent [Caesar] taking up his Wages more than… Necessary" and to "keep" those wages and Caesar's "Prize Money" for Welles himself. Further, Welles asked McNeil to "keep [Caesar] on Board" the ship whenever possible, because Welles was "afraid of his running away" if "he gets on Shore."[1]

Although the outcome of Caesar's time aboard the ship is unclear, this brief letter reveals much about the contrasting attitudes in Revolutionary Massachusetts towards enslaved sailors as both economically viable and potentially dangerous. Caesar was one of many Black men who served aboard privateers sailing out of New England throughout the war. One sale advertisement in October 1776 for an eighteen year old in Portsmouth, New Hampshire shows the appeal of such a role to the region's enslaved men, as the advertisement claims the teen had not only previously "served at sea" but was "extremely desirous of belonging to a Captain of a privateer."[2] Welles' explicit fear of Caesar taking advantage of his mobility aboard McNeil's ship to escape slavery demonstrates that while lucrative for enslavers, hiring enslaved men onto ships also presented a threat to their authority. Whether motivated by understandings of desertion

[1] "An Original Revolutionary Document," *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, November 27, 1858.
[2] *Freeman's Journal or New Hampshire Gazette*, October 5, 1776.

aboard privateers more generally or Boston's history of seabound escapes by enslaved men, Welles' fears were not completely unfounded.[3]

At the same time Caesar, the teenager from Portsmouth, and many other enslaved men throughout New England boarded privateers for the Patriot cause, hundreds of Black Bermudians served on English vessels like the *Regulator*. Reflecting on the war in 1788, Bermuda Governor William Browne wrote to Parliament that "several hundred slaves…. Voluntarily served on board" the island's "believed fifteen and twenty privateers" and "behaved, both as sailors and mariners, irreproachably." Unlike Welles, Browne's letter describes no fear of desertion, but rather that these enslaved sailors "always returned [to Bermuda], if it was in their power." For Browne, no story better evidenced this trend than the "Ship *Regulator*."[4]

This chapter seeks to trace the development of the systems of maritime slavery in Boston and Bermuda which culminated in enslaved men serving as "irreproachable," and "very good" sailors on both sides of the American Revolutionary War. In both places, emergent eighteenth-century mercantile and maritime economies relied upon the labor of enslaved men on the docks and aboard ships. Over time, these men developed indispensable maritime knowledge while also building and maintaining connections in the disparate regions of the World to which their work brought them. This chapter also focuses on the ways in which Black sailors in Boston and Bermuda engaged with and resisted their condition. The stark contrast between Welles' fear of Caesar's escape and Browne's claims of enslaved loyalty did not reflect the men's individual anxieties, but rather true differences in how enslaved sailors acted and were perceived. In Boston, Black sailors frequently attempted to escape via the sea, leading to a special association

[3] For desertion aboard Revolutionary privateers see: Providence (Sloop-of-War) Muster Roll, 1775-1776, microfilm edition, 1 reel, MHS.
[4] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," Folio 134.

among Boston's slave holders between enslaved maritime workers and resistance. Bermudian sailors, on the other hand, almost never ran away, despite ample opportunity to do so. Instead, they incorporated themselves into transatlantic communication and trading networks, provided materially for themselves and their families, and used their status as mariners to periodically challenge the typical racial hierarchy of slavery. Thus, when the *Regulator* was taken into Boston in 1782, the experiences of the ship's crew clashed with the assumptions about enslaved maritime labor held by the judiciary which attempted to free them.

The Emergence of Boston and Bermuda and the Development of Maritime Slavery

Unlike the much-mythologized arrival of the Pilgrims in Plymouth or John Winthrop's migrants in Boston, English presence in Bermuda began as a serendipitous accident, when the *Sea Venture*, an English ship on a resupply mission to Jamestown, crashed into the coral reefs surrounding Bermuda and stranded its crew on the previously uninhabited island in 1609. There, the island's beauty and its abundance of natural resources encouraged the *Sea Venture*'s crew to claim Bermuda for the English, beginning the island's gradual settlement.[5] Compared to the drama of the *Sea Venture*, the settlement of Boston was much more premeditated. Granted a charter by King Charles I in 1629, the Massachusetts Bay Company, led by Winthrop, arrived in what would become Boston in 1630.[6] While not the first English settlement in the region, Boston soon developed into the most powerful town in what would become Massachusetts.

In both places, slavery followed shortly after initial settlement. In 1616, Bermuda became the first English colony with African slavery and, by the 1630s, indentures for Black workers in

[5] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 12–15; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 9–13.
[6] Peterson, *The City-State of Boston*, 25–29.

Bermuda condemned them to 99 years of servitude, rendering them slaves for life.[7] Similarly, enslaved Africans lived and labored in Boston since the town's earliest years, and, as revealed by Wendy Warren, slavery constituted a productive and popular institution for Massachusetts settlers in the seventeenth-century. This slavery, though, operated mostly as "household labor within a household economy," as enslaved New Englanders primarily served the conveniences of their enslavers rather than city- or colony-wide economies.[8]

Around the end of the seventeenth century, spurred on by the British Empire's growth, both Boston and Bermuda began to focus their economies on the sea. In Bermuda, which quickly faced over-population and where early experiments with tobacco cultivation permanently damaged the soil, maritime industries became the prime source of employment and survival.[9] So dependent was Bermuda on seabound trade that by the middle of the eighteenth century visitor Philip Freneau remarked that they "could be no way supported were it not for… their traffic to America," as "they cultivate[d] nothing."[10] When the American Revolution threatened to sever relations between Bermuda and North America, Bermudian Henry Tucker wrote that "the ruin of this Little Country can scarce be avoided" in the case of a trade embargo.[11] This trading network also provided social and political links between the isolated island and the rest of British Atlantic, allowing Bermudians to send and receive news to loved ones or business partners abroad.[12]

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[7] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, 8; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 26, 31; Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 49, 52.
[8] Warren, *New England Bound*, 1–9, 133.
[9] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 2–5, 66; Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 99–101, 148.
[10] Philip Freneau, "An Account of the Island of Bermuda, May 10, 1778," in *BHQ* 5 (1948): 98
[11] Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, July 31, 1774, in *BHQ* 5 (1948): 86-89. Import and export records affirm these observations. See: British North American Customs Papers, 1765-1774, MHS.
[12] Trading vessels provided the rare opportunities to transmit mail to and from Bermuda, see: Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, December 6, 1773, in *BHQ* 4 no 4 (1947): 154-155; Anne Tucker to St. George Tucker in *BHQ* 5 (1948): 72; John Phillips, Jr. Papers, 1749-1768, Folios 17-19, 38-41, MHS.

Just as Bermuda expanded its Atlantic trading network at the turn of the eighteenth century, Boston too turned to the sea to establish itself as a regional economic power. Mark Peterson describes how Boston's merchants enriched themselves through "invisibles," or the practice of "bearing the costs and risks" of shipping goods created elsewhere.[13] In other words, Boston merchants, much like ship owners in Bermuda, used their maritime skills and financial capital to act as middlemen in the triangle trade. The 1697 abolition of the Royal African Company's monopoly on the English slave trade especially altered Boston's trajectory, as the city's ship owners quickly turned to the traffic in enslaved Africans to make their fortunes.[14] Similar to Bermuda's reliance upon North America for survival, Boston's economy became dependent upon this trade in goods and slaves with the West Indies. In fact, John Adams shared Henry Tucker's anxiety about war, writing in 1775 that Boston had "been an essential link, in a Vast chain" and expressing his "Horror" that "this Chain" could be "broken in one blow."[15] In the eighteenth century, maritime trade linked the British Empire together economically and socially, ensuring the survival of small colonies like Bermuda and growing the wealth of port cities like Boston.

Boston and Bermuda's reliance upon slavery expanded alongside their maritime economies. By midcentury, Boston was "the slaveholding capital of New England," with its 1,500 enslaved people constituting ten to fifteen percent of the city's population.[16] Labor shortages aboard colonial vessels meant that maritime labor garnered significantly higher wages

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[13] Peterson, *The City-State of Boston*, 88. The wide reach of New England vessels can be seen in David Jeffries' Mercantile Journal, which documents voyages to Philadelphia, London, Antigua, and beyond. David Jeffries, *Mercantile Journal*, Robert Hiester Montgomery Codex Manuscripts, 1300-1941, RBML.
[14] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 20; Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 21–23.
[15] John Adams, "To William Woodfall," May 14, 1775, Adams Papers Digital Edition, MHS https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/ADMS-06-02-02-0012.
[16] Whiting, *Belonging*, 10.

than comparable work on land. Hiring enslaved men out to work aboard one of Boston's vessels or on the city's wharfs, then, presented some of the most appealing sources of income for the city's enslavers, leading around 25% of Boston's enslaved men to work on a ship by the 1740s.[17] The growing significance of slavery and seafaring industries in Boston pushed an increasing number of Black Bostonians into maritime labor.

