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### Reading Between the Lines of Slavery: Examining New England Runaway Ads for Evidence of an Afro-Yankee Culture

Lauren Landi

Salve Regina University, lauren.landi2012@gmail.com

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Reading Between the Lines of Slavery:  
Examining New England Runaway Ads for Evidence of an  
Afro-Yankee Culture

Lauren E. Landi

Salve Regina University  
Department of History and  
Cultural and Historic Preservation  
Senior Thesis  
Dr. Neary

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## Introduction: Slavery in New England

Since the very beginnings of the United States, slavery has played a vital role. This “peculiar institution” made our country what it is today, and its legacy haunts us still. “Slavery was not incidental to America’s origins; it was central”, writes David Von Drehle in a recent cover story for *Time* magazine. “There were slaves at Jamestown. In the 1600’s...slave labor was far more central to the making of New York than to the making of Virginia. As late as 1830, there were 2,254 slaves in New Jersey. Connecticut did not abolish slavery until 1848...eight years before the fighting broke out in Kansas. Rhode Island dominated the American slave trade until it was outlawed in 1808. The cotton trade made Wall Street a global financial force. Slaves [even] built the White House.”<sup>1</sup> Due to the Civil War many conveniently think of slavery as a system unique to the South, but the North is just as guilty if not more because slave labor was not essential to their economy. James Mars, who himself had served as a slave in Connecticut, was even confronted with people who doubted New England’s connection with slavery. “Some told me that they did not know that slavery was ever allowed in Connecticut,” recalled the former slave “and some affirm that it never did exist in the State.”<sup>2</sup> This illusion of a slave free North persists to this day. While this “inhuman bondage” was practiced differently in New England than the plantation system of the South, it was here nonetheless and should not be ignored. It is time that the states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts take responsibility for their involvement in slavery instead of laying all the blame on the South. The simplified history of a free North and enslaved South must be done away with.

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<sup>1</sup>David Von Drehle, “The Way We Weren’t,” *Time*, April 18, 2011, 51.

<sup>2</sup>James Mars, “Life of James Mars, a Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut,” *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina, 2004, Web. 27 Apr. 2010, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mars64/menu.html>, 37.

## **Newport's Role**

One of the epicenters of the African slave trade in the North was none other than Newport, Rhode Island. Acting as one of the primary stops on the infamous triangle trade, Newport merchant vessels filled with rum would set sail for the West African coast, where the rum would be traded for slaves, the ships would then head for the Caribbean where their human cargo was traded for molasses and brought back up to Newport where it would be used to make rum; the cycle would then start over again. By 1770 Newport controlled seventy percent of the slave trade, and thirty percent of the families in the community owned slaves.<sup>3</sup> “Newport’s participation in the slave trade” notes historian Elaine Crane “made it relatively easy for the local population to acquire slaves. In 1774 the census takers reported 1,084 bond servants in a total population of 9,209— an unusually high proportion of blacks for a New England community.”<sup>4</sup> This population of slaves is one that requires further study.

## **An Afro-Yankee Culture**

From the middle of the fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth-century over nine million Africans were forcibly removed from their homeland and exported to the Americas as slaves. This trade in human cargo “involved all the nations of western Europe and every colony and nation in the New World.”<sup>5</sup> This crime against humanity has become known as the African Diaspora. It forever changed the course of history in the Western Hemisphere and its legacy continues to haunt us today with its leftover feelings of racism and prejudice. Of the nearly ten million who were imported as cargo to the Americas, around 400,000 were brought to the United States. In 1775 there were an estimated 750,000 Africans living in the American colonies, and

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<sup>3</sup>Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 24.

<sup>5</sup>Roger Daniels, *Coming to America; History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, (Perennial: Princeton, NJ, 2002), 53.

they made up twenty to twenty-five percent of the total colonial population. This remains the highest peak for the black population in America.<sup>6</sup> Split between the plantation economy of the South and the merchant economy of the North these Africans were forced to adopt a foreign way of life they had never known.

The way in which slaves lived in the northern states was decidedly different from the way they lived in the southern half of the country. While that does not say enslavement was any less or more harsh in either geographic area, it does mean that an African American heritage developed differently in each location. "Africans...in the New World arrived from a three-thousand-mile swath of western Africa" writes W. Jeffery Bolster "They had been born into societies with substantially different languages...political organizations, religions, and decorative arts. Nevertheless, underlying cultural unities provided a distinctly African foundation from which African American culture would evolve."<sup>7</sup> In the New World Africans were the minority, lorded over and mostly owned by the dominant culture of the English. Here they were forced to assimilate and quickly if they wanted to get by in the New World. Yet many African practices persisted. While it had become difficult to hold onto vestiges of particular African cultures, they formed an African heritage encompassing the African traditions carried over. In this way they ceased being separated as Liberians, Angolans, or men of the Ivory Coast. Instead they became united as Africans living in America, carving out their own cultural niche under the noses of the English and even influencing the dominant culture.

If we look at the runaway ads of eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century New England we get more than just a description of the fugitive slave. They were not passive participants in their enslavement, but rather created their own American identity, in which they adopted and at times

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 53-65.

<sup>7</sup>W. Jeffery Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 45.

mocked the very culture that placed them in this system of bondage. The runaway advertisements from colonial and post Revolutionary War Newport provide us with dozens of examples of this unique culture. Rather than taking slavery lying down, they took it “dressing up.” Evidence of an Afro-Yankee culture is clearly visible in the clothes they wore, the hairstyles they kept, their mannerisms, talents, and overall presence.

If we look at the material culture of the enslaved displayed in the advertisements we can see signs of personal and creative expression. Dress has always been used to display status, wealth, and personal taste. While slaves were given cast-offs and clothes made of poor material, they were still able to do something with them. African American slaves were known to dye and trade clothing with other blacks, wear vibrant color combinations, and add patches to their clothing in order to make them their own. This expression of individuality was visible to the colonists, but instead of seeing it as slaves asserting their culture they thought it strange and backward. In this way the act of having control over their wardrobes was an act of resistant accommodation. They were wearing English clothes, but they were wearing them in their own way; subverting the dominant culture in order to fit the unique one they had created for themselves. Other ways in which they did this included the way they styled their hair. Taking cues from the dominant white culture some slaves arranged their hair in a mock European style by piling it on top of their heads to resemble a wig. Others decided to reject the white standard of beautiful hair and kept theirs curly and unkempt, or shaved it in various ways.<sup>8</sup> Even in their very demeanor slaves succeeded in fighting against the perceived notion of how they should be seen. Rather than keeping a submissive bowed look many displayed a “glaring eye” or “full ey’d

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<sup>8</sup>Shane White, and Graham White, *Stylin’, African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 37-62.



stare.” These were not meek simple-minded folk, they understood the injustice that was being placed against them and rejected it in ways they could.

The population of slaves I am studying also took a very active role in expressing their displeasure with their lot in life. They ran away. Not only (as the advertisements show) did they seek to express their individuality in their daily appearance, showing that while their bodies were owned their minds were not, they took their fate into their own hands and fled from their bondage. If one looks to where many of these runaways sought refuge from their enslavement we can see where in colonial America there was the most equality between whites and blacks. It, for the most part, did not lie in the halls of the educated and elite but rather aboard a ship amongst coarse and common sailors who suffered under their own stereotypes and found a common bond between themselves and the slaves.

By examining how slaves adorned and presented themselves, we can get a better picture of how exactly they were expressing identity through clothing and other means. The study of this Afro-Yankee culture is vital to understanding the way we see race today. Another common myth is that racism only exists in the South, which is far from the truth. As we have seen in the very recent past, with such historical events as the Boston Bus Riots of the 1970s and the 1986 Howard Beach incident, racism is prevalent in the North as well. Here in New England we tend to sweep this embarrassing fact under the rug along with that of an established northern slave economy. If we ever want to move away from this fallacy we must grapple with the true reality.

### **Historiography and Purpose**

It was not until the 1970s that scholars began to write about slavery from the perspective of the enslaved. Before then academics took the side of the slave master, claiming that African Americans were eager participants in the paternalistic, master-slave dynamic. These earlier

interpretations of slavery often portrayed blacks as the submissive and docile “Sambo” who was more than happy to do his owner’s bidding. One of the first works to contest this idea was John Blassingame’s 1972 work The Slave Community.<sup>9</sup> By applying different psychological theories to southern, antebellum fugitive slave narratives Blassingame came to the conclusion that rather than being the willing puppets of their masters, African Americans had created an independent culture for themselves. In which they controlled aspects of their own lives and developed their own unique and interesting personalities. Criticized for ignoring the thousands of Workers Progress Administration’s (WPA’s) interviews with former slaves and for picking biased narratives, the validity of his argument was challenged. Despite this, Blassingame’s book remains one of the pivotal texts on the culture of the enslaved.

While The Slave Community focuses on slavery in the plantation system of the South, Edgar McManus’s 1973 work Black Bondage in the North is, as the title suggests, about the North’s system of slavery.<sup>10</sup> While trying to create an all-inclusive portrait of slavery in the North, McManus stresses slavery’s structure as an economic institution. He claims that slavery in the North arose from the need for cheap labor. As a result of this labor the North prospered and became industrialized which made the system of slavery obsolete. It was then more economically viable for masters to set their slaves free. However, with this manumission freed slaves were now competing with whites for the same jobs they once did and suffered in their freedom from racist sentiments. While McManus’s work fails to fully grasp the racism and prejudice placed against the enslaved and newly freed blacks and the arising abolitionist movement, it is successful in providing a stable context regarding northern slavery. Joanne Pope Melish’s 1998

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<sup>9</sup>John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community; Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>10</sup>Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1973).

book, Disowning Slavery does a much better job of addressing what McManus lacks.<sup>11</sup> In her work she covers New England emancipation and the popular rhetoric that went along with it. She goes beyond the economic aspect of slavery and explores the relationship between the black man and white man. Disowning Slavery is triumphant in bringing forth New England's dirty little secret of slavery and racism.

William Pierson's 1998 work Black Yankees establishes the concept of a unique black culture for New England. By exploring early colonial folk culture Pierson makes the case for an African American culture in which slaves took African customs and mixed them with those of the dominant white culture to create something new and completely their own. While forced to take on Anglo customs such as language, dress and manners they were able to adapt to and subvert these to their own design. Slaves in the North were living under the same roof as their master and yet still were able to continue on with their folk traditions of medicine and superstitious ways. African games were still played in New England, and were even adopted by whites for amusement. Black funerals still allowed for merriment and splendor in America.<sup>12</sup> While it is clear that Africans were assimilated into Anglo culture, it is equally clear that many of their cultural practices went right with them.

While Pierson looks at folk traditions and slave narratives, Shane and Graham White's 1998 book Stylin' finds an African American culture present in the way slaves dressed, danced, arranged their hair, communicated, and even walked. By looking at such sources as runaway ads, paintings, narratives, songs, and photographs they reveal an African American identity "from its beginnings to the Zoot Suit." White and White do take a look at this culture in New England, but

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<sup>11</sup>Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup>William Pierson, *Black Yankees*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 74-103.

they mainly focus on the South, and do not differentiate between the different systems of enslavement.<sup>13</sup> This is what I will attempt to do with my thesis.

## **Methodology**

While secondary source material is in an abundance regarding slavery in the United States, primary sources are harder to come by. There are few slave narratives depicting slavery in the North and even fewer paintings and drawings depicting slaves and their particular style of dress. In order to present and establish the presence of a unique African American New England Slave culture, building on William Pierson's thesis in Black Yankees but not repeating his research, I have looked to runaway advertisements.

Slave runaway advertisements provide a wealth of information as Shane White and Graham White showed in their book Stylin'. Listed in the typical ad is the name of the runaway, where the slave was fleeing from, their age, gender, a physical description (usually including height, build, and any scars they might have), a list of what the slave was wearing and what if anything the runaway took with them. From this information we can interpret ways in which Africans altered their dress, wore their hair, and presented themselves in manners which reflected their own culture.

For my research I have collected seventy-seven runaway advertisements, all from the *Newport Mercury* and spanning a time period from 1758-1801. I have selected ads from the *Newport Mercury* because this periodical represents a bustling entrepôt. In colonial times Newport, RI was the fifth largest city in the country; as one of the commercial centers for New England it would have been a place where people from all over the area would place ads for their runaway slaves. From these ads I have collected data on the clothes slaves took/were wearing

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<sup>13</sup>Shane White, and Graham White, *Stylin', African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

when they ran away, the way their hair was arranged, their skills, manners, any bodily mutilations, age, gender, speculations on where they might be headed, overall impression, and any other interesting tidbits from their listed description. This collected information has been put into a spreadsheet database (See Appendix A) from which trends involving these facts show how the runaway slaves either followed, defied, or mixed with that of the dominant Anglo culture.

Of course there will always be ambiguity in interpreting these ads. I am not the wearer of these garments or hair styles, and can therefore not know what they meant to convey with their adornment. I can only take educated guesses and back it up with evidence to support my argument. I will also be looking at these descriptions from the white perspective. These advertisements were written by white slave owners seeking the return of their property, and therefore represent how they saw the slave, not how the slave saw him or herself. I will be analyzing a culture through the perspective of one who did not see or accept it. This will present a challenge. Also the runaway ads will be heavily biased toward the male population. Female slaves were much less likely to run away because of ties to children and family, not to mention the hardships of living alone as a woman in colonial times. So I will pretty much be ignoring the female cultural perspective. Despite these challenges I believe that the evidence of the advertisements will yield positive results to assert an Afro-Yankee culture present in eighteenth-century New England.

### **Slaves to Fashion**

Every morning when we wake up we make a conscious decision about what we are going to wear that day. Our clothes say something about us and reflect our personality. The choice in what we wear remains one of the basic forms of human expression. Fashion is a visual language. While it says something about you as an individual, it also relates to others the group you belong

to and where on the social scale you lie. In colonial New England slaves were on the very bottom of the social ladder and their clothes reflected this. They wore poorly fitting garments made of the lowest quality cloth, such as kersey (a coarse woolen twill), linsey woolsey (a cheap mixed fabric) and oznabrig (a heavy unbleached linen) as well any castoffs their masters decided to bestow upon them. On the opposite side of the spectrum we find the genteel whose clothing “had to be close-rather than ill-fitting, clean and brushed rather than soiled, and, above all, smooth in texture rather than coarse... made from silk, chintz, and superfine wools.”<sup>14</sup> While the poorness of their dress echoed their servitude, so did the very fact that they were wearing European clothing. “Accustoming the African body to the wearing of European garb” argues Shane and Graham White “was just one more facet of a painful process of adjusting to an alien culture.”<sup>15</sup>

No longer allowed to wear the clothing of their ancestors, slaves made do with what they were given and altered their European clothes to suit their needs. Known to dye clothing, add patches for decorative purposes, swap and trade garments, and to pair together contrasting colors, slaves modified the garment to suit their own personal and cultural taste. “A blending of styles and tastes” observes William Piersen in his book *Black Yankees* “...marked the dress of black New Englanders. The slaves brought an African eye to their Euro-American materials and created something new out of their owners’ used clothing and their own purchases.”<sup>16</sup> When we look to the ads we can see many examples of this.

### **Clashing Colors**

Pomp, a twenty-five-year-old slave who ran away from Stockbridge, MA in 1774 “carried away with him a home made mix-coloured blue and red coat, lined with blue shalloon, trimmed with yellow metal buttons, cloth-coloured duroy jacket and breeches, two pairs of

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<sup>14</sup>White and White, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 8.

<sup>16</sup>Piersen, 101.

leather-breeches, a new felt-hat laced with yellow tinsel, old ditto not laced, a white shirt, and striped ditto, checked linen trousers, cloth coloured great coat, much worn, a pair of turn'd pumps, and double soled shoes, silver-plated shoe buckles, and sundry pair of stockings.”<sup>17</sup> His color palette is anything but subdued. Mixing such colors as red, blue, and yellow and such patterns as strips and checks would have seemed very strange to the English colonists. But in doing so Pomp is expressing his African heritage. The different colors he uses in his wardrobe reflect those typically used in West African textiles which use contrast and geometric patterns to create beauty (See Appendix B). Robert Farris Thompson writes that “African cloth has for centuries, as it is today, been distinguishable by deliberate clashing of ‘high affect colors,’ ...in willful, percussively contrastive, bold arrangement...the colors must clash [*kengi*, literally, ‘argue’], and where you stop, there must be another color not looking like the one you end with but far away from it.”<sup>18</sup> Also such colors as red, blue, green, and gold represent African power colors, which symbolized wealth and status in African communities. There is even a myth in African folklore blaming the African love of red cloth as the cause for them being lured into slavers’ chains.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the ads follow this example of clashing colors such as a slave named Dick of Warren, RI who fled in 1758 with “a check linen shirt...red broadcloth breeches, a pair of blue breeches and clouded stockings”<sup>20</sup> and Job of Plymouth, MA who ran away in 1764 wearing “a light colour’d serge jacket & breeches, a blue pair of yarn stockings; a red baize shirt.”<sup>21</sup> In addition Jack, a twenty-five-year-old runaway from Newport in 1773 wore “a stripped flannel

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<sup>17</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), October 31, 1774.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African Art and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York, 1984), 209, 217. As quoted in *Stylin’* by Shane White and Graham White on p. 24.

<sup>19</sup>Piersen, 102.

<sup>20</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), December 26, 1758.

<sup>21</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), March 3, 1764.

shirt, breeches, a dark striped waistcoat, a butternut bark coloured lapelled jacket, a grey home made bearskin great coat, new, with large metal buttons,” and a “pair of blue yarn stockings”<sup>22</sup> when he made his escape. But more than just mixing the patterns and colors of clothes they already had, slaves also physically altered their clothing by dying and adding patches to their garments.

### **“Sew, a Needle Pulling Thread”**

In order to add a little bit of individual style to a shirt, coat, or a pair of breeches, slaves often embellished their clothes. In the *Newport Mercury* Hendley a runaway from Stonington, CT is advertised as wearing “a pair of leather breeches, with a large piece of brown cloth sew’d into the crotch.”<sup>23</sup> Quako from Newport is listed as running away in 1768 wearing “a pair of duffil trousers, pretty much patched”<sup>24</sup> and another slave also running away from Newport is described as wearing “a jacket very much patched with canvas.”<sup>25</sup> The problem with interpreting the ads is we have no way of knowing whether these patches served merely as repair of the garment or a decoration of it. When we look at WPA interviews of ex-slaves from the South we see that the tradition of patching clothing to add style was a common practice. As recorded in White and White’s *Stylin’* “Benjamin Johnson, an ex-slave from Georgia, told his interviewer that, although slaves’ clothes were just ‘ol plain white cloth,’ they ‘wus patched fum de legs to de waist,’ and that ‘some wus patched so till dey looked like a quilt.’”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, I think we are free to assume that their New England counterparts were doing the same thing, remaking their secondhand garments to fit their own purpose and reflect their own style.

### **Emulation of the Rich**

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<sup>22</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), March 3, 1773.

<sup>23</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), April 22, 1760.

<sup>24</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), July 18, 1768.

<sup>25</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), January 1, 1776.

<sup>26</sup>White and White, 22.



While slaves were trapped in their subordinate status this did not stop them from trying to copy the splendor of their masters. We can see an example of this in one of the few female runaway advertisements. Mary who made her escape from Westerly, RI in 1793 took with her “one light chintz gown, one white linen ditto, one blue and white striped linen ditto, one purple moreene skirt, one white diaper ditto, three flannel petticoats, one black silk hat, one black figured worsted cloak, one light chintz short gown, one white linen ditto, one red and white woolen ditto, shoes, stockings, and a large supply of other apparel.”<sup>27</sup> What is of interesting note in this ad, besides the sheer amount of clothes, is the quality of the garments that Mary managed to take with her. Items like the chintz gowns, silk hat, petticoats, and worsted cloak were clearly reserved for the elite. That Mary was able to make off with them shows she was aware of the meaning of the clothes and wanted to start her new life as a free woman dressed as finely as her former enslavers. It is possible that Mary received these fine garments as a reward for good behavior, a common practice among slave owners, or that she stole them before making her escape. Given that she ran away, decidedly bad slave behavior, it was most likely the latter.

Another example of Africans and African Americans paying attention to the fashion trends of their masters is described in the runaway advertisement placed for Prince who fled from Newport in 1774. Prince “had on when he went away, a tow cloth shirt, yellow silk breeches, a blue double breasted jacket, and an under jacket of red baize, an old blue great-coat, black worsted stockings, a beaver hat, cocked in the newest fashion, and a pair of cut silver shoe buckles, marked M. M.”<sup>28</sup> Not only are his silk breeches, silver shoe buckles, and beaver hat not the common slave attire, but that he was wearing his hat “cocked in the newest fashion” shows

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<sup>27</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), October 8, 1793.