Even more so than in Boston, Bermuda's turn to the sea transformed the colony's relationship to slavery. As argued by Michael Jarvis, Bermuda had become "the most intensively maritime colony within the British Empire" by the beginning of the eighteenth century, a transformation which "entrenched slavery as an institution more firmly than" in the colony's first years.[18] Earlier, when white Bermudians pursued small-scale agriculture, familial labor and indentured servitude reduced the economic incentives for slavery. As Bermuda became dependent on maritime industries, the frequent departure of white men for sea increased the importance of domestic enslaved labor, and the ceaseless demand for maritime workers led enslavers to frequently hire enslaved men onto Bermudian sloops.[19]

Legislative and legal developments in response to fears regarding the island's declining white male population paved the way for Black men to become an eventual majority of Bermuda's sailing force. The rapid incorporation of white men into maritime industries in the early 1700s transformed the island's demographics. As claimed by Governor John Hope in 1722, of Bermuda's 4,770 white inhabitants, he "reckon[ed] three women to one man upon the island,"

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[17] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 117–19; Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 114–18; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians,* viii; For early examples of enslaved men working aboard Boston vessels, see: "Documents Relating to a Dispute between John Mico and Captain Samuel White," 1703, 9: 150-151, MSA; "Contract for Samuel Lynde's Slave Tony to Serve on John Halsey's Privateer," 1704, 9:149, MSA.
[18] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 5, 105.
[19] *Ibid*, 105–9; Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 592–96.

as the "vast number of men" either worked at sea or were "carried away by ship-wreck."[20] Bermudian elites feared this gender-imbalance exposed the island to Spanish or French conquest. So, in 1717, the Bermuda legislature passed an order limiting the "Compliment of White Sailors" to twelve men or, aboard smaller vessels, nine.[21] By capping the number of white sailors per vessel, the legislature incentivized the hiring of Black sailors, who faced no such limit. More significantly, the 1725 recognition of enslaved Bermudians as British subjects legitimized the island's reliance upon Black mariners, as the Navigation Acts mandated that British subjects make up three quarters of each British vessel's crew.[22]

Between the Board of Trade's ruling and the end of the century, Bermuda increasingly manned its trading empire with the enslaved. Within fifteen years, Black men made up over a quarter of all Bermudian sailors, and scholars now believe that by the beginning of the American Revolution between half and two-thirds of Bermuda's sailing force was enslaved.[23] Contemporary onlookers recognized this greatly atypical development. French-American writer J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur marveled at the "truly edifying sight," that "the great number of [Bermudian] vessels are manned by Negroes."[24] This reliance upon Black maritime labor concerned David Parry, the Governor of Barbados, who in 1786 wrote to London to lament the "Numbers of Negro Slaves" aboard ships "from Bermudas," who he believed threatened to "throw so many English Seamen out of Employment."[25] While in Boston and much of the British Atlantic World Black sailors remained a common sight, only in Bermuda did they come to

[20] John Hope, "A Description of Bermuda," CO 37/10, Folio 216, NA.
[21] "Minutes of His Majesty's Council, 9th May 1717" in *BHQ* 6 no 3 (1949): 117.
[22] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 598.
[23] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 148–49.
[24] J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, "Description of Bermuda: Extract from 'Letters d'un Cultivateur American,'" trans. Louis S. Friedland, BHQ 3, no. 1 (1946): 201–3.
[25] Quote in Fisher, "Manuscript Materials Bearing on the Negro in British Archives," 88.

constitute the majority of the sailing force, creating a system of maritime slavery unique to the island and inconceivable to those from elsewhere.

In both Boston and Bermuda, the actual mechanics of enslaved maritime labor looked quite similar. Enslaved mariners often worked aboard a ship owned and commanded by their enslaver or were hired to serve aboard another vessel. In the latter case, they often arranged their own employment, as enslavers tasked sailors with finding and negotiating the conditions of their own work. While enslaved sailors received a substantial wage for their work, depending on the individual terms of their enslavement some, most, or all of that payment would then be seized by their enslaver.[26]

Enslaved seafaring work therefore mirrored systems of urban slavery throughout the Atlantic. Still, Bermuda's lack of a central urban hub distinguished its system of non-plantation slavery from that elsewhere. As described by William Browne, in most of the Atlantic world "Merchants" and their "vessels" were "generally collected in Towns." In Bermuda, though, "the Traders [were] dispersed throughout the Islands," and their "vessels" remained "in the Creeks, Coves, and Inlets" near their homes, not on docks or in harbors in a city.[27] Rather than a centralized economy oriented around a bustling harbor, Bermudian maritime industry was diffused throughout the island. Therefore, enslaved Bermudians, who overwhelmingly lived in the homes of their enslavers, would have found work not in a port city, like Black sailors in Boston, but aboard a vessel sailing out of their parish or neighborhood. In their study of eighteenth-century Salem, Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh argue that laboring on vessels with childhood friends or neighbors allowed sailors to maintain social and emotional connections to

[26] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 110–12, 117–19; Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 596, 596f15, 606; Hammon, *Narrative*, 3.
[27] "January 19, 1788," in "Letters of Governor William Browne," in *BHQ* 2 no. 1 (1945): 24-25.

home while abroad.[28] Although the dispersal of wharfs in Bermuda likely limited Black sailors' employment options, it also led them to work alongside those enslaved in their communities, creating similar continuous bonds and familiarity between the many enslaved men working on Bermudian ships.

By the beginning of the American Revolution, Bermuda and Boston had cultivated distinct enslaved maritime cultures. In Bermuda, where enslaved men constituted the majority of the island's sailing force, the almost exclusively Black crew of the *Regulator* would have been no anomaly. Although enslaved men like Caesar or the young man from Portsmouth could find work aboard one of New England's many ships, the region's smaller enslaved population and its abundance of free white sailors meant they often did so alone. Nonetheless, as seen with the man from Portsmouth's "extrem[e] desir[e]" to work aboard a privateer, Black New Englanders still felt the allure of maritime labor.

White Fear of the Maritime Passage to Freedom in Boston

On October 11, 1742, "Capt. John Aves" published a runaway advertisement in the *Boston Evening Post* after Philip, a 28-year-old man he enslaved, fled Aves' home in "the North End of Town." As Philip was "use to the Sea," and because he "carried away his Sea Bedding," Aves feared that Philip would "endeavour to get off in some Vessel," flee the colony, and escape bondage via the sea. Thus, he "cautioned" all "Masters of Vessels… against concealing or carrying [Philip] off," and implored the *Post*'s readers to assist in locating him.[29]

[28] Vickers and Walsh, "Young Men and the Sea."
[29] Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, 47–48.

Whether or not Philip succeeded in his escape, Aves' focus on the threat posed by both the sea and Philip's knowledge of it provides valuable insight into many white Bostonians' anxieties towards enslaved sailors. Aves' own occupation as a captain and his assertion that Philip was "use to the sea" implies that Aves likely employed and trained Philip aboard his own ship. Thus, Aves' fear that Philip would stow himself away as a means of escape might seem like a rational inference based on Philip's unique skills and experience. Aves' threat to "Masters of Vessels," however, was anything but unique. In fact, similar warnings proliferated throughout runaway advertisements in Massachusetts, reflecting a widespread anxiety towards enslaved men escaping via the sea.[30] In port cities like Boston, Salem, and Plymouth, the frequent employment of enslaved men in maritime industries enriched their enslavers and grew local economies. At the same time, it ironically equipped those enslaved men with the very skills needed for a seabound escape. Massachusetts' maritime slavery also fomented the creation of an interracial working class, especially in Boston, which enslaved men exploited to make claims on their freedom. Together, white anxiety surrounding seabound escapes, true examples of Black sailors running away via the sea, and the threatening relationships formed between enslaved and free workers in Boston created a special association between enslaved maritime workers and resistance in eighteenth-century Massachusetts.

As white fear of Black resistance grew in Boston, the colonial legislature passed an array of laws aimed at regulating the behavior and supposed "disorder" of the city's enslaved population.[31] Perhaps more than anything, Boston's white elite feared escape, with the constant appeals to "Masters of Vessels" at the end of runaway advertisements revealing a particular anxiety towards the sea. Naturally, Black sailors became especially threatening, leading the

[30] Countless examples can be seen in Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, 21-202.
[31] Whiting, *Belonging*, 167–69.

legislature to require permission from the colonial governor for "any ship… to sail out of" Massachusetts with a "Servant or Negro" aboard.[32]

Maroonage, or the permanent or temporary escape from slavery, has long fascinated historians of slavery. In comparison to the long-famed images of the Underground Railroad or Jamaica's maroon communities, maritime maroonage, or escape via the sea, has only more recently begun to attract prolonged attention.[33] In Boston, the reality of seabound escapes both to and from the city had been present since the seventeenth century. In 1694, John Papine of St. Christopher's, now St. Kitts, filed charges against Abraham Samuel of Boston, who he accused of "carry[ing] away" a "Negroe boy named Polydoro."[34] It is unclear whether Samuel was aware of Polydoro's presence on his ship, but Polydoro nonetheless managed to escape slavery in St. Christopher's and flee to Boston by finding his way aboard Samuel's vessel. For those enslaved in Massachusetts, flight from the colony became a more common goal. Two illustrative examples of attempted escapes by Black maritime workers demonstrate both that white elite fears of maritime maroonage were not entirely unfounded and, importantly, that such escapes often relied upon the collaboration of white sailors and ship captains.

The first escape began in Plymouth in July 1724, when an enslaved man named Pompey fled the ship owned by his enslaver, Richard Trivett of Marblehead. While at port in Plymouth, Pompey abandoned his post and hid on the *Morehampton*, a ship owned by John Moffatt and bound for Portugal. Our knowledge of Pompey's escape is based on a months-long legal saga between Trivett and Moffatt, during which Trivett alleged that Moffatt not only knew Pompey

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[32] William Whitmore, ed., *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, 281. While initially passed in 1680, this law remained on the books throughout the eighteenth century and was invoked in "Deposition of Richard Trevett," December 28, 1725, 9: 185, MSA.

[33] The term "maritime maroonage" was first introduced in reference to the Danish West Indies in Hall, "Maritime Maroons."

[34] "Bond for Abraham Samuel," May 7, 1695, 9: 137, MSA.

hid aboard his ship, but that he aided him in doing so.[35] No records of Pompey's testimony remain, so the exact details of his escape are unclear: Moffatt and his crew continuously denied Trivett's allegations of complicity and Trivett maintained that Moffat had wronged him.

The men concurred that, while Moffat's crew were "loading fish at Plymouth" before departing for Porto, Trivett's sailors informed them that "they had lost a negro man" and requested to search the *Morehampton*. Unable to find Pompey, Trivett's sailors allowed the *Morehampton* to depart Plymouth. After two days at sea, however, Pompey was allegedly "discovered hidden among ye wood." Because the *Morehampton* had "a loaded ship and a fair wind," Moffatt "dare[d] not venture to return back to let the negro on shore," and ordered the ship to continue to Porto.[36] Seven of the *Morehampton* crew similarly testified that Pompey "privately got aboard the ship… by means of a Canon" after "bad usage" from Trivett, supposedly without the knowledge or help of anyone aboard.[37]

Regardless of whether Pompey acted alone, his daring attempt reveals the chances Black sailors had for escape. His work aboard a ship provided Pompey with the opportunities to flee via the sea, as he could slip away while at port or use his maritime skills to convince a sympathetic or desperate ship captain to stow him away. In doing so, Pompey affirmed the anxieties of so many white slaveholders, that a runaway might hide themselves aboard a ship and disappear from the colony. Once at sea, Pompey forced Moffatt to decide: turn back to Massachusetts, return Pompey, and lose his investment on the voyage or continue to Europe and transport Pompey further away from slavery.

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[35] "Documents Relating to Richard Trivett's Claim Against John Moffatt," 1725, 9:182-195, MSA.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] "Deposition of John Cornuck and Others Regarding Pompey (a Freedom Seeker)," October 7, 1724, MHSOC, https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=629&br=1.

After arriving in Porto, the *Morehampton* continued to "Lynn Regis," where Moffatt arranged Pompey's return aboard a ship bound for Boston. During a stop in Dover, though, Pompey made yet another escape, when he again "departed the ship" and evaded recapture. Pompey then disappears from the archive for about a year, during which time he presumably worked and lived as a free mariner in and around England. In Cadiz Bay in July 1725, however, John Hastie, a friend of Trivett's, recognized Pompey, who was then working aboard Captain Francis Thorne's ship. Although Pompey "went by the name of John Williams" and claimed to be "a free man," Hastie kidnapped Pompey and sent him back to Boston, where all that is known of his fate is that "Mr. Trivett has since sold and disposed of him."[38]

Despite its tragic conclusion, Pompey's escape shows the liberatory potential of Massachusetts' maritime passage to freedom. After leaving Plymouth, Pompey embarked on a year-long transatlantic voyage, during which he seemingly reaped the benefits and maintained complete control of his labor for the first time. Only through an unlucky encounter with a close friend of his former enslaver was Pompey once again stripped of his freedom.

While also unsuccessful, the plotted escape by three enslaved dockworkers thirteen years later more clearly highlights the white assistance Black Bostonians relied upon in their maroonage. On January 11, 1737, three enslaved men, Boston, Pompey, and Sharper boarded the sloop *Dollahide*, then docked in Boston Harbor. Boston, who had "been sundry Times onboard" the sloop, "asked for" Robert Boyd, the ship's captain. After their meeting, Boyd then instructed Alexander Mitchell, the sloop's mate, to "give each of them a Dram of Rum." Two days later, Mitchell noticed the three men still "stowd away in the sloop's forecastle," and was again instructed by Boyd to give "the negroes some victuals." Based "what actions [Mitchell] observed

[38] "Documents Relating to Richard Trivett's Claim Against John Moffatt."

between Capt Boyd and the Negroes, he supposed that Boyd intended to carry them off," likely to work as sailors aboard the vessel. In fact, when "an officer came down" and requested "to search said sloop for some negroes," Boyd ensured the three men "returned… on shore" to avoid arrest. Shortly thereafter, however, the men were caught and faced "examination before Justice Savage" on January 14.[39]

Pompey, Sharper, and Boston's attempted escape demonstrates both the possibility of maritime maroonage and the importance of white assistance in such escapes. At every stage of their attempt, Boyd aided the three men. As Boston experienced "chronic labor shortages" in its maritime enterprises, lack of proper staffing aboard the *Dollahide* pushed Boyd to not only allow the men to stow away on his ship but to seemingly recruit them, feed them, and even hide them from the law.[40] The fact that Boston had been aboard the ship on multiple occasions further implies an established relationship with Boyd. Although it seemed to trouble Mitchell, he and the other white sailors aboard the *Dollahide* understood Boyd's intentions and collaborated in the plot to smuggle the three men out of Boston.

Potential knowledge of the men's past provides further insight on their escape. Six years earlier, after an enslaved man named "Boston… left work" at a Boston shipyard with a friend named Shaper, the two men witnessed a fight between two slaves, Minto and Pompey.[41] While these three men cannot be confirmed to be the same Pompey, Boston, and Sharper, it would make sense for the men to have known each other and to have worked in or around Boston's shipyards together. Working on the wharves, they would have acquainted themselves with

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[39] "As to Boston, Sharper, and Pompey, Negroes on Sloop Dollahide, Robert Boyd, Master," January 15, 1737, 45472, *The Suffolk Files*, MSA.
[40] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 104.
[41] "Deposition of Boston (a Negro), as to Minto (a Negro), Wrestling with Pompey (a Negro)," September 1731, 32611, *The Suffolk Files*, MSA.

Boston's white sailors, captains, and ship owners, men like Boyd. Boyd, too, would have recognized the enslaved men who frequently worked on the docks, making it easier for him to illicitly recruit skilled laborers to work his ship in times of need. Jared Hardesty describes this interracial working class as providing "a powerful form of resistance" in this period, as white and Black laborers came to know each other through shared work, drinking together in the same taverns, and socializing on the streets.[42] Boston, Sharper, and Pompey took advantage of this interracial community in their attempted escape, as it helped them find an escape route in the *Dollahide* and potential accomplices in Boyd and, even if unenthusiastic, Mitchell and the rest of the *Dollahide*'s crew. White Bostonians, therefore, were not simply passive 'victims' to the maritime maroonage many feared but often active participants in it, whether motivated by economic stress or moral conviction.

These two audacious attempts at freedom demonstrate that, if the enslaved were able to board one of Boston's many Atlantic bound ships, either by stowing themselves away as Pompey may have done, or by hiring themselves as sailors as Boston's group attempted, independence could await them. So great was the fear of maritime maroonage that the legislature attempted to curb the use of Black men as sailors and countless runaway advertisements in Massachusetts ended with a warning to ship captains. Although neither attempt resulted in permanent freedom, they serve as prime examples of what many enslaved men in Boston aspired to and what Boston slavers constantly warned against: that one of Boston's "master[s] of vessels" would "conceal or carr[y] off" a runaway.

Bermudian Sailors, Transatlantic Networks, and Alternative Forms of Resistance

[42] Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 93.

In June 1788, as British Parliament pondered policy changes regarding slavery in their colonies, Governor William Browne sent a report on the specific characteristics of Bermudian slavery to London. Alongside answers to questions regarding the numbers, working conditions, and social lives of enslaved Bermudians, his letter estimated that "about 500 slaves [are] usually employed as seamen" in Bermuda. Like in Boston, Browne acknowledged that these men had "frequent opportunities… to deliver themselves from bondage," due to their role in the island's "rambling trade." However, "it is positively affirmed," Browne continued, "that the number of deserters, for thirty years past, does not exceed five a year on average." Although Browne recognized that "this may seem incredible," he expressed "no doubt of it" in his letter to Parliament.[43]

Born in Salem, Massachusetts to one of the colony's wealthiest and most important families, Browne was forced to abandon his seat on Massachusetts' High Court and escape the colony at the outbreak of the American Revolution.[44] Browne's awe, then, at the reluctance of Bermuda's enslaved sailors to flee was likely informed both by his time in Massachusetts, where white elites constantly feared resistance by slave sailors, and by a general reputation for disorder among privateering crews. Writing to Frederick North, Home Secretary of Great Britain, Browne recalled the sheer volume of "privateers which belonged to or frequented" Bermuda during the Revolution. Specifically, he condemned the "Crews of Privateers" as "no where well disciplined" and especially "disorderly" on shore.[45] Despite this reputation of free, white sailors, Browne lauded the "irreprochabl[e]" conduct of the "several hundred slaves" who manned Bermuda's privateering fleet.[46] Compared to white sailors, Browne found Bermuda's Black

[43] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," Folio 135.
[44] Sydney Jackman, "William Browne, Governor, 1782-1788" in *BHQ* 13 no. 1 (1956): 17-23.
[45] "October 15, 1783," in Letterbooks of William Browne [transcription], microfilm edition, 1 reel, page 46, MHS.
[46] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," Folio 134.

mariners remarkable both in their behavior at port and in their aforementioned refusal to abandon their ships. Browne's estimates of Black desertion, for example, stand in stark contrast to those from the Massachusetts privateer *Providence,* which saw 15% of its sailors flee the ship between 1775-1776.[47] Instead of resistance via escape, Bermudian slave sailors inverted the typical hierarchies of slavery through their reputation and skill as mariners. Further, they appropriated their relative mobility and their position in the Black Atlantic to socially and financially provide for themselves and their families.

To better grasp their reluctance to run away from Bermuda, we must try to understand the experiences of enslaved Bermudian sailors both at home and abroad. When Bermudian men docked at foreign ports, they interacted with other enslaved people, learned about local politics and news, and transported information and goods back home. As described by Jeffrey Bolster, Black sailors "became for [other] Black people in the Atlantic world what newspapers and the royal mail service were for white elites," as they incorporated their communities into the Black Atlantic by revealing "regional and local differences."[48] Julius Scott similarly argued that Black sailors "provided the medium of long-distance communication" which allowed enslaved people throughout the Atlantic "to follow developments in other parts of the world."[49] Because Bermudian sailors became "among the most widely traveled denizens in the Atlantic," they served as the connective tissue which intellectually, emotionally, and financially linked Bermuda's Black community to that elsewhere.[50]

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[47] Providence (Sloop-of-War) Muster Roll, 1775-1776. Michael Jarvis contrasts the estimated 1% desertion rate aboard Bermudian ships to the higher rate among other free British sailors: Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 613.
[48] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 39.
[49] Scott, *The Common Wind*, 39.
[50] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 614.