<sup>28</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), December 12, 1774.

that Prince was picking up on the style of the white New Englanders and incorporating it into his own look.

While Mary and Prince's attire was not the common garb for most slaves, it is interesting to point out that most had a decent wardrobe. From Elaine Crane's research she writes that "According to newspaper advertisements, approximately 77 slaves vanished from Newport and its vicinity in the period from 1760 to 1766... [a] curious footnote...almost all appeared to be well dressed."<sup>29</sup> While the majority of slaves listed in the ads are indeed well-dressed they are not all dressed to the degree of Mary and Prince. In fact they are the only two (except for one mention of a "silk handkerchief" in a 1797 ad) out of the seventy-seven slave advertisements that I have documented described as wearing silk garments, and Mary is the only one wearing chintz. It is not clear whether Mary and Prince obtained these garments as rewards for good behavior, or if when they were running away they saw an opportunity to grab something they had had their eye on and decided to make off with it. Because of the intimate nature of urban slavery, masters did not want neighbors gossiping about their poorly dressed slaves, and this can most likely account for the relatively well-dressed slaves in the ads.

### **Dressed to Impress**

African slaves also put their fine attire on display during events occurring within their own population. The slaves living in Newport Rhode Island during the colonial era were acting as a community within a community. Since they weren't living in a separate location amongst other slaves, as their plantation counterparts did, they found other ways to interact and congregate together as a community. If we look beyond the runaway advertisements we can see how New England blacks held onto their culture within the community.

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<sup>29</sup>Crane,79.

The best example of this would be the annual festival they held in Newport in which a black “governor” was elected by the African population. This Negro Election Day was a “fusion of West African culture and American conditions.”<sup>30</sup> Similar celebrations of this nature were held in the Caribbean, the American South, New York, and New Jersey. From Elaine Crane’s research we know that “With the financial encouragement of their owners, the slaves emulated the white upper class as closely as possible in appearance on this occasion, each slave having tried to outdo the other in fashion and style. Eyewitnesses to the events testified that the outcome of the election was determined in no small measure by the opulent appearance of the candidate.”<sup>31</sup> The winning slave was given a leadership role in the black community. He presided as a sort of judge over petty matters brought to his attention by other slaves and gave decisions on what was to be done.

That is not to say that whites allowed the Africans to participate in a system of self-government. Due to the position of power awarded to the winner of the election, many masters felt they had a strong stake in wanting their slave to win. If their slave won, then it would essentially be they who held control over the black community. There was also a sense of honor in having their slave win. So it was the masters who financed this celebration, sparing no expense on the food and drink for the festivities, and adorning their slaves in the race with the best clothes possible. But while it was their money being spent, it was the slave who decided on his own attire.

More often than not the fashion choices of the black population did not make sense to the colonists. They saw the flamboyant dress of Africans as odd and peculiar, laughable even. Much amusement was gained by pointing out the strange color combinations, pattern mixing, and sewn

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<sup>30</sup>Crane, 78.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 78.

on patches of black dress. This misunderstanding of black culture and fashion choices followed the paternalistic viewpoint of New England slavery. To the whites African slaves and black free men seemed to be simple children, incapable of complex ideas, who needed to be looked after and kept busy, otherwise they would get into trouble. These shows of fine dress seemed to them just another example of how blacks were backward in their thinking. But rather than the slaves being incapable of understanding white culture, it was the whites who were incapable of seeing black culture. What seemed to the whites as one thing meant to the blacks another. Fred Davis in his work *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* writes "...the clothing-fashion code is highly context-dependent. That is, what some combination of clothes or a certain style emphasis 'means' will vary tremendously depending upon the identity of the wearer, the occasion, the place, [and] the company...Despite being made of identical material, the black gauze of the funeral veil means something very different from that sewn into the bodice of a nightgown."<sup>32</sup> Africans and African Americans were taking cues and clothing from the dominant culture, but adapting them to fit their own. They were proud of the way they looked and did not mind showing off, as we've seen in festivals, but also during religious practices such as funerals and church service.

### **Sunday Best**

While for the most part converted to Christianity, Africans still held onto their funereal practices while living in America. The traditional African funeral was very different from the somber affairs practiced by the religious dominations of New England. William Piersen points out that "Slave funerals and burials were conducted by Yankee blacks much as they had been in Africa...African music, dancing, and singing serenaded the departing otherworldly travelers, and liquor and material offerings were made to comfort them on their journey. Africans felt that the dead were especially honored and delighted by the celebration and merriment that accompanied

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<sup>32</sup>Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

their funerals.”<sup>33</sup> Many whites misunderstood the meaning of these flourishes in the funeral practice and found them silly. In George Mason’s *Reminiscences of Newport* he describes a slave funeral in which the black undertaker wears a “bell-crowned hat that seemed older than himself...a long, blue, swallow-tail coat with brass buttons; and when he stepped, in long strides, the coat-tails nearly touched the ground”<sup>34</sup>, to Mason these clothes seemed out of place but in African tradition it would be important to wear your best most vibrant colored clothes on such an occasion. Piersen put it best when he wrote “The black style of dress in New England, as elsewhere, celebrated life in bright colors, demonstrating joy in physical attractiveness...when they put on their best, the old African immigrants among them knew their sartorial splendor outdid that of even the coastal elites of Africa.”<sup>35</sup> Even though it was not completely understood by the whites, these funerals were an important part of African culture that was able to survive the move to America.

Another opportunity for blacks to put their finery on display was during Sunday service. In an account written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, in 1872, she describes a “well-dressed black Connecticut woman who strolled to church in a typically Afro-American ensemble. Her yellow gown was boldly set off by a red petticoat and a red, African-style kerchief turban; to accent her wardrobe she chose a string of golden-colored beads and African-style, gold hoop earrings.”<sup>36</sup> During the rest of the week most slaves were confined to their shabby dress as bondsmen, but Sunday as their day off allowed them to indulge in their taste for showy garments. Shane White and Graham White write that “Generally...slaves were only too keen to display, even to flaunt, their finery both to other slaves and to whites...the Sunday promenade of well-dressed slaves

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<sup>33</sup>Piersen, 77.

<sup>34</sup>George C. Mason, *Reminiscences of Newport*, (Newport, RI: Hammett, 1884), 106.

<sup>35</sup>Piersen, 101-102.

<sup>36</sup>Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sam Lawson’s Oldtown Fireside Stories* (Boston, 1872), 331. As quoted in *Black Yankees* by William Piersen on p. 102.

attracted whites' rapt, almost voyeuristic gaze...The vivid, visual presence they established was an emphatic repudiation of their allotted social role."<sup>37</sup> Slaves were consciously putting together these garish outfits as a way to blur race lines and social status, mocking the colonists supposed Anglo superiority. While for the most part this defiance against European dress went over the heads of the whites, some picked up on it: "there was an edginess underlying the white response to this black style, a sense that white control was, at least obliquely, being challenged."<sup>38</sup> In this way African slaves participated in a form of resistant accommodation. Yes they were slaves, but they still had some control over their own bodies

### **Currency of Clothes**

Not only were clothes valued by slaves as a way to express themselves, they were also used as a form of currency in the slave community. For a population who had little access to money, clothing, which could be easily traded, filled this void. Slaves bought, bartered, traded, and sold garments in their own underground economy.<sup>39</sup> This gave slaves even more of a reason to take as many clothes as they could with them when they ran away. Any clothes that they carried could help supply them with a livelihood, at least for a time, while they were on the run. Lorenzo Johnston Greene in *The Negro in Colonial New England* recounts how "A slave belonging to Edward Garfield of Waltham, Massachusetts, provided for his comfort and amusement by taking with him a supply of his master's clothes and a 'good violin.'"<sup>40</sup> Other slaves who planned ahead traded off their garments before running away in order to have some money on hand for their escape. One such example is Jack, whose owner "did not bother itemizing his runaway slave's clothes because he had doubtless disposed of all but those he

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<sup>37</sup>White and White, 35.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 35.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, 15.

<sup>40</sup>Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, (New York: Atheneum, 1942), 146.

needed... [having] ‘offered some for sale, a little before he went off, for hard money.’”<sup>41</sup> This clothing economy helps to account for the varied pieces of clothing listed in the ads, as well as giving us a reason why some ads did not come with a description of what the runaway was wearing. Clothing not only provided slaves with a medium with which to combine their African roots and new English customs, but served as a valuable commodity with which they created their own economy.

## **Hair Styles**

Another way in which slaves displayed their style was in the way they arranged their hair. A point made by Shane White and Graham White who wrote “In African cultures, the grooming and styling of hair have long been important social rituals. Elaborate hair designs, reflecting tribal affiliation, status, sex, age, occupation, and the like were common, and the cutting, shaving, wrapping, and braiding of hair were centuries-old arts.”<sup>42</sup> While slaves were not given the time or tools to recreate the ornate hair arrangements of their homeland, they still managed to produce unique hairstyles, which made a statement as much as their clothes did.

## **The Natural Look**

Whereas almost every runaway advertisement gave a description of what the slave was wearing, many also reported their hair style. The predominant hair style of runaways listed in the *Newport Mercury* was to keep its natural look and texture. An advertisement placed for a thirty-three-year-old slave running away from East Haddam, CT in 1773 describes him as having “curl’d hair.”<sup>43</sup> A similar ad from the next year seeking the return of Tim, whom ran away from New Shoreham, RI with an accomplice, also depicts “curled hair.”<sup>44</sup> And an advertisement from

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<sup>41</sup>White and White, 15.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 41.

<sup>43</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), August 16, 1773.

<sup>44</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), March 21, 1774.

1775 describes Moses from Newport, RI as having a “bushy head of hair.”<sup>45</sup> These hair styles suggest a rejection of the white concept of beautiful hair, which was long and sleek. African hair was often referred to as “wool,” connoting an association with animals and their enslaved station as chattel. So by keeping their natural hair texture these runaways are defying this association. This “natural look” they kept may have also been a result of the lack of tools or time to create the elaborate styles of their home country.