Upon arrival in a foreign port, Bermudian crews would have immediately encountered, socialized, and traded with the local Black population. As described by James Kelly, an Irish traveler to Jamaica, when a ship arrived in Kingston it immediately was surrounded by "dozens of canoes" occupied by enslaved people selling fruit. Every Sunday, Kingston's enslaved population held what Kelley called the "Negro market," in which "several thousand" slaves gathered, mingled, and sold "ground provisions,… articles of dress," and other goods to each other. According to Kelley, enslaved Jamaicans were also "on the most amicable terms" with the many white sailors docked in Kingston.[51] If Kelly, as an Irishman, was so struck by the presence and rich community of enslaved people in Jamaica, one can only imagine what enslaved Bermudians felt when they visited ports like Kingston. Like the white sailors observed by Kelly, enslaved Bermudian mariners would have had the opportunity to build "amicable" relationships with the enslaved people working and living near Kingston's port, from whom they could learn about Black life, slavery, and political developments in Jamaica. Because eighteenth-century vessels often took several weeks to sell and load cargo at each port, and because agreements between Black Bermudians and their enslavers typically granted them between one third to one half of their total wages, they would have had plenty of time to socialize with and purchase goods from local Black communities, not only in Jamaica but throughout the Caribbean where similar market and port scenes proliferated.[52] As Black Bermudians traveled from island to island, with weeks at a time in each port and their share of wages to spend, they integrated themselves, at least temporarily, into Black communities throughout the Atlantic.

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[51] Kelly, *Voyage to Jamaica, and Seventeen Years' Residence in That Island*, 11, 17, 30.

[52] For the trade, both illicit and legal, engaged in by Bermudian slave sailors abroad, see: Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 184, 213; For an account of length of stays at port, see: Scott, *The Common Wind*, 39; For information on wages, see: Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 606.

This incorporation of Bermudian sailors into the wider Black Atlantic world allowed them to achieve relative economic and social autonomy, of which they took advantage to materially provide for themselves and their families outside of the purview of their enslavers. Unlike many Atlantic slave societies, the small size of Bermuda and its unique form of slavery engendered the creation of fairly stable enslaved family units, which often disincentivized overt resistance or escape for enslaved sailors.[53] Because they tended to share owners with their families, mariners feared retribution against loved ones if they were to desert their ship. Most importantly, they worried their wives and children would be punished for their transgression with sale into plantation slavery, whether in the American South or the Caribbean.[54] Cyril Outerbridge Packwood described this fear as a "Sword of Damocles" which hung over the head of every Black sailor while at sea.[55] Familiarity, kinship, and a sense of mutual responsibility between the many enslaved sailors on a vessel, who were likely also neighbors and friends, may have further dissuaded Bermudian men from desertion.

Instead of escape, then, Black Bermudian sailors capitalized upon their relative mobility abroad to support their loved ones back home. Michael Jarvis describes how slave sailors obtained and brought home "creature comforts" for themselves and their families.[56] The complete inventory of a slave sailor's wife provides a valuable example of the potential for wealth provided by maritime labor. The inventory reports an array of luxury goods, from a "silver Table spoon" worth ten shillings or "six Damask Napkins" worth sixteen, to a "red Silk petticoat" valued at two pounds.[57] While not worth an exorbitant amount of money, inventories

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[53] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," Folio 131; Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 611.
[54] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 149.
[55] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, 35.
[56] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 611.
[57] The inventory is included in full in Maxwell, "Enslaved Merchants, Enslaved Merchant-Mariners, and the Bermuda Conspiracy of 1761," 150f40.

such as these demonstrate how maritime labor allowed enslaved men to provide material wealth and commodity goods for their families. This possibility of consumption threatened and perturbed white Bermudians, who frequently expressed shock at the clothing worn by enslaved women and passed ineffective and rarely enforced laws governing their self-adornment.[58] One such provision in 1730 assumed any goods brought into Bermuda by slave sailors to be stolen, and therefore empowered ship captains to "take and seize" such belongings "for their own Use."[59] By skirting these regulations and continuing to return from voyages with goods for themselves and their families, enslaved Bermudian sailors resisted restrictions placed on their economic autonomy while also improving the material conditions of their and their loved ones' lives.

In addition to the economic opportunities it provided, Black sailors' mobility allowed them to build and maintain relationships in disparate parts of the Atlantic. When Bermudian Joseph Hilton was sold to New York, Black sailors helped him stay in touch with loved ones at home by attempting to smuggle a letter from Hilton to a friend in Bermuda.[60] Even white elites, alienated from family abroad, trusted and used their enslaved sailors to maintain transatlantic relationships. Presumably at the request of Anne and Henry Tucker, his enslavers, a Bermudian sailor named Sam traveled from port in Norfolk, Virginia to Williamsburg to visit Anne and Henry's chronically hard-to-reach son St. George. In a letter to St. George, Anne expressed her jealousy towards Sam, writing "how happy should I have thought myself, to have spent so much time with you." Still, she recognized "how greatly [St. George] rejoict" at Sam's visit. Henry similarly shared his relief at Sam's news that St. George was healthy and enjoying his time in

[58] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, 91; Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 610; Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 212–13.
[59] *Acts of Assembly, Made and Enacted in the Bermuda or Summer Islands, Continued to 1736*, 95.
[60] "Hilton to Benjamin Hunt, July 21, 1741," cited in Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 612.

Virginia.[61] The ease with which Sam relayed information between Bermuda and Williamsburg reveals the important role slave sailors played in linking Bermudians, both Black and white, to loved ones, friends, business partners, or current events abroad. While the archive cannot immortalize the oral communications of slave sailors, remnants of this information network like the letters from Hilton and the Tuckers demonstrate the responsibility and trust given to Bermudian mariners for keeping the island connected to the rest of the Atlantic.

This social responsibility was only possible due to Bermudian sailors' Atlantic-wide renown as mariners, a reputation they periodically parlayed into benefits and opportunities which reversed the typical hierarchy of slavery. In his study of Black ship pilots, Kevin Dawson persuasively argues that Bermudian pilots, who navigated inbound ships through the island's dangerous coral reefs, "wield[ed] social and political influence" which allowed them to "gain freedom" and forced "whites to redefine their social system."[62] Bermudian sailors similarly inverted the typical racial power structure of slavery abroad through their talent as sailors and businessmen. J. Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur marveled at "their ability as sailors," their "faithfulness as supercargoes," and the way they "direct[ed] the business" of ship owners. In fact, Crevecoeur described seeing "several of these Black managers at the tables of the rich Jamaican Planters," where they likely negotiated shipping rates, made demands of the planters, and held true power over them.[63] Henry Laurens, the famed South Carolina planter, frequently articulated his preference for shipping his goods aboard Bermudian sloops, which he described as having "in general reputed fine sailors."[64] While Laurens, himself deeply entrenched in the

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[61] "Anne Tucker to St. George Tucker, May 13, 1773," and "Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, May 13, 1773," Tucker Coleman Papers, Series 1 Box 2 Folder 3, CWMSC.
[62] Dawson, "Enslaved Ship Pilots in the Age of Revolutions," 83, 89.
[63] St. John de Crevecoeur, "Description of Bermuda," 202–3.
[64] Quote in Henry Laurens, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, 2: 466. For other examples of Laurens' preference see 1: 256; 2: 325, 423, 419; 3: 405.

slave trade, never mentioned the racial makeup of the Bermudian vessels, he nonetheless celebrated their talent and trustworthiness. His almost exclusive preference for Bermudian ships likely gave their enslaved crews true leverage over the planter. Laurens was not alone in his strong preference towards Bermudian vessels, further hinting towards the widespread importance and influence of Bermudian mariners throughout the Atlantic.

Conclusion

The growth of the maritime economies in eighteenth-century Bermuda and Boston catalyzed the creation of two similar but distinct systems of maritime slavery, which led countless enslaved men in both places to work as shipbuilders, porters, and sailors throughout the Atlantic world. While enslaved maritime laborers remained a minority in Boston, by the time the *Regulator* set sail in 1782, most Bermudians sailors were enslaved. As maritime slavery expanded in Boston, white slaveholders came to associate Black watermen with resistance, typically escape. Black Bostonians affirmed this anxiety by attempting or successfully engaging in maritime maroonage, often by relying upon the collaboration, encouragement, or tacit approval of their white shipmates. The development of a similarly transgressive interracial working class would have been more difficult in Bermuda, where the lack of an urban center prevented the unsupervised socialization which engendered familiarity and collaboration between Boston's free and enslaved maritime laborers.

Despite Bermuda's greater reliance upon Black sailors, no association or true threat of desertion arose. Importantly, though, this lack of maritime escapes does not imply a supposed benevolence of Bermudian slavery. In fact, enslaved Bermudians, including sailors, constantly found ways to more forcefully act against and protest their enslavement while at home. Clarence

Maxwell argues that enslaved merchant mariners played a central role in Bermuda's quashed 1761 slave conspiracy, potentially motivated by the sharp contrast between their relative privilege at sea and their continued bondage at home.[65] When the famed evangelist George Whitefield visited Bermuda and preached to its enslaved population in 1748, his refusal to "give them the least umbrage to flight or behave imperiously to their masters" angered much of his audience, who "expected… to hear [him] speak against" slavery.[66] The chilling descriptions of violence in Mary Prince's narrative further demonstrates that enslaved Bermudians frequently faced the characteristic brutality of Atlantic slavery.[67] Rather than a contentment within bondage, enslaved Bermudian sailors' lack of desertion serves to demonstrate the alternative ways in which they made claims on their freedom and autonomy through their labor. Instead of fleeing their ships and starting anew abroad, Bermuda's slave sailors utilized their mobility and reputation as mariners to better their material conditions and to periodically invert the typical hierarchy of Atlantic slavery. At the same time, they took advantage of their time at sea and in foreign ports to cultivate their own social worlds, independent of their enslavers, which they used to transport information and goods to and from home in Bermuda.

Thus, by the time the *Regulator* arrived in Boston, two drastically different understandings of enslaved maritime labor had been developing for nearly a century. Nothing demonstrates this discrepancy between white Bostonians, who perceived enslaved sailors to be prone to resistance, and the lived experiences of enslaved Bermudian sailors better than the case of the *Regulator*. Then, the Massachusetts court assumed legal emancipation to be the ultimate goal for the *Regulator*'s crew, without understanding how Black Bermudian sailors historically

[65] Maxwell, "Enslaved Merchants, Enslaved Merchant-Mariners, and the Bermuda Conspiracy of 1761."
[66] George Whitefield, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 165–66.
[67] Prince and Pringle, *The History of Mary Prince*.

engaged with and thought of their condition. Chapter 2 will further investigate this rejected offer of freedom in the context of Revolutionary Massachusetts' abolition movement, when the divergent trajectories of maritime slavery in Boston and Bermuda would fully clash.

2.
They Are "Desirous of Being Returned to their Former Masters:"[1] Revolutionary Abolitionism, Free Soil, and the Return to Home

On May 20, 1782, eleven days after its arrival into Boston, the *Boston Gazette* announced that the "armed ship *Regulator*" would face "Trial" in front of Nathaniel Cushing at the "Maritime Court" in Salem on June 11.[2] Although no records of the trial remain, on June 20 the *Regulator* was listed for sale in Boston, implying that Cushing, whose "condemnation of vessels in hard times" made "his name immortal" in Massachusetts, treated the *Regulator* with his typical severity.[3] For the *Regulator*'s enslaved crew, however, the result of the ship's trial was meaningless. In fact, instead of being treated as part of the *Regulator's* "Cargoes and Appurtenances," those men, alongside four of the *Regulator*'s white officers, were already "Prisoners on parole" aboard the Sloop *Duxbury* by June 9 and "bound to New York," where they would then await transport back to Bermuda.[4]

This chapter seeks to understand the experiences of the *Regulator*'s crew between May 10 and June 9 through an examination of abolitionist sentiment and action in Massachusetts over the preceding two decades. What ideological and political developments motivated the revolutionary legislatures and courts to refuse to include enslaved sailors among a ship's "Cargoes?" How did Massachusetts abolitionists, white and Black alike, articulate their opposition to slavery, and how would those objections and their goals for a post-emancipation Boston have resonated with the *Regulator's* crew? An analysis of abolitionist pamphlets,

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[1] "Resolve Concerning the Return of Slaves Taken from South Carolina," June 24, 1779, 223: 307, MSA.
[2] N. Cushing, *Boston Gazette*, May 20, 1782
[3] *Boston Gazette*, June 17, 1782; John Adams, "To Francis Diana," July 10, 1789, Adams Papers Digital Edition, MHS.
[4] N. Cushing, *Boston Gazette*, May 20, 1782; Book of Protests 1:121-122, BA.

freedom petitions, legal and legislative developments, and reflections upon emancipation reveals that Massachusetts abolitionists co-opted the dominant revolutionary rhetoric which described colonial oppression as a form of slavery, allowing them to convince many Patriots that only through the end of chattel slavery could they fully actualize the goals of the Revolution. Therefore, when the war began in earnest, Massachusetts' Revolutionary Government quickly instituted policies which effectively turned Boston into free soil for enslaved people captured at sea, like those aboard the *Regulator*. At the same time, this fervent devotion to liberty created a false binary between freedom and slavery, one which wrongly assumed legal emancipation to be the ultimate aim for the *Regulator*'s crew. Instead, abolitionists' stated goals and motivations seemingly failed to align with the experiences and personal desires of the Bermudian men. This misalignment, coupled with the grim prospects of free Black life in Massachusetts, led the *Regulator*'s crew to make the calculated decision to return to slavery in Bermuda, where they could reunite with family and continue to engage with a familiar labor system, one which they had found ways to manipulate for their own benefit.

Political Slavery, Chattel Slavery, and Liberty

In the middle of his 1764 pamphlet *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, Boston lawyer James Otis denounced the "ill-usage, slavery, and chains" placed upon Massachusetts by Great Britain.[5] While not yet a revolutionary text – Otis was advocating for Massachusetts colonists to be given the same rights as all British subjects – Otis used imagery that would permeate throughout future revolutionary rhetoric: that of a despotic Crown enslaving English colonists. For Otis, his commitment to individual liberty also pushed him to condemn the

[5] Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, 37.

practice of actual slavery. Because "all men… white or black," are "by the law of nature free born," he wrote, no "reasons can be given, for enslaving those of any colour." Not only was slavery "the most shocking violation of the law of nature," argued Otis, but its prevalence in North America also diminished the legitimacy of the Patriot cause, as "those who every day barter away other men's liberty, will soon care little for their own."[6]

In the years following Otis' pamphlet, countless other American colonists would utilize similar language of slavery and bondage to protest British domination. Not all of them, even in Massachusetts, would share in Otis' universal application of liberty. In June 1775, John Dolbeare, a member of one of Boston's leading slave-trading families, asked God to "Deliver" those "in the Land for Liberty," from "Distress and Bondage."[7] Samuel Savage, from another family deeply invested in the slave trade, similarly emphasized the colony's right to defend itself from "slavery" in 1773.[8] Historians have long debated the glaring hypocrisy between labelling colonial subjugation slavery while actual slavery remained popular throughout the colonies.[9]

In Massachusetts, at least, abolitionists frequently appropriated this dominant revolutionary language to advocate for emancipation by defining slavery in all forms as diametrically opposed to the new state's ethos. Like James Otis, Caesar Sarter, a formerly enslaved man from Newburyport, conceded in 1774 that colonial oppression could be described as slavery, and argued that slavery's "opposite, Liberty, is the greatest temporal good." Massachusetts' relationship to liberty, he continued, stemmed from the founding of the colony, when Pilgrims refused to "submi[t] to tyranny at home." This history must inspire Patriots to

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[6] *Ibid*, 43–44.
[7] "John Dolbeare to Benjamin Dolbeare," June 15 1775, Dolbeare Family Papers Box 1 Folder 11, MHS.
[8] "Letter Replying to a Sermon Against Disobedience to Britain," 1773, Savage Family Papers, Box 1 Folder 12, MHS.
[9] A good summary can be seen in Blanck, *Tyrannicide*, 9–11.

oppose chattel slavery, as enslaved Africans "are entitled to the same natural rights of mankind" upon which he believed Massachusetts to be founded. Sarter then made clear the Patriot hypocrisy, writing that he "need not point out the absurdity of [Patriot] exertions for liberty" while slavery persisted in their homes. Only when "oppressed Africans be liberated," he concluded, could Massachusetts revolutionaries succeed in their "endeavors to knock the shackles" off of their "own feet."[10] An anonymous "Lover of True Liberty" similarly insisted that slavery was "repugnant to the character of this Province."[11] For many Massachusetts abolitionists, so central was liberty to the new state's identity that the casting off of British domination, which they accepted could be appropriately described as political slavery, could only occur concurrently with the abolition of chattel slavery.

Freedom petitions by enslaved men constituted another important genre of anti-slavery literature in the 1770s. Most thoroughly examined by Grant Stanton, these petitions again affirmed descriptions of colonialism as slavery and juxtaposed the condition of chattel slavery with the liberty desired by Patriots.[12] In a petition to the Massachusetts legislature in 1773, a group of enslaved men wrote that Massachusetts' "efforts… to free themselves from slavery" gave the men hope their requests for emancipation would be met.[13] Four years later, another group claimed the "natural and unalienable right to freedom," demonstrating how enslaved petitioners adjusted to and appropriated the evolving language of the Revolution, here the recently issued *Declaration of Independence*.[14]

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[10] Caesar Sarter, "Address to Advocates for Holding the Africans in Slavery."
[11] Lover of Constitutional Liberty, *The Appendix*, 5.
[12] Stanton, "The Freedom Petitions."
[13] "Petition to the District of Stoughtonham," April 20th, 1773, George A. Plimpton Papers, Series VI, Box 52, Folder 9, RBML.
[14] "Petition of Lancaster Hill," January 13th, 1777, 212: 132, MSA, transcribed by Grant Stanton at: https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/web.sas.upenn.edu/dist/6/824/files/2023/12/Freedom-Petition-Transcripts_04252024-5921cca8e2c94c80.pdf.

More than simply moralizing rhetoric, these abolitionist writings directly contributed to a tangible change in attitudes towards slavery in the region. Pamphlets like those by Otis or the anonymous lover of liberty were sold throughout the colony, and Massachusetts' many newspapers reprinted and publicized the freedom petitions submitted to the Assembly.[15] Reflecting upon the causes of emancipation in 1795, Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, credited these "pamphlets and news-paper essays" for leading "many," even those "who had, without remorse, been the purchasers of slaves" to "condemn themselves" and oppose slavery.[16] These published works also reached Massachusetts' enslaved population. According to John Adams, several "negroes [who] sued for their freedom" used the same "arguments in favour of their liberty" that were made by "pamphlets and newspapers."[17] Massachusetts' anti-slavery writings, therefore, were not simply bold condemnations of slavery, but persuasive arguments in favor of its abolition, which garnered support for emancipation among both free and enslaved people in the province.