### **Wigs and Hair Styled to Look Like Them**

While not wearing the hairstyles of their home country, slaves did take cues from the elite of colonial New England and some donned wigs. Those who did not have the means to acquire a wig may have cut their hair in a fashion that resembled one. Wigs at the time were a distinct marker of the upper class, just as clothes made from fine fabrics and of a good fit were reserved for those at the top of the social hierarchy. Reverend Devereux, writing of his boyhood in Massachusetts in the 1730s and 1740s recounts the importance of wigs in separating classes. “We were accustomed to look upon, what were called *gentle folks*, as beings of a superior order. For my part I was quite shy of *them*, and kept off at a humble distance. A periwig, in those days, was a distinguishing badge of *gentle folk* and when I saw a man riding the road, near our house, with a wig on, it would so alarm my fears, and give me such a disagreeable feeling, that, I dare say, I would run off, as for my life.”<sup>46</sup> While wigs carried such distinction, enough to frighten off poor, white Reverend Deverux, it is interesting to see in the runaway advertisements two cases where slaves were wearing them. Quako, mentioned before because of his patched trousers, ran from Newport in 1768 and was described as wearing a “black wig.”<sup>47</sup> And Peter, a twenty-four-

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<sup>45</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), April 3, 1775.

<sup>46</sup>Alexandra A. Chan, *Slavery in the Age of Reason*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>47</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), July 18, 1768.



year-old slave fleeing from Newbury, MA in 1771, was described as wearing a “brown wig.”<sup>48</sup> Neither is described as having special skills, so it is doubtful that they were able to purchase their wigs with any money they might have earned outside their bondage. A fine stolen wig might have caused too much suspicion for them while they were on the run, so the most likely explanation for Quako and Peter having wigs is that either the style of the wig had gone out of fashion or its fine quality had become worn out and was no longer of use to the owner, so it was bestowed to the slaves as a gift. But nevertheless, whatever the quality, a wig was not normally part of a common man’s wardrobe and still was a show of status in the slave community.

So much so that it appears that slaves who did not have access to wigs, attempted to recreate their style with their own hair. Shane White and Graham White point out in their book how “John Van Dyke of New York noted” as well as others “that his slave Hamilton sometimes craped (that is, frizzed) his hair and that ‘when craped, it appears like a cut wig.’”<sup>49</sup> In order to achieve this look White and White described how a slave’s hair would have been combed up from the forehead and bunched to create a shape resembling the pompadour worn by the elite.<sup>50</sup> This shows slaves adopting part of the Anglo culture, but making it their own. Again through their appearance, they were challenging ideas of how a slave ought to look by creating fashionable wig styles with their African hair. “When the owner of the Maryland runaway Lot described his slave’s hair as being ‘being done up in the tastiest manner of his colour,’ he was, in effect, acknowledging the existence, at least among some blacks, of a distinctively African American style.”<sup>51</sup> While in the advertisements I surveyed there were no descriptions of hair arranged in this particular style, it does not mean that it was not worn by New England Africans

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<sup>48</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), June 17, 1771.

<sup>49</sup>White and White, 51.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid, 51.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, 52.

and Afro-Americans. From White and White's evidence it seems to have been common practice among Southern slaves, so it would therefore be likely that the practice was passed northward.

### **Female Hair Arrangements**

Female as well as male slaves were participating in this practice of arranging their hair in particular styles, with certain meanings. While the majority of the runaways in the advertisements I collected were men, there were some women represented. Unfortunately only one is listed with a description of her hairstyle. Mary a twenty-two-year-old slave, who was mentioned earlier because of the fine quality of her garments, ran from Westerly, RI in 1793 and is described by her master as "a large, likely negro wench...[who] speaks good English, [and] dresses [her] hair high."<sup>52</sup> Mary was most likely copying the style of her mistress. In the early 1790s women in America were wearing their hair parted down the center and piled on top of their heads in a knot.<sup>53</sup>

While Mary was adopting this Anglo custom Flora, a nineteen-year-old slave from Connecticut, was preserving her African heritage with her particular hair style. A silhouette, ca. 1796, accompanying a bill of sale for Flora, provides us with a picture of a female African American hairstyle (See Appendix C). This silhouette, created to use as an identifier in case Flora ever ran away, juxtaposes the soft features of her face with the spiky profile of her hair. Flora, by all appearances, has her hair done in the "threaded" style. The process of threading, as discussed by White and White "...was a process by which, once the hair had been brushed free of tangles, small clusters of it were bound with cotton or some other material to keep it from knotting and also to cause it, when released, to curl...Braiding and threading are traditional

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<sup>52</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), October 8, 1793.

<sup>53</sup>"The History of American Dress," *Early American Dress*, Vol. 2, ed. Edward Warwick, Henry C. Pitz, and Alexander Wyckoff (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), 255.

techniques in African hair design.”<sup>54</sup> It was not just men who attempted to keep their African heritage alive in America. These women challenged perceptions of how they should look. One trying to copy an elite style, even though she was a slave, and another wearing her hair in an African fashion, despite the fact that slaves had been forced to conform to so many other English customs.

### **Body Language**

Besides appearance there were also white notions of how a slave should act. According to their masters slaves were supposed to be submissive and meek characters, who took orders without a second thought, and lived only to make life easier for their enslavers. Slaves were not merely expected to look a certain way, they were expected to behave a certain way as well. They were playing a role in which there were, as White and White write, “...not merely notions as to how they should be clothed but expectations relating to demeanor and posture, to the way slaves held their heads directed their gaze, moved their bodies, and so on. Just as there was opposition to slaves who dressed too grandly, so, too, was their resistance to slaves (and free blacks) who stood too proudly, approached too nearly gazed too directly, walked too confidently.”<sup>55</sup> Having an erect and straight posture was a sign of gentility and looking someone straight in the eye meant that you were the same station as them. Slaves were taught to portray a “cringing servility,”<sup>56</sup> and those who did not follow this manner were punished.

However, this show of defiance could not always be beaten into the slaves and many contradicted these social mores. Just as they had done with dress, and hairstyles, colonial blacks defied presumptions of how they should look and act. Shane and Graham White recount how “One former slave reported that he had disconcerted buyers at a slave auctions and avoided being

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<sup>54</sup>White and White, 57-58.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, 66.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid, 67.

sold by aggressively meeting the gaze of prospective bidders as they cast their eyes over him. Other slave habitually held their heads erect, meeting their masters' eyes with a direct stare, an assertive, even troubling characteristic that their owners were sure to remember when composing a runaway slave advertisement."<sup>57</sup> When we look at the advertisements from colonial Newport we can find several instances of slaves following this defiant example. Jack, a runaway slave from Tiverton, RI in 1765 was described as being "5 feet 6 inches high... [with] a scar on his forehead, and...a glaring eye."<sup>58</sup> This description of a "glaring eye" tells us that Jack was not one to demurely look away when addressed by his master, but rather gave him an even gaze right back. One can speculate whether the scar described was a result of punishment given for this "glaring eye." Similarly listed is a thirty six year old slave named York, from Newport, RI who is described as being "full ey'd...[and] of an insinuating address."<sup>59</sup> Not only is he rebellious with his stare, but is even given the label of "insinuating," with this sly and cunning nature it's no wonder that he was able to make his escape. James, a slave who ran away from the Wanton family of Newport in 1767 is physically described as being "very upright,"<sup>60</sup> meaning he was not continually bowed in a submissive state, but rather adopted a proud and straight gait. White and White make the argument that "In most cases, whites compelled their slaves to obey their instructions, however grudgingly and incompletely. Nevertheless, this type of bodily language was important in allowing slaves to fashion a psychic space within which African American culture flourished."<sup>61</sup> Slaves were looking for ways to rebel against a society that placed them at the bottom, for no reason other than the color of their skin, and having an erect posture and even

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<sup>57</sup>White and White, 69.

<sup>58</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), November 18, 1765.

<sup>59</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), August 22, 1774.

<sup>60</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), December 7, 1767.

<sup>61</sup>White and White, 71-72.

stare symbolized their rejection of this social hierarchy. Other ways in which they escaped this discrimination and sought to elevate themselves were through musical talent and skills.

### **Talents and Trades**

The system of urban slavery, unlike its plantation counterpart, provided slaves with a free day to do as they wished and move about town. Usually Sunday “when a man’s allotted work was done, whether in the field or in the shop, the remainder of the day or week was his own, to employ as he pleased.”<sup>62</sup> Many slaves employed this free time to learn a trade. If they possessed skills they could hire out their labor to earn some money, however this was usually handed over to their master, but a few slaves were able to keep a portion of what they had made. A skilled slave was worth more than an unskilled one, so masters often encouraged this type of education.

### **An Ear for Music**

A particularly talented and gifted African who lived in Newport from 1760-1826 was Occramar Marycoo. As George Mason recounts Occramar Marycoo “was bought here directly from the coast of Africa when about fourteen years of age, and that he was entrusted to the captain of the vessel, who, having pledged himself to see that the boy was properly instructed, sold him into slavery.”<sup>63</sup> He was sold to Caleb Gardner, a prosperous merchant, and renamed Newport Gardner. In his service as a slave Newport learned the English language and taught himself how to read, as well as the fundamentals of music. Mrs. Gardner recognized his natural talent and saw to it that Newport received further instruction in music. “There was a singing-master named Law who occasionally came to Newport to give lessons, and it was Newport’s ambition to join one of his classes...soon the pupil showed himself to be more than equal to his

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<sup>62</sup>George C. Mason, *Reminiscences of Newport*, (Newport, RI: Hammett, 1884), 156.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid*, 154.

teacher. He read and wrote music with ease, and his voice was remarkably strong and clear.”<sup>64</sup> This musical proficiency brought with it prosperity as Newport Gardner began to teach music lessons for a profit. While still a slave Newport was able to rent a room outside his maters home where he taught several pupils musical instruction, even teaching “men and women who had better schooling, and had enjoyed more advantages in musical training.”<sup>65</sup> With the money he earned from these lessons Newport purchased lottery tickets and won enough to purchase his freedom. In 1780 he set up the African Benevolent Society, a civil and Christian organization which gave aid to the black community. Newport Gardner became involved with the back to Africa movement and with the aid of Dr. Samuel Hopkins (the first congregational minister to denounce slavery) and Ezra Stiles (another prominent anti-slavery minister), returned to his homeland in 1826 along with his two sons and several members of the African Benevolent Society. Unfortunately, soon after arriving there Newport Gardner became ill and died, but he at least died a free man on his home continent.

Newport Gardner was not the only slave with a flair for music. The Reverend Samuel Davis of Virginia, in his opinion, believed that “the Negroes, above all the human species...have an ear for music.”<sup>66</sup> In the runaway advertisements it was not uncommon to find descriptions of slaves who were skilled with the fiddle. A twenty-five-year-old male slave from New London, CT, running away in 1760 was described as being able to “play on a violin.”<sup>67</sup> Pero, also twenty-five, running away from Tiverton, RI in 1765 could play “on a fiddle”<sup>68</sup> In other descriptions there is even a hint towards the skill of the slave with the instrument. Cesar, a twenty-four-year-old slave fleeing from Mendon, MA in 1773 was describing as having a violin on his person

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid, 154-155.