Although Massachusetts law never formally abolished slavery, the state's Constitution provided the legal framework which led to gradual emancipation. Soon after the enactment of the 1780 State Constitution, which plainly stated "all men are born free and equal," enslaved people throughout Massachusetts either sued for their freedom or simply departed their enslaver's home.[18] When such lawsuits made their way to trial, John Adams wrote that he "never knew a jury… to determine a negro to be a slave," further revealing the general public's growing

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[15] For reprinted petitions see; Lover of Constitutional Liberty, *the Appendix*; *Massachusetts Spy*, July 29, 1773; *Essex Gazette,* August 3, 1773; *Massachusetts Spy*, September 7, 1774; *Salem Gazette,* September 16, 1774.
[16] Belknap, "Queries Respecting the Slavery and Emancipation of Negroes in Massachusetts," 201.
[17] Adams to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 401.
[18] "Massachusetts Constitution;" Belknap, "Queries Respecting the Slavery and Emancipation of Negroes in Massachusetts," 203; Dexter to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 386.

aversion to the institution.[19] In 1783, William Cushing, the Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, succinctly explained the Constitution's effect on slavery when presiding over the Quock Walker Case, which cemented the precedent for gradual emancipation. Because of the Constitution's first article, Cushing wrote, the document is "totally repugnant to ye. Idea of being born Slaves."[20] Although proponents of slavery, including the judge James Winthrop, derided the "misconstruction" of the Constitution for the "abolishing [of] a trade" which was "woven into [Massachusetts'] nature," it nonetheless ensured that the courts, absent legislative abolition, would not protect slavery.[21] The Constitution thus represented the culmination of a decades-long anti-slavery movement in Boston, which laid the ideological foundation for the eventual offer of freedom to the *Regulator*'s crew.

Boston as Free Soil: The Maritime Impact of Revolutionary Abolitionism

Even before this gradual and unofficial emancipation scheme, the Revolutionary Government, motivated by the state's new devotion to individual liberty, inverted the maritime passage to freedom which Boston's slaveholders feared during much of the eighteenth century. In September 1776, "two negro men" were "brought into [Massachusetts] as prisoners taken on the high seas." When their captors hoped to sell them into slavery, the interim House of Representatives placed a temporary injunction against their sale as they considered its legality. On September 13, four days before the men were to be sold, members of the House proposed a resolve which boldly declared "that the selling and enslaving of the human species is a direct

[19] Adams to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 402; Slavery's continuation in Massachusetts can be seen in "Sale of Boston," June 1, 1774, Dolbeare Family Papers, Box 3 Folder 1, MHS.
[20] William Cushing, "Legal Notes by William Cushing about the Quock Walker Case," 1783, MHSOC, https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=630&br=1.
[21] Winthrop to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 389–90.

violation of the natural rights alike vested in all men." Further, it parroted the rhetoric of Sarter and others by contrasting slavery with the "principles on which this" state and the rest of the eventual United States "have carried their struggle for liberty." Therefore, the resolve aimed to "forbi[d]" the men's captors from "sell[ing] them" or treating them differently than free prisoners of war.[22] When the official resolve passed three days later, the legislature had removed the bold condemnation of slavery as a violation of universal human rights. However, it maintained its practical impact – the prohibition of selling enslaved people captured at sea – and the House freed the men.[23]

The September 16 resolve demonstrates how Massachusetts abolitionists effectively associated the end of slavery with the principles of independence, even as the official version removed the explicit condemnation of slavery as antithetical to the Revolution. Only one year after its passing, an enslaved woman named Cuba cited the resolve in a petition to the Revolution Council. After being "taken on the high Seas" and "brought into Boston," Cuba hoped to "rejoyc[e]... in this Land of Liberty" and to "Spend her life [there] in Comfort and freedom." The officers who captured Cuba, though, planned to sell her into slavery in Jamaica. Citing the "true Intent and meaning" of the September 16 resolve and appealing to the state's ethos of liberty, Cuba asked the Council to intervene on her behalf and ensure her enduring freedom in Boston. Upon receipt of her petition, the Council agreed that Cuba came "within the meaning and intent" of the law, freed her, and extended the resolve's liberatory powers from prisoners of war to all enslaved people captured at sea, regardless of their occupation.[24]

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[22] "Proposed Resolve Against Selling Two Men Captured at Sea," September 13, 1776, 215: 96, MSA.
[23] "Resolve Against Selling Two Men Captured at Sea," September 16, 1776, 215: 95, MSA.
[24] "Petition of Cuba," November 21 and December 2nd, 1777, 168: 31-32, MSA.

By prohibiting the treatment of enslaved privateering captures as property, these two cases effectively established Boston as free soil, at least for those captured at sea. Even as slavery persisted in Boston in the late 1770s, the legislature manifested widespread abolitionist sentiment into material opposition to slavery for those enslaved outside of Massachusetts' borders. In doing so, it inverted the maritime passage of freedom discussed in Chapter 1 and turned Boston into a place in which enslaved people could be freed upon arrival, not one from which they fled. Boston's courts even extended this right to freedom to those enslaved in the American South, despite doing so threatening national unity. In 1783, when eight enslaved South Carolinians ended up in Boston, the courts refused to detain and return them to slavery, citing habeas corpus, "ye right of every person." Writing to Governor John Hancock, William Cushing, who presided over the trial, stated that the court "had nothing to do with" who "had a right to the service of those negroes," and was "unable to conceive" of how freeing them constituted "an attack upon the spirit, freedom… and sovereignty" of South Carolina.[25]

Not everyone offered freedom in Massachusetts elected to stay. In 1779, a "number of Negroes" arrived in Boston aboard the prize *Victoria*, which had "recaptured" them from a British Privateer. These men and women had previously been "stolen from the Plantations of Anthony Pauley and others" in South Carolina. As a number were "desirous of being returned to their former masters," the legislature determined "that their desire… should be gratified." However, the committee crucially stressed that "the said Negroes should by no means be considered… as transferable property," framing their return not as a matter of property rights but the exercise of personal autonomy.[26] The very same belief in individual liberty which motivated

[25] "William Cushing to John Hancock," December 20, 1783, William Cushing Papers, MHS.
[26] "Resolve Considering the Request of a Number of Negroes to Return to South Carolina," June 24, 1779, 223: 307, MSA.

the Revolutionary Government to offer freedom to Cuba or those aboard the *Victoria* paradoxically forced it to also accept their desire to return to slavery. Still, the resolve voiced an opposition to the fundamental principle of slavery, that an individual could be considered "transferable property." Even when seemingly accommodating slavery, the rebel government condemned the institution and refused to acknowledge the unfreedom of the enslaved.

While no trial records, resolves, or deliberations from the *Regulator*'s time in Boston remain, these cases allow for a reconstruction of how and why its enslaved crew were offered their freedom. Like the two men from 1776 or those aboard the *Victoria*, the *Regulator*'s crew was treated not as property but as prisoners of war upon their arrival in Boston. As part of this treatment, they would have been given the opportunity to "spend [their] li[ves] in Comfort and freedom" in Massachusetts, as Cuba claimed to desire. However, when they requested or demanded to return home, the same ideology which motivated their offer of freedom also forced Boston's courts to grant their desire to return to a life of slavery.

The Misalignment of Goals

To attempt to understand why the *Regulator*'s crew made such a choice, the goals and motivations expressed by Boston abolitionists must be placed in conversation with understandings of Bermudian slavery. Arriving in Boston two years after the state's Constitution and amid Massachusetts' sharp turn away from enslavement, the *Regulator*'s crew would have understood slavery to be truly on its last legs in the city. As established by Jarvis, Scott, and Bolster, their careers as sailors would have allowed the ship's crew to learn about the political developments and conditions of Black life throughout the Atlantic world. Whether informed by their time in the city or by conversations with the New England sailors whom they met in Bermuda or at port scenes throughout the Atlantic, this broader political understanding would

have certainly included developments in Boston. So, how would they have reacted to the ideas of slavery and freedom they encountered in discourses surrounding slavery in Revolutionary Massachusetts?

More than anything, Massachusetts abolitionists resented the institution for its impositions upon the formation of family units, in which Black men could fulfill the Christian duty of husbandry and fatherhood. For abolitionists, the image of family separation in both Africa and Massachusetts epitomized the inhumanity of the institution.[27] One particularly telling example comes from a 1773 freedom petition. As slavery severed "the endearing ties of husband, wife, parent, [and] child," the petitioners wrote, "how can a slave perform the duties of husband or parent?" "So inimical is slavery to religion," they concluded.[28] Describing Massachusetts slavery in 1795, Dr. John Eliot remembered "lovers and friends separated" and "their children given away, with the same indifference as little kittens and young puppies."[29] The bill of sale for Rose, an enslaved girl purchased by James Dolbeare at just two years old, shows Eliot's claim was not hyperbolic, as does Wendy Warren's revelation that New England slave holders frequently "gave away" enslaved infants for free within days or weeks of their birth.[30]

While recent scholarship has challenged the impossibility of stable enslaved families in Massachusetts, with Gloria McCahon Whiting demonstrating that legal slave marriages were both possible and common in the state, stories of family separation dominated descriptions of bondage in Revolutionary Massachusetts.[31] As this rhetoric was so central to Boston's discourses

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[27] For examples, see: Freedom Petition in Lover of Constitutional Liberty, *The Appendix*, 10; Appleton and Grainger, *Considerations on Slavery*, 4–5; Sarter, "Address to Advocates for Holding the Africans in Slavery."
[28] *Massachusetts Spy*, July 29, 1773. Transcribed by Grant Stanton at https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/web.sas.upenn.edu/dist/6/824/files/2023/12/Freedom-Petition-Transcripts_04252024-5921cca8e2c94c80.pdf.
[29] Eliot to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 383.
[30] "Bill of Sale for Rose," June 3, 1743, Dolbeare Family Papers, Box 3 Folder 1, MHS; Warren, "'Thrown Upon the World.'"
[31] Whiting, *Belonging*, 4–9.

around slavery, the *Regulator*'s crew likely would have understood impositions upon family life to be a key characteristic of enslavement in Massachusetts, even if modern historians have painted a more nuanced picture.

The Black Bermudians aboard the *Regulator* had radically different experiences of family life than their Bostonian counterparts. As discussed in Chapter 1, enslaved people in Bermuda more easily formed stable family units than in much of the Atlantic. Michael Jarvis has demonstrated that most Bermudian men, including slave sailors, informally married and had children at young ages.[32] According to William Browne, enslaved Bermudians "regard[ed]" their informal intimate "engagements" as "of indispensable moral obligations." Further, their "attachment to their offspring" led enslaved Bermudian couples to be "constant in their cohabitations."[33] Pervasive white paternalism partially explains this relative stability of family life. As John Hope complained, white Bermudians refused to "sell a Negroe… that has been born in his family, but upon the last extremity," a stark departure from Eliot and Warren's descriptions of enslaved children being sold or given away like puppies in Massachusetts.[34]

For the *Regulator*'s crew, then, many of whom had parents, wives, and children awaiting them in Bermuda, the main rhetorical and emotional critique of slavery in Boston would have failed to resonate. Since Boston's Black population was fighting against slavery largely because of their inability to form families within it, their arguments would have likely fallen flat with Black Bermudian sailors, who were able to build intimate emotional relationships at home. As Jarvis and Packwood have revealed, Bermudian slave sailors were constantly conscious of their families while abroad, as they feared their wives or children would be punished if they were to

[32] Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 149.
[33] "William Browne to Parliament Concerning Slavery in Bermuda," Folio 131.
[34] Hope, "Description of Bermuda," Folio 217.

run away at port or revolt at sea.[35] Ironically, then, freedom in Boston, which so many Black Bostonians sought in order to protect and form family ties, would have not only alienated Bermudian sailors from loved ones at home but directly endangered them. Further, Bermuda's prohibition on free Blacks living on the island persisted until the nineteenth century, meaning that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the *Regulator*'s crew to ever return to Bermuda and reunite with their families as freed men.[36]

Another common motivation for the end of slavery which might have perturbed the Bermudian sailors was racism. For many white abolitionists, the end of slavery could allow for the removal, or at least prevent the further introduction of non-white people into Massachusetts. Nathaniel Appleton, a businessman from Cambridge, insisted that slavery was "inconsistent with the interests of the province," as "the importation of black slaves" prevented "the importation of white servants." Abolition, he argued, would aid Massachusetts' settler colonial project, as indentured laborers from Europe could "turn out upon our waste lands, marry," and populate Western lands with new white towns.[37] James Sullivan, a justice on the Massachusetts Supreme Court, supported "the freedom of the blacks," but insisted they should not be allowed "to participate [in] civil privileges."[38] John Adams credited competition between white workers and slaves, alongside the "lazy, idle, proud, vicious, and … wholly useless" behavior of Boston's enslaved population, for making "the abolition of slavery… a measure of economy."[39] Here, justifications for abolition reflect an opposition to slavery rooted not in anti-racism or visions of

[35] Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, 45; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 149.
[36] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters," 590.
[37] Appleton and Grainger, Considerations on Slavery, 12–13.
[38] Sullivan to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 412.
[39] Adams to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 402.

equality, but in derogatory ideas surrounding Black work ethic, productivity, and capacity for political thought.

In response to this persistent racism in Massachusetts, many enslaved freedom seekers advocated for a return to Africa alongside emancipation. One freedom petition requested a tract of "unimproved land… for a settlement" in Massachusetts. If that request could not be met, they then asked to be "releas[ed]... from bondage" and "transported to [their] native country."[40] In their petition to the town of Stoughton, another group of Black men expressed their desire to "leave the province… as soon as… our joynt labours procure" enough money to return to "the coast of Africa."[41] Some white abolitionists, too, supported a hypothetical return to Africa. The anonymous "Lover of Liberty" wrote that if slavers had the "Right to bring them from their own country" then enslaved New Englanders "ought to be returned thereto, at the public Expense."[42] The embrace of Africa as a possible post-slavery destination arose both as a response to racist motivations for the end of slavery and from a desire to create a distinct Black community in freedom, which many enslaved people believed impossible in Massachusetts.

For the Bermudians offered to become free in Boston, this widespread desire to rid the state of Black people or the Black desire to return to Africa would have only served to darken the prospects of a free life there. According to Jarvis, Bermudian sailors would have witnessed the "insidious pervasiveness" and unique characteristics of slavery and racism in the ports they visited.[43] Almost certainly, then, they would have understood the quotidian discrimination faced by Black Bostonians, both free and enslaved, and the desires of many to leave the city. This knowledge of Black Bostonians' desire to depart and white elites' hope to replace Black labor

[40] *Massachusetts Spy*, July 29, 1773.
[41] "Petition to the District of Stoughtonham."
[42] Lover of Constitutional Liberty, *The Appendix*, 6.
[43] Jarvis, "Maritime Masters."

with European immigrants would have understandably dissuaded the Bermudians from starting a new life there. As most men aboard the *Regulator* would have had no direct personal or familial ties to Africa, the prospect of joining a settlement on the West African coast, too, would have been unlikely to appeal to them.[44]

The fact that Black Bermudians conceived of their condition and of the nature of freedom differently than Black Bostonians should be no surprise. In the eighteenth century, both the possibility of abolition and modern notions of freedom were only beginning to emerge. As Christopher Brown writes, late eighteenth-century abolitionists "could not assume" the feasibility of "abolishing any aspect of the slave system," especially before the Haitian Revolution.[45] So integral was slavery to the New World that the very notion of a society without slavery was often unimaginable, even for the enslaved themselves. Enslaved people, therefore, did not necessarily adhere to binary understandings of slavery and freedom, itself a novel concept at this time. Rather, enslaved people articulated different visions of freedom and autonomy, defined by their own experiences of slavery and informed by the seeming impossibility of abolition.[46] For the *Regulator*'s crew, doubting the form of freedom promoted in Massachusetts would have reasonably resulted from the novelty of revolutionary discourses of freedom, which seem to have led the goals of abolition to misalign, or sometimes directly contradict, the Bermudian men's understandings of autonomy.

The Prospects of Free Black Life in Boston

[44] Bermuda's enslaved population had been largely creole since the late seventeenth century, Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 95–96; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 102.
[45] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 25.
[46] For a brief description of the unthinkability of abolition, see Brown, *Moral Capital*, 210–13.

Not only would visions of post-emancipation Boston have failed to appeal to the *Regulator*'s crew, the material conditions faced by those who had already been freed from slavery would have also given them pause. Reflecting on free Black life in Massachusetts during gradual emancipation, white elites described the "pretty miserable," and "wretched" conditions which left many freed people "oppressed with poverty and its attendant miseries."[47] Records from the Boston Almshouse, a temporary "refuge for the truly homeless, the ill, and the involuntarily idle," affirm that the end of slavery forced many Black Bostonians into immediate and severe poverty.[48] As seen in Table 1, after 1780, when slavery began to decline more rapidly, the Black admissions rate to Boston's Almshouse tripled from below 2% to above 7% of total admissions by the end of the century. At the same time, Boston's total Black population slowly decreased from between 10-15% at midcentury to under 1,000, or about 5% following the Revolution. For many, admission to the Almshouse meant death, as 20-25% of those who entered died inside.[49] The transition from slavery to freedom provided no consistent economic opportunities or safeguards against poverty for Black Bostonians, leading them to soon become disproportionately represented among the city's poorest residents. While many individuals were likely repeat visitors to the Almshouse, the numbers nonetheless suggest that a significant proportion of Boston's newly free Black population clearly faced the intense poverty needed to be sent to the poorhouse. Even more would have faced the threat of institutionalization, as they struggled to find work, pay for shelter, and survive in their new state of freedom.

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[47] Holyoke to Belknap and Eliot to Belknap in "Queries Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts," 400, 382; Belknap, "Queries Respecting the Slavery and Emancipation of Negroes in Massachusetts," 206.
[48] Nellis and Cecere, *The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor*, 57.
[49] *Ibid*, 63, 57.

Years	Total Admissions	# Of Black Admissions to the Boston Almshouse	Black Admissions to the Almshouse by Percentage
1758-1774	1,836	34	1.8%
1775-1788	1,909	99	5.1%
1788-1795	1,603	102	6.4%
1795-1801	1,926	140	7.3%

Table 1: Black Admissions to Boston Almshouse in the second half of the eighteenth century.[50]

The life of Philis Wheatley serves as a prime example of the precarity free Black men and women faced in Boston. When enslaved, Wheatley published a successful collection of poetry in London and the Colonies, making her the first published African American poet. After Wheatley's emancipation, though, this fame failed to save her from the characteristic struggle of free Black life in Massachusetts. In the ten years following the publication of her poems, Wheatley's husband was jailed for debt and both of their children died in infancy. In 1784, Wheatley, then living in obscurity and extreme poverty, passed away while giving birth to a third child.[51] Even for the most renowned of Black Bostonians, free life often meant poverty and struggle. It is hard to imagine the *Regulator*'s crew, who arrived in Boston amid the city's transition to freedom and would have understood the extreme challenges Boston's Black population faced, being willing to sacrifice all they had ever known for a new life in this uncertain and threatening environment.