<sup>65</sup>Mason, 155.

<sup>66</sup>Piersen, 66.

<sup>67</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), April 22, 1760.

<sup>68</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), November 18, 1765.

when he ran and on which he “plays extremely well.”<sup>69</sup> In 1775, from Ridgefield, CT, there was a slave named Ishmael whose master remembered that he was “a remarkable good fiddler,”<sup>70</sup> when making up his advertisement. William Piersen picked up on this theme in *Black Yankees* and writes “As [a] fiddler, it is likely that black musicians were more energetic in their playing and more expert in the popular jigs and reels because of their African taste for energetic music. Indeed, given the ubiquity of African-born fiddler players in the early United States, it is extremely probable that the American fiddle playing style carries a strong African influence.”<sup>71</sup> This presents us with yet another example of blacks in New England fusing together their African culture with their new American one. While music was able to help Newport Gardner earn his freedom, for most it was only a hobby. Others instead turned to more artisan professions.

### **Skilled Labor**

The runaway advertisements from the *Newport Mercury* abound with the different occupations slaves took up. Job, a twenty-five-year-old runaway from Plymouth, MA understood “the blacksmith’s trade”<sup>72</sup> as did Pero (described above for his ability to play the fiddle) from Tiverton, RI. Caesar who ran away in 1767 was a blacksmith as well, but was principally trained in “anchor making.”<sup>73</sup> Quash Weeden a runaway from Newport in 1771 was “by trade a painter”<sup>74</sup> while Will, also from Newport, was a cooper who had “lately arrived from whaling.”<sup>75</sup> Another Cesar, this time a seventeen-year-old from Nantucket fleeing in 1775, practiced

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<sup>69</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), October 25, 1773.

<sup>70</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), January 20, 1775.

<sup>71</sup> Piersen, 104.

<sup>72</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), March 26, 1764.

<sup>73</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), June 8, 1767.

<sup>74</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), September 9, 1771.

<sup>75</sup> Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), March 22, 1775.

“something of the rope-making business.”<sup>76</sup> Prince, also seventeen had been born in Narragansett and was “bred to farming.”<sup>77</sup> Scipio, a forty year old runaway from Newport, was “used to house service and gardening.”<sup>78</sup> With the exception of Prince and Scipio all these trades would have been of use on the high seas, which is where many runways sought freedom and solace.

## **Slaves and the Sea**

In many ways the early American sailor felt akin to those suffering under the system of slavery. W. Jeffery Bolster writes, in his book *Black Jacks*, that “White seamen surrendering a personal liberty for the duration of their voyage suffered a situational ‘slavery’; most African American slaves endured a real and perpetual one. White sailors, nevertheless, frequently spoke of themselves as ‘slaves’ and empathized with the plight of blacks.”<sup>79</sup> On a vessel both black and white sailors were subject to the rule of the captain, however totalitarian he might be. Both bore the same threat of a flogging with the cat-o-nine tails, and shared the fear that they could be forcibly impressed into the British Royal Navy (before 1815). “Disciplined, impressed, and traded like blacks...white sailors could not help seeing analogies between themselves and blacks. A Spanish ‘seafaring man...disliked everything in Charleston, but the Negroes and the sailors.’”<sup>80</sup> Even when off the ship and in port sailors were not treated equally compared to other whites, they were cast as rabble rousers and drunks. Sailors, as wage earners, were just a step above slaves and indentured servants on the social hierarchy scale. But because of this ill treatment of black and white sailors alike, the two races were able to come together on board a vessel. Facing the same obstacles helped to bridge the gap between white and black seamen. Bolster continues

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<sup>76</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport RI), August 14, 1775.

<sup>77</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), August 27, 1785.

<sup>78</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), September 19, 1797.

<sup>79</sup>W. Jeffery Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid*, 71.



with this theme writing “Work pulled them together. An inexperienced white sailor in the Bahamas who lacked the knack for making fishing lines readily admitted his reliance on an ‘old Negro on board of our schooner’ who taught him...So the way of a ship...often provided opportunities for blacks to escape the prevailing racism of other occupations and to improve their condition.”<sup>81</sup> The New England runaway slaves certainly picked up on this and often made for vessels or other port towns where they could board a voyage.

### **A Preference for Seaside Towns**

The majority of the advertisements came with a note from the owner stating “All masters of vessels, and others are cautioned against concealing or carrying away said Negro, on penalty of the law.”<sup>82</sup> Of the ads I collected thirty-one percent came with this warning to vessels. Others were more specific and noted the master’s speculation on where the runaway slave was headed. In the advertisement for York, a runaway slave from Newport who was mentioned before because of his “full ey’d” glare, states, “It is suspected that the said NEGRO left Newport, the 12<sup>th</sup> of August instant, to go to Nantucket, from thence to sail on a whaling voyage.”<sup>83</sup> In the listing for Cambridge, a twenty-six-year-old slave from Middletown, RI, there is a note which reads, “He had enlisted on board a Privateer at Newport, but inquiry being made for him, he left her and ‘tis supposed he is gone to Providence or Boston to look for a voyage to sea, for which he has a great inclination.”<sup>84</sup> A twenty-three-year-old slave from Tiverton, RI even made his escape “in company with a white lad, that follows the sea, [and is] about 19 years of age.”<sup>85</sup> Of the slaves who ran away, seventy percent were running away from towns that were on the water. It would have been much easier for them, rather than inland slaves, to runaway and find

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<sup>81</sup>Bolster, 69.

<sup>82</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), October 9, 1759.

<sup>83</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), August 22, 1774.

<sup>84</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), January 1, 1783.

<sup>85</sup>Advertisement, *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), August 12, 1771.

employment on an outgoing voyage, and therefore elude capture. Ships offered a safe haven for runaways when no free states existed. While race never disappeared aboard a ship, and blacks were still treated subordinately there was less of a racial prejudice at sea. Many Africans continued to sail even after the abolition of New England slavery, finding it an occupation where many of the social boundaries of race were discarded.

### **An End to New England Runaways**

After the Revolutionary War, during the mid-1780s, gradual emancipation measures were put into practice in New England. There had been no precedence for the freeing of slaves before this. Rather than granting all the slaves of New England freedom at once, gradual emancipation was seen as a way to ease former slaves into freedom. However, the whole process acted as an extension of “the peculiar institution” rather than a step toward equality. The extension of slavery from the 1780s to 1820 is visible in the status of the newly freed in the minds of white New Englanders, the continued practice of selling African labor, and in the failure of the *post nati* system (the freeing of those born after a certain date on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday).

In many ways the emancipation of slaves in New England was “emancipation” in name only. In the minds of many being black still equaled being a slave, and in some cases this was still true. “In 1784 Rhode Island legislators passed a Gradual Emancipation Act. Contrary to portrayals of the Act in histories of Rhode Island, it did not provide wholesale freedom of the enslaved. Rather it mandated that any child born after April 1, 1784 would be considered free.”<sup>86</sup> While some of the enslaved received their freedom and others did not, it is easy to see how the institution of slavery not only continued in practice but in the mindset of New Englanders. “In the view of most whites,” Joanne Pope Melish writes in her book *Disowning Slavery* “since even

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<sup>86</sup>James C. Garman, *From the School-Lands to Kerry Hill: Two Centuries of Urban Development at the Northern End of Newport, RI* (Newport, RI: Salve Regina University, 2002), 10.

the act of being freed represented the exercise of the owner's power over the slave, an emancipated slave could never become a 'free' person but only a 'freed' one- a person acted upon, not acting. Freed slaves...could thus be considered categorically dependent...their very emergence from the condition of enslavement was a dependent, not an independent, act."<sup>87</sup> Blacks were still seen from a paternalistic viewpoint; they could not act for themselves but could be acted on. Their status had not changed, even with the gradual emancipation measures.

Though slavery had ended many African Americans remained in a sort of slave state until they were twenty-five. Though technically free in the eyes of the law, the labor of Africans was still bought and sold by masters. While like the practice of indentured servitude the blacks under this system did not enjoy any of the advantages a white indentured servant was given, the African American worker did not receive any payment on completion of his/her work term or at times even a set of marketable skills. This practice can be seen in the case of James Mars, who was born in Connecticut in 1790 (which was after the date of emancipation for Connecticut yet he still acted as a slave). "I soon found out that I was to live or stay with the man [Mr. Munger] until I was twenty-five. I found that white boys...were bound until there were twenty-one...They would say to me sometimes 'You have to work four years longer than we do, and get nothing when you have done, and we get one hundred dollars, a Bible, and two suits of clothes.'"<sup>88</sup> Not only were many forced to work with no pay when they legally were not required to, many of those remaining in servitude still faced the abusive conditions that had been common before. James Mars feared upsetting his master Mr. Munger because "he was fond of using the lash...I had now got to be fifteen years of age. I had got my health and had grown to be a big boy...yet I

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<sup>87</sup>Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 81.

<sup>88</sup>James Mars, "Life of James Mars, a Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut," *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina, 2004, Web. 27 Apr. 2010, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mars64/menu.html>, 22.

was afraid of Mr. Munger. I actually stood in fear of him.”<sup>89</sup> Hardly anything had changed from what it once was. Slaves were still uncompensated for their labors and mistreated as they had been in the years before gradual emancipation. Though they were only kept until age twenty-five, this was still more than a quarter of a person’s life and some were even kept past the age limit. Gradual emancipation was the guise under which the continued practice of slavery hid.

The idea behind gradual emancipation and this lingering indentured servitude status reserved for young freed blacks was part of the *post nati* system, which held that “the status of involuntary, uncompensated servitude would presumably prepare slaves’ children for free adulthood.”<sup>90</sup> This system had been implemented in the cases of poor young whites, who were bound out and expected to work until the age of twenty-one (in most cases) but in return they received an education and a vocation. Melish writes, “The contracts spelled out the obligations of each party: on one side, to be obedient, work diligently, and learn a trade; on the other, to provide instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic...and a ‘freedom suit’ of clothes.”<sup>91</sup> These measures were not always followed in the cases of African Americans. As we saw in James Mars’s case he did not receive any compensation or clothing at the end of his service, nor did he receive much of an education or vocational training. Mars worked on a farm, chopping firewood and serving as a field hand to Mr. Munger where his “schooling was broken and unsteady.”<sup>92</sup> *Post nati* measures were poorly implemented among the free black population; it was simply slavery under a new name. “The statutory servitude mandated by *post nati* emancipation was not, and was never intended to be training for independent citizenship.” Melish argues that “What the gradual abolition statutes offered was a framework within which whites could enjoy abolition

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<sup>89</sup>Mars, 23.

<sup>90</sup>Melish, 77.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid, 78.

<sup>92</sup>Mars, 21.

and slavery at the same time- just as they had always enjoyed personhood and property together in their slaves.”<sup>93</sup> Whites were still in control, and blacks were still under the thumb of forced labor.

This period of extended slavery, under the false pretense of gradual emancipation continued. “Acts finally and specifically banning slavery were not passed in Rhode Island until 1843 and in Connecticut until 1848.”<sup>94</sup> It is clear that slavery was practiced past its expiration date in New England. Whites continued to view African Americans as dependent creatures who could not act for themselves, still benefited from the forced labor of blacks, and implemented a system that preserved rather than ended slavery. After such a long period of involvement in slavery one may ask why the practice in New England was forgotten by some.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the odds African traditions were kept alive in America. Slaves refused to give up aspects of their heritage and instead adapted to living in New England by fusing together their West African culture with that of the northern Anglo merchants. The runaway advertisements listed in the *Newport Mercury*, as well as different accounts from the time support this assertion. An Afro-Yankee culture evolved in which slaves altered their clothing, hair styles, and body language to suit their own needs rather than that of their masters. These were all used to express their individuality and served as a way to fight against slavery. Altering their appearance was used as an extension of their self. Refusing to be completely suppressed, blacks created a hybrid Afro-Yankee culture, in which they used European clothing as a medium to express African style, arranged their own hair in ways reserved for the colonial elite, and stood proud and even with their supposed masters. Their position at the bottom of society was not something they

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<sup>93</sup>Melish, 79.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid, 76.

agreed with and many sought to elevate themselves by learning a trade and honing their skills. There were also those who seeing no way out simply fled and made their way to the sea, where blacks and whites were on a more equal scale. Credit needs to be given to the slaves of New England who were able to subvert traditions and make a home for themselves in this New World. All too often they have been forgotten by the public and glossed over in history books. There was a vibrant slave community and culture in New England that should be remembered. To this day African Americans follow this tradition by creating their own distinct subculture amongst the majority. The established slave system of New England should not be ignored, but rather addressed and studied, in order to tackle the leftover and veiled sentiments of racism still present in our country today.

## Appendix A

### Runaway Advertisements from the *Newport Mercury*, 1758-1801

Date of Advertisement	Location	Name of Slave	Gender	Age of Slave	Description of Slave	Description of Clothing (worn and taken away)	Miscellaneous	Reward offered	Name of Slave Owner Placing Ad
12-26-1758	Warren, RI	Dick	M	20	"middle stature, slim , thin face, large eyes, has a scar on one side of his face, and thin lips"	"Had on and carried with him a dark colour'd jacket cloth coat with flat metal buttons, a new Kersey dark colour'd jacket, with flat metal buttons, an old brown jacket, a flannel jacket and flannel shirts, a check linen shirt, and a pair of white wide trousers, red broadcloth breeches, a pair of blue breeches, and clouded stockings."	Large eyes	Three dollars	Nathan Miller
10-09-1759	Rehoboth, MA	Joe	M	28	"about 5 feet high, tawny Complexion, speaks good English, being bro't up in the country"	"Had on, a light coloured Kersey Jacket, old felt hat, tow shirt and trousers, and old stockings and shoes."	Gives warning to vessels	Two dollars	Col. Philip Wheeler
12-04-1759	Block Island, RI	London	M	20	"about 5 feet 5 inches high, is slender, and speaks broken English."	"Had on when he went away a felt hat, blue great coat, a close-bodied fly coat of a brown colour, two check flannel shirts, a pair of wide tow trousers, bluish Yam stockings, and an old pair of pumps, with square brass buckles."		Five dollars	Ray Sands
04-22-1760	New London, CT		M	25	"short and thick, has a large leg and lips, his teeth stand at a distance before. He can play on a violin."	"Had on when he went away, a light coloured broadcloth coat, with flowered brass buttons, a kersey Jacket w white flannel shirt marked C on the bottom, and a pair of broadcloth breeches, with short wide trousers over them, and a felt hat."	Played the violin	Five dollars	Robert Stanton
04-22-1760	Stonington, CT	Hendley	M	22	"well set, a little more than 5 feet high, speaks good English, his Complexion somewhat swarthy."	"Had on when he went away, a large great coat of a grayish colour, a brownish jacket, and underneath that, an old double breasted jacket, a pair of leather breeches, with a large piece of brown cloth sew'd into the crotch, a felt hat, white flannel shirt, and old stockings and shoes."	Patched clothing	Four dollars	Israel Hewit
11-03-1761	Newport, RI	Robert	M		"about 5 feet 9 inches high, well made, and square shoulder'd, has a mark, somewhat resembling a burn'd scar, between his cheek and the corner of his mouth; the middle tooth of the upper wanting. He was born in Jamaica, speaks good English and is very artful and insinuating."	"He took with him several sorts of apparel, therefore cannot be described by any in particular."		Forty Pounds Old Tennor	Andrew Hunter
05-11-1762	Hopkinton, RI	James	M	30	"5 feet 7 inches high, speaks very good English, has had his head shaved since he went away, is of an uncommon swarthy complexion, has a handsome set of teeth, and very large feet."	"Had on when he went away, a dark-coloured great coat, and old strait-bodied coat of a light colour, an old striped flannel jacket, a white flannel shirt, a pair of leather breeches, and gray yarn stockings."	"Said fellow has been in or near Mansfield, in Connecticut, and its supposed intends for Albany, to join the Army."	Six dollars	Jedediah Davis
06-20-1763	Warwick, RI	Peter	M	18	"of a slim stature, not tall, speaks good English, born in this country; he has a small	"had on when he went away, one old stripped linfey wolsey jacket, without sleeves, one new full cloth		Five dollars	Othniel Gorton

					bunch on his forehead, and another on his wrist;"	jacket, of a redish colour, and an old beaver hat: He carried away a new full cloth great coat, of the same colour as the jacket likewise two new tow cloth shirts, and two pair of new tow cloth trousers, which were made pretty wide and short: He also took with him one fine white shirt."			
08-22-1763	Yarmouth, MA	Sancho	M	21	"a very large, likely fellow, speaks good English;"	"had on a cloth colour'd Jacket, and a strip'd flannel one under it, check'd flannel shirt and breeches, and an old beaver hat, with a small bundle of cloaths tied up."		Four dollars	Richard Baxter
10-31-1763	Subscriber	London	M		"a black, short, square-shouldered fellow, bow-legged, speaks good English, has thick lips, is marked on each side his face with his country marks;"	"had on when he went away, a blue cloth jacket with check lining, a wollen shirt, black knit breeches, black stockings, and metal buckles."	Gives warning to vessels	Two dollars	Nich's Lechmere
03-26-1764	Plymouth, MA	Job	M	25	"5 feet 8 or 9 inches high...his left hand and wrist is very weak; he understands the blacksmith's trade."	"had on a light colour'd serge jacket & breeches, a blue pair of yarn stockings; a red baize shirt;"	Was a blacksmith	Eight dollars	Stephen Samson
09-10-1764	RI	Caesar	M	35	"a well set fellow, stoops forward remarkably when he walks, speaks good English for one of his colour."		Stoops forward, probably "lurking" on Rhode Island	Four dollars	John Banister
12-24-1764	Subscriber	Prince	M	30	"speaks English well, has a remarkable Roman nose, and some gray hairs in his head, is about five feet nine inches high."	"had on when he went away, an old gray double-breasted thick jacket, a flannel ditto striped with sheeps black, an old white flannel shirt, a pair of light colour'd cloth breeches, tow trousers, sheeps black stockings, and an old pair of double-sole shoes, tapped."	Gives warning to vessels	Ten Dollars	John Peirce jun.
01-21-1765	Durham, NH	Cato	M	35	"born county, a middling size, and a spry fellow...had a scar across his throat (lately done by a fall from a Horse)"	"had on when he went away a grayish home spun coat, lin'd with strip'd homespun, a light colour'd jacket, leather breeches, white yarn stockings;"	Gives warning to vessels	Eight Dollars	Capt. Daniel Rogers
11-04-1765	Albany, NY	Joseph	M	25	"a short well made fellow, speaks broken English;"	"He had on when he went away, a blue jacket, an old light-colour'd ratteen ditto without sleeves, an oznabrigs shirt, old leather breeches, a pair of black ribb'd stockings, a hat bound with worsted binding, and a pair of new shoes with brass buckles."	Gives warning to vessels, "he went off with a big Spanish Negro belonging to Mr. Bayard of New York, sent here to fell."	Forty Shillings	Barent Ten Eyck
11-18-1765	Tiverton, RI	Pero	M	25	"is a blacksmith by trade, and plays on a fiddle;"	"had on when he went away, a sheeps gray coat, with blue cuffs, a stripped flannel jacket, leather breeches, thick shoes, a hat, and a full cap."	Ran away with Jack who is listed in the same ad and an Indian slave named Isaac, plays the fiddle and is a blacksmith	Well rewarded	Col. Job Almy
11-18-1765	Tiverton, RI	Jack	M	35	"5 feet 6 inches high, has a scar on his forehead, and has a glaring eye;"	"had on a mill'd worstd coat, white Holland jacket, a stripped flannel ditto, fustian breeches, and a pair of thin shoes."	Ran away with Pero who is listed in the same ad and an Indian slave named Isaac, has a "glaring eye"	Well rewarded	Cornelius Sole
12-30-1765	Subscriber	London	M	20	"a short, thick, well made Negro Man,"	"had on, when he went away, a light frize double-breasted Jacket, blue baize under ditto, a tow cloth shirt, a pair of blue plush breeches."	Gives warning to vessels	Four Dollars	Benjamin Brenton
05-12-1766	Long Island, NY	Prince	M	30	"of a middling stature, well set, one of his upper fore teeth	"had on when he went away, a light-blue homespun broad-cloth	Ran away with Crank who is	Five Dollars	Micah Moore



					gone, of an Olive Complexion;”	coat”	mentioned in the same ad		
05-12-1766	Long Island, NY	Crank	M	25	“5 feet 9 inches high, well set, has lost half of one of his upper fore teeth, is very black...speaks good English.”	“had on when he away, a homespun broad cloth coat of a light blue, trimmed with black, and double-breasted, black everlasting waistcoat, black leather breeches, blue ribbed yarn stockings, with plain silver buckles, and a new castor hat.”	Ran away with Prince who is mentioned in the same ad	Five dollars	Abraham Corey
03-23-1767	Newport, RI	Toney	M	40	“six feet high, can talk good English, born in the Country”		Gives warning to vessels	Two dollars	Capt. Peter Simon
06-08-1767	Subscriber	Caesar	M		“about 5 feet 9 inches high...Said fellow is very black, and well proportioned every way, hath a scar on one of his cheeks, is a blacksmith by trade, but has principally followed anchor making”	“had on when he went away, a cloth-coloured serge coat, a stripped jacket, and stripped trousers, also a pair of silver shoe buckles”	Knows the blacksmith trade as well as anchor making	Eight dollars	Eber Sweet
12-07-1767	Newport, RI	James	M		“very upright”	“had on when he went away, a red surtout coat, homespun waistcoat, a pair of new cloth coloured breeches, white yarn stockings &c”	Slave owned by the Wanton family	Five dollars	Joseph & William Wanton
02-15-1768	Subscriber	Taff	M		“middling stature, with a large Guinea mark on each cheek”	“had on a hat and cap, a red watch coat, a dark coloured jacket lined with stripped flannel, oznaburbs shirt, light coloured breeches and trousers, and stockings and shoes”	“N.B. All persons are desired not to entertain him.”	Two dollars	Peleg Shearman
07-18-1768	Newport, RI	Quako	M		“a short thickset fellow,”	“had on an ozenbrigs frock, a stripped flannel shirt, a pair of red duffil trousers, pretty much patched, an old hat and black wig”	Same advertisement is listed again in the Newport Mercury on Monday, August 8, 1768 but contains added note “N.B. Said Negro has two letters branded on one of his shoulders, one which letters is a B, the other his master has forgot.”	Two dollars (but the second time the ad was listed the reward was upped to five dollars)	Thomas Chadwick
07-25-1768	North Kingstown, RI	Ceff	M	18	“”short thickest fellow, between four and five feet high, with a long built head;”	“had on a tow-cloth shirt, long red and white flannel trousers, an old beaver hat, a pair of mixt blue stockings, a pair of worsted ditto, a pair of new leather pumps”	Wearing red and blue (both African power colors)	Five dollars	Immanuel Case
08-01-1768	Newport, RI		M	23	“about 5 feet 6 inches high and pretty thickset...talks poor English”	“had on a blue broadcloth coat, with yellow buttons, and breeches of the same cloth, a large brimmed hat and white stocks,”	Ran away with another male slave listed in the same ad	Four dollars (eight for both)	Godfrey Wainwood
08-01-1768	Newport, RI		M	35	“The other is a very thickset fellow, about 5 feet 8 inches high...& has one stiff finger;”	“had on a check’d shirt, a pair of ozenbrigs trousers, & a blue broadcloth jacket without sleeves”	Ran away with another male slave listed in the same ad	Four dollars (eight for both)	John Goddard
05-01-1769	Subscriber	Bina	F				“Reward; and those who harbor her may depend on being prosecuted.”	Five dollars	Isaac Elizer
06-05-1769	South Kingstown, RI	Cuff	M	26	“a likely, well built negro man...He has on one of his legs, and also on one of his feet, a large scar, and stoops very much,”	“had on when he went away, a pair of kersey breeches, flannel shirt, and shoes and stockings”		Ten dollars	Joseph Congdon

04-23-1770	Enfield, CT	Sam	M	20-21	"born in Warwick, 5 feet 5 inches high, has a very short neck, a thick well set fellow... One of his toes has lately been froze"	"has on when he went away, a mixt bluish jacket, a red under jacket, and a pair of old leather breeches"	Gives warning to vessels, wearing both red and blue	Five dollars	John M'Clister
06-17-1771	Newbury, MA	Peter	M	24	"about 5 feet 3 inches high, thickset, speaks English well...had a scar about 2 inches long on the back side of his neck"	"had on when he went away a snuff coloured coat with brass buttons, a green ratteen waistcoat, a pair of brown fustian breeches, he carried with him a pair of light blue stockings and white ditto, a linen shirt, a brown wig and a castor hat;"	Gives warning to vessels, carried a lot of clothes with him	Four dollars	Capt. Joseph Hale
08-12-1771	Tiverton, RI		M	23	"a likely well set fellow...about 5 feet 10 inches high, with a small hair mole on his left cheek, is very flat footed, and walks with his feet turn'd out,"	"had on when he went away a brown cloth coat, with dark lining, white jacket, leather breeches, an old pair of stockings without feet, and canvas cap; he carried with him a small bundle of clothes,"	"in company with a white lad, that follows the sea, about 19 years of age;"	Three dollars	John Smith (Gideon Wilcox)
09-02-1771	South Kingstown, RI	Cuff	M	30	"of a good black; a short thickset fellow,"	"had on, when he went away, a stripped flannel jacket, a felt hat, a little worn, a white tow and linen shirt, a pair of tow-cloth trousers"		Three dollars	William Knowles
09-09-1771	Newport, RI	Quash Weeden	M	35	"by trade a painter, has a very large scar over his left eye, and plays well on a violin"		Gives warning to vessels, also Quash Weeden is a painter and can play the violin	Two dollars if found in Newport, Five dollars if taken in other parts	Thomas George
01-25-1773	New York	Cato	M	22	"about 5 feet 9 inches high; he is very black, straight, and well limb'd; looks grim, speaks pretty good English, a little lisping;"	"had on, when he went away, an ozanbrigs shirt, jacket and trousers, a felt hat, shoes and stockings; a great coat, half worn, and almost a new beaver hat with him;"	"said negro man is now at or about Rhode Island", walks straight	New York Currency Reward	John De Peyfter (who Cato ran away from in NY), Lemuel Wyatt (man posting the reward), Capts. Webster, Johnson, St. Croix (who Cato can be delivered to)
03-01-1773	Subscriber	Jack	M	25	"5 feet, 8 inches high, a straight well built fellow...a scar upon his neck made by a wound from a scythe"	"Has on, when he went away, a stripped flannel shirt, breeches, a dark stripped waistcoat, a butternut bark coloured lapelled jacket, a grey home made bearskin great coat, new, with large metal buttons, one pair of blue yarn stockings and one pair of mixed ribb'd worsted stockings, calfskin turned pumps, pinckbeek buckles, a felt hat,"	Gives warning to vessels, wardrobe consists of many animal skins	Five dollars	Timothy Lester
05-17-1773	Long Island, NY	Cush	M		"about five feet nine inches high, his complexion not very black, one or two of his fore teeth out, a scar upon one of his ears, speaks good English, has forged papers;"	"has on when he went away a blue mill'd cap, a blue outside jacket, and a red baize shirt"	Gives warning to vessels, also offers a twenty dollar reward for securing the forged papers and the person who wrote them	Ten dollars	John Froster

08-16-1773	East Haddam, CT		M	33	"a mulatto man slave...about five feet eight inches high, thickset with curl'd hair, round shouldered;"	"carried away with him , and had on , a coat and breeches of a claret coloured cloth, a green ratteen jacket; one stripped linen shirt on his backs, felt hat, short, wide tow-cloth trousers, a pair of pumps on his feet, but no stockings"	Gives warning to vessels, also runaway had curled hair	Six Spanish mill'd dollars	Brazillai Beckwith
10-04-1773	Weathersfield, CT	Cato	M	27	"a stout, well built, handsome fellow, near 6 feet high, not very black...talks very good English, and will tell a very plausible story"	"had on, when he went away, a light homespun outside jacket, a green under jacket, a stripped homespun shirt, blue German serge breeches, dark clouded worsted stockings, and old shoes, an old felt hat, also a dark brown great coat"	Gives warning to vessels, Cato has a "very plausible story" to tell those who suspect of running away	Four dollars	Wait Robbins
10-25-1773	Mendon, MA	Cesar	M	24	"about 5 feet 4 inches high, having a scar near his left eye, the little finger of his left hand has been cut, and is stiff in the first joint; his face is pretty ling, and rather whiter than negroes in common...Said fellow has a violin with him, on which he plays extremely well"		Whiter than most African slaves and can play the violin	Ten dollars	Simeon Hazeltine
02-07-1774	Dartmouth, MA	Cesar (alias Hanover )	M	24	"about 5 feet, 3 inches high...stout for his size, with broad face and pretty well looking; he has a very large white set of teeth, one of his great toes having been formerly split with an ax, on which is a scar, the whole length of the toe, but can't be discovered , without being closely examined;"	"had on when he went away, a maple colour'd fulled jacket, a striped flannel shirt, and a cotton and linen shirt"		Six dollars	John Wady
03-21-1774	New Shoreham, RI	Dick	M	35	"near 6 feet high, and wellset; speaks good English; has a large scar upon each leg, a little below the calf; is remarkable for having a bald head"	"Had on when he went away, a white flannel shirt, a thick, light coloured pair of breeches, a red and blue duffil waistcoats, a light coloured jacket, a green ratteen surtout, gray yarn stockings, and an old beaver hat."	Ran away with a mustee named Tim and is listed in the same ad	Fifteen Dollars	John Paine
03-21-1774	New Shoreham, RI	Tim	M		"about 5 feet 10 inches high, strong built, curled hair, small legs and large feet, speaks good English"	"what he had on when he went away can't be rightly described, but is supposed he had on a flannel jacket and trousers"	Ran away with another slave, Dick, also Rick has curled hair	Fifteen dollars	Abel Franklin
08-22-1774	Newport, RI	York	M	36	"about 5 feet high, speaks good English, is very black, full ey'd, two large fore teeth in the upper jaw, something light framed, a nimble active complaisant fellow, of an insinuating address;"	"had on when he went away, a check'd shirt, stripped holland waistcoat, sheepskin leather breeches, white yarn stockings, a pair of half worn shoes, and a small beaver hat:"	"It is suspected that the said NEGRO left Newport, the 12 <sup>th</sup> of August instant, to go to Nantucket, from thence to sail on a whaling voyage." Also gives warning to vessels	Four dollars	Joseph Underwood
09-05-1774	Newport, RI	Quaco	M		"is branded on one shoulder with two letters:"	"had on when he went away an old stripped flannel shirt, patched with linen, narrow, white breeches under them, and a white jacket without sleeves...N.B. He stole a blue great-coat when he went off"	"It is suspected he is gone toward Dartmouth." And the description of his patched shirt.	Two dollars	Thomas Chadwich
10-31-1774	Stockbridge, MA	Pomp	M	25	"well made fellow, of middling stature, lively and active...speaks quick, and something broken English, can talk some Dutch, has lost the upper joint of his left	"carried away with him a home made mix-coloured blue and red coat, lined with blue shalloon, trimmed with yellow metal buttons, cloth-coloured duroy jacket and breeches, two pair of leather-	Pomp was an indentured servant rather than slave, gives warning to vessels, and the description of his	Six dollars	Samuel Brown, jr.

					thumb, the nail turns down partly over the end of the frame;"	breeches, a new felt-hat laced with yellow tinsel, old ditto not laced, a white shirt, and striped ditto, checked linen trousers, cloth coloured great coat, much worn, a pair of turn'd pumps, and double soled shoes, silver-plated shoe buckles, and sundry pair of stockings;"	homemade jacket incorporating both blue and red.		
12-12-1774	Newport, RI	Prince	M	24	"about 5 feet 6 inches high, pretty thick, well built fellow, he has a remarkable scar on one side of his neck, talks very good English"	"had on when he went away, a tow cloth shirt, yellow silk breeches, a blue double breasted jacket, and an under jacket of red baize, an old blue great-coat, black worsted stockings, a beaver hat, cocked in the newest fashion, and a pair of cut silver shoe buckles, marked M. M."	Wearing silk breeches	Six dollars	James Miller
01-30-1775	Ridgefield, CT	Ishmael (goes by the name Samuel Dimonet )	M		"about 6 feet, 3 inches high; a remarkable good fiddler, had great nostrils and mouth, and steps large and loping;"		Plays the fiddle	Ten dollars	Caleb Lobdell, Nathaniel Sillick
04-03-1775	Newport, RI	Moses	M		"a mulatto man...about 4 feet 7 inches high, a short well set fellow, of a yellow complexion, with a bushy head of hair, somewhat different from a Negro, speaks exceeding good English;"	"had on, when he went away, a new felt hat, and a blue cap, a red duffi great coat, a green ratteen jacket, and a thin cotton one underneath, a buck skin pair of breeches, a light coloured pair of worsted stockings, and shoes about half worn;"	His busy head of hair as well as a note which mentions "It is imagined he as directed his course towards Bedford, in Dartmouth, and that he has got a pass with him, dated last November."	Four dollars	John Dennis
05-22-1775	Newport, RI	Will (alias Will Johnston )	M		"a large stout fellow, of a yellow complexion, has a remarkable flesh mole upon his left cheek, a large scar upon one of his hands, between his thumb and fore finger, and a scar of a burn on one thigh, & has lately arrived from whaling, with Capt. Lemuel Jenkins...N. B. Said Negro professes something of the cooper's trade; and can play upon a violin."		Will's experienced in whaling, the copper's trade, and can play the violin.	Six dollars	James Carpenter
08-14-1775	Nantucket, MA	Cesar	M	17	"his lips a little, he is a straight limb'd fellow, slender built and of a middling stature...N.B. Said Negro understands something of the rope-making business."	"had on a cloth-coloured outside serge jacket, a green under jacket, an old pair of brown cotton thickset breeches,"	Knows the rope-making business	Ten dollars	Timothy Coffin
09-25-1775	Pomfret, (?)	Sias	M	24	"New England born...a stout, lusty fellow, active, bold and impudent; about five feet, nine or ten inches high; moderately splay-footed, rather long visage, and hath several marks left by the King's Evil, on his neck, just above the collar of his shirt."	"He took off with him an old light-coloured, fulled cloth jacket, a pair of breeches nearly the same, a white flannel shirt, with an unwhitened tow-cloth collar, and a tow-cloth frock and trousers, all of them homespun; besides, a pair of blue-checked trousers an old, brown broadcloth jacket, lined with red duffils, and a smartly-cocked hat."		One Guinea	Godfrey Malbone (Promfret), John Malbone (Newport)
09-25-1775	Newport, RI	Duno	M		"a tall fellow, somewhat lame, and is supposed to be lucking about this town,		Duno's master is a woman.	One dollar	Sarah Bull

					where he is well known:"				
10-02-1775	Bedford, MA	Peter	M	40	"a Portuguese Negro man servant...a stout, well-set fellow, about 5 feet, 8 or 10 inches high, speaks broken English."	"had on, when he went off, a frock and trousers, and a red great-coat;"	Peter ran away with a Portuguese indentured servant named Frank	One Guinea	John Proud, jr.
10-16-1775	Tiverton, RI		M	26	"5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, a pretty straight lim'd fellow, not very thick;"	"had on, and carried with him, a blue outside sailor's jacket, bound with white, a green jacket tied with strings at the button holes, a white tow shirt, a small brimm'd hat, bound with red, earrings in his ears, a pair of pumps, which had been new-toed, a moss coloured sailor's great-coat, and stripped blue and white tow-trousers."	Seems to be adorned like a sailor	Eight dollars	John Stafford
01-01-1776	Newport, RI		M		"a short thick Negro fellow...supposed to be gone to Dartmouth:"	"had on a jacket very much patched with canvas,"		Two dollars	Thomas Chadwick
08-12-1776	Newport, RI	Will	M	14	"rather small, but well proportioned, speaks but indifferent English;"	"had on a brown jean jacket, white shirt, and Ruffin drab breeches, without cap or hat:"	The subscriber placing the ad asks to be met at the sign of the White Horse Tavern, and there is a warning to all not to harbor the runaway.	Five dollars	E. Moon
09-02-1776	Bedford, MA	Moses	M	14	"he is tall and slender"	"had on a dark-coloured woolen jacket, linen trousers, and an old hat;"		All necessary charges	Joseph Rotch
11-11-1776	Long Island, NY	James Truddle	M		"he is about 5 feet 5 inches high, a well-set fellow, something upon the Mustee order, middling long hair:"		James ran away from the brig Dudley-Castle	Ten dollars	Robert Elliott ("belonging to Capt. Amleton Darling of Smithtown, on Long Island")
12-07-1782	Freetown, Massachusetts	Hager	F	32	"of a middling stature, very black, and has a large flat nose;"	"she has been absent so long it is uncertain what clothes she may have on"	Hager had been missing for four months before this ad was placed.	Ten dollars	John Hathaway
01-25-1783	Middletown, RI	Cambridge	M	26	"a lusty stout Negro Man...about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, goes a little limping, one of his ankles being considerably larger than the other, plays well on a fiddle:"	"Had on, when he went away, a felt hat, a whitened tow-cloth shirt and linen stock, a brown homespun closebodied coat, an old light coloured great-coat, a new white, short, woolen homespun jacket, with a belt to it; a pair of full cloth homespun gray breeches, black and white yarn stockings."	Gives warning to vessels, and also notes "He had enlisted on board a Privateer at Newport, but inquiry being made for him, he left her and 'tis supposed he is gone to Providence or Boston to look for a voyage to sea, for which he has a great inclination."	Ten dollars if found in Rhode Island, Twenty dollars if found elsewhere	Benjamin Gardner
02-21-1784	Norwich, CT	Leander	M		"a barber by trade, speaks both French and English, is about five feet eight inches high, somewhat pitted with the small-pox"		Is a barber and can speak two languages.	Ten dollars	Charles Beaujean (master), Pardon Gray (paying charges in RI)

08-27-1785	Newport, RI	Prince	M	17	"5 feet 6 inches and a half high, is very black, erect and stout built; has a scar on the forefinger of his right hand- He was born in Narragansett, and bred to farming- is slow of speech and awkward in his manners."	"His wearing clothes which he carried off, consisted of frocks and trousers, a blue outside jackets, a pair of breeches, and an under jacket of white broadcloth, a half-worn beaver hat, and a woolen ditto"	Gives warning to vessels, says that before fleeing Prince stole some "sundry articles" to defray his expenses, and supposes that if not in Narragansett he has either fled to Boston or Connecticut.	Ten dollars	I. Senter
09-10-1785	Tiverton, RI	Jeremiah	M	20	"about five feet 8 inches high, not very black, well built;"	"had on when he went away a tow-cloth shirt and trousers, and striped towcloth coat, and a large bound castor hat, also carried away with him a towcloth shirt and a pair of copperas green trousers,"	Give warning to vessels	Eight dollars	John Almy
05-07-1792	Middletown, RI	George	M		"had a remarkable thing on the back of his neck, is better than 5 feet high."	"he had on when he went away a grey coating outside jacket and trousers,"	Gives warning to vessels, and notes that George is "supposed to be seduced by a black wench he kept with, and has left an aged mother, a wife and daughter, all blacks who are in good credit;"	All necessary charges	John Slocum
05-14-1792	Newport, RI	Kate Grealy	F	22	"with a young child 3 weeks old, both of the mulatto kind"		"Said Wench I bought...at public sale of the sheriff of this county-Who was sold by said sheriff for theft, house breaking, and shoplifting and lawfully convicted by a court of justice in this town, and I have good reason to suppose that Tom Robinson, Ben Hadden, and Will Langly, were and have been her advisers to defect from my service; I therefore forbid any person harboring, secreting or employing said wench on any account or pretense"	"shall be handsomely Rewarded"	Ben J. Peckham
10-08-1793	Westerly, RI	Mary	F	22	"a large, likely negro wench...speaks good English, dresses hair high;"	"carried away with her one light chintz gown, one white linen ditto, one blue and white striped linen ditto, one purple moreene skirt, one white diaper ditto, three flannel petticoats, one black silk hat, one black figured worsted cloak, one light chintz short gown, one white linen ditto, one red and white woolen ditto, shoes, stockings, and a large supply of other apparel."	Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her, and mentions how she dresses her hair high.	Five dollars	Joseph Noyes
03-08-1796	Newport, RI	West	M				Gives warning to anyone who might harbor him, owned		Ann Booth Pollok

							by a female, and mentions that "he may be sold, at a very reasonable price, immediately."		
04-19-1796	South Kingstown, RI	Fibbo	F	30			Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her.	Five cents	William Champlin, jr.
09-19-1797	Newport, RI	Scipio	M	40	"of a black complexion, about 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high...he is used to house service, and gardening, and otherwise a handy fellow.		Gives warning to vessels, and it is interesting to note his experience in house service and gardening.	Twenty dollars	David Oliphant
12-28-1797	Hopkinton, RI	Biram	M	19	"a negro servant boy...about 5 feet 5 inches high; had a scar on his left cheek, and on his forehead;"	"had on when he went away, a new low crown felt hat, grey jacket, old trousers, and old shoes; wore and carried away two shirts, two under jackets, and an old silk