Free Black sailors, too, faced a unique threat in freedom. In February 1788, several Black Bostonians requested help from the Massachusetts legislature in recovering three Black sailors

[50] *Ibid*, 60–63.
[51] Peterson, *The City-State of Boston*, 323–24.

who were kidnapped at sea and sold into slavery in Martinique. According to the petition, so intense was the threat of kidnapping and re-enslavement abroad that "maney… good" Black "seamen [were] oblidge[d] to stay at home thru fear," leading them to "loiter about the streets for want of employ." If Massachusetts protected its Black sailors, these men claimed they would return to work and "get a [handsome] livelihood for themselves and" their families.[52] Even maritime labor, the most abundant and lucrative employment for free Black Bostonians, presented great danger. Despite this specific petition coming after the *Regulator*'s return, such stories were not unique to Boston and reflected the general insecurity of free Black maritime labor in a world dominated by slavery.[53] While certainly troubling to modern ideas of freedom, the constant threat of kidnapping and re-enslavement for free Black sailors might have convinced Bermudian mariners, who had found ways to appropriate their condition to provide for their families and carve out relative privileges, that remaining in slavery allowed for a more stable and predictable working life than freedom. The conditions of free Black life in Boston, then, not just the rhetoric of the city's abolitionist movement or emotional and familial ties to home, would have cautioned the *Regulator*'s crew against remaining in Massachusetts.

Conclusion

When the *Regulator*'s crew was offered emancipation in May 1782, the differing conceptions of freedom held by the enslaved sailors and the Massachusetts courts finally came to a head. It is impossible to know exactly why each of the 69 surviving members of the *Regulator*'s enslaved crew chose to board yet another ship and return to Bermuda. For some,

[52] The petition is transcribed in Aptheker, *A Documentary History*, 20–21.
[53] For more on the prevalence of kidnapping in the late eighteenth century North, see Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 101–6.

who perhaps feared that, once captured, they would never again see their wives, children, and friends, the thought of loved ones surely drew them back home. Others, after exploring Boston or talking to its Black residents, may have witnessed the widespread poverty and fear among the city's Black community and chose to return to a familiar and more predictable life in Bermuda. Having fought against the American rebels, some perhaps identified as British subjects, as the Board of Trade ruled in 1725, and returned to Bermuda as a political decision informed by their service. Of course, some too may have been enticed by Massachusetts' offer and elected to return only after pressure by their crewmates and friends. While the archive obscures the individual identities, histories, and motivations of each man, they all would have made a calculated decision regarding their future, one deeply informed by their personal understandings of freedom, the goals and motivations of the abolition movement in Boston, and the experiences of free Black New Englanders. Whatever their motivations may have been, soon the *Regulator*'s crew stood on the deck of the *Duxbury* on June 9, anxiously awaiting their arrival back home.

Conclusion: "Hurra for Bermuda?"

Shortly after the *Duxbury* rounded the tip of Cape Cod en route to New York on June 10, the *Regulator*'s white officers reported being "alarmed with a noise upon Deck." Soon, they recognized the sound. "Hurra for Bermuda!" shouted the rest of the *Regulator*'s crew, as they "declared… they were determined to proceed" directly to Bermuda and "obliged Lieutenant Henry Hall… to navigate the vessel" accordingly.[1] William Browne provided a more blunt description of the actions taken by the *Regulator*'s Black mariners: they "seized the command of [the] vessel, and brought her into" Bermuda, where they arrived on June 24 and immediately "dispensed themselves" throughout the island.[2]

On first glance, this may seem like an unbelievable, fairy tale ending to the story. The testimony describing the crew's mutiny, down to their perfectly on-the-nose war cry, raises a few questions. First, it comes from the *Regulator*'s white officers, whom the Governor summoned shortly after returning to Bermuda to explain this violation of their terms of surrender. In their response, they forcefully "protest[ed] against" the crew's actions, which supposedly interfered with the officers' plans to "religiously observe" the terms of "parole they had been given."[3] Conscious of the severity of overthrowing the *Duxbury*, these men clearly desired to place all the blame on the enslaved prisoners. Next, James Parker, the *Regulator*'s Lieutenant, owned multiple slaves, and perhaps so too did the four other officers.[4] It is very possible, then, that at least a few of the *Regulator*'s crew were enslaved by the very men who commanded them on deck, as was common aboard Bermudian ships. How this added power dynamic, in addition to a ship's typical hierarchy, informed what happened on the *Duxbury* is unclear. Could these four

[1] Book of Protests I: 121-122 BA.
[2] "William Browne to General Carleton," July 1, 1782, PRO 30/55/44/4, NA.
[3] Book of Protests 1: 121-122, BA.
[4] "The Will of James Parker," April 20, 1798, *Book of Wills*, 11:273-4, BA.

officers truly have had no knowledge of or involvement in the mutiny, or did they simply name the enslaved crew as perpetrators to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the crime?

Further examination, though, reveals that the claimed fate of the *Duxbury* was not fantastical but an apt and perhaps even unsurprising conclusion to the *Regulator* saga. Whether or not they acted alone, by seizing the *Duxbury* and forcing it back to Bermuda, the *Regulator*'s enslaved crew engaged in yet another daring affirmation of agency. By refusing to trust others to deliver them back to Bermuda, the crew demonstrated once again that its rejection of Boston's offer represented not a passive acceptance of enslavement, but an assertion of self-determination and a true desire to return home. So assured were they of their calculated and informed decision in Boston, that they took radical measures, more extreme than any before aboard a Bermudian vessel, to ensure its immediate completion.

Their return to Bermuda finally ended the men's extraordinary ordeal, which began in familiar ways. Months earlier, like countless Bermudian men over the preceding century, they left their homes, boarded a vessel, and departed for sea from one of the many docks which line Bermuda's harbors, sounds, and inlets. When they were captured and brought into Boston, they entered another Atlantic locale with a rich Black maritime tradition. There, enslaved men had also played important roles in Boston's expansive eighteenth-century trading network. However, unlike in Bermuda, where enslaved mariners appropriated their relative privileges and mobility to build transatlantic community, materially improve their and their families' lives, and even occasionally invert the traditional hierarchy of slavery, in Boston white elites came to associate enslaved seamen with resistance due to a real but slightly hysterical fear of maritime maroonage.

The Boston of 1782, though, was not the same city as the Boston of much of the eighteenth century. In the preceding two decades, abolitionists described Massachusetts'

movement against the British as incompatible with the maintenance of slavery in the province. Many came to view slavery, both political in the form of British colonial oppression and literal in the form of human bondage, as diametrically opposed to the natural rights of freedom and personal liberty upon which Massachusetts and the burgeoning United States were founded. This assertion that human slavery directly contradicted the state's moral foundation and delegitimized the Revolution pushed Boston's rebel government to take meaningful action to weaken the institution. Perhaps the most daring and transgressive of these actions was the prohibition on the return or sale of enslaved people captured at sea, even to Southern states. While none of these steps officially freed Massachusetts' slaves, these rulings effectively turned the state's ports into free soil for those enslaved outside of its borders and reversed the long-feared maritime passage of freedom in the city.

Despite Massachusetts' true shift away from slavery, the specific justifications, goals, and initial outcomes of emancipation in the state seem to have misaligned with the Bermudian sailors' desires and experiences, pushing them away from a free life in Boston. In the state's abolitionist writings, slavery's impositions upon family life emerged as the primary moral critique of the institution. For the *Regulator*'s crew, who likely had families awaiting them back home, freedom in Boston would have in fact presented greater impositions upon family life than continued slavery in Bermuda. In imagining a post-emancipation Boston, Black freedom seekers advocated for an immediate or eventual return to Africa, while white writers expressed their hope that abolition would decrease the state's Black population. Again, these discourses would have troubled the prospects of free life in Boston for the Bermudian sailors, who would have had few emotional ties to Africa. The transition from slavery to freedom also forced countless Black Bostonians into precarity, poverty, and suffering, further demonstrating the uncertainty which

would accompany manumission in Massachusetts. So, after weighing a new life in Boston against a return to Bermuda and, indeed, slavery, the men chose to board the *Duxbury* and return home.

The *Regulator* saga serves as a powerful reminder that only by studying the particularities of enslaved life in different localities can we attain more complete understandings of the transnational history of slavery and abolition. The specific experiences of slavery deeply informed how enslaved people thought of themselves, engaged with their condition, and formulated opinions on the realities of Black life in other parts of the world. In the late eighteenth century, even the concept of freedom remained novel, as politicians, philosophers, and common people presented conflicting definitions of liberty and unclear visions of what a society built upon it would look like. Enslaved people, like the white revolutionaries, loyalists, and settlers around them, defined freedom on their own terms. For some, manumission represented the ultimate manifestation of liberty. But, for others, goals of personal autonomy could be attained without emancipation, especially in an Atlantic world with no true models of a society without slavery.

For those enslaved in or around Boston, the *Regulator*'s crew's decision might have seemed incomprehensible. Certainly, for Cuba, the formerly enslaved woman who lauded Massachusetts as the "Land of Liberty," or the eight Black South Carolinians who sued for their freedom to avoid being forced back onto a rice plantation, freedom in Massachusetts presented a desirable respite from slavery's degradation and brutality. While perhaps more conceivable or even reassuring to some modern audiences, their decisions should not be viewed as any more legitimate or empowering than those made by the Bermudian men. Both cases must be understood as expressions of agency, informed by the unique experiences of each individual and

their perceptions of the freedom they had been offered in contrast to the conditions of their lives at home. For the *Regulator*'s crew, it was not a belief in the benevolence of Bermuda's slavery which motivated their choice, but a rich understanding of the lives they were offered and an unwillingness to sever themselves from their community, home, and way of life for such an uncertain and precarious freedom.

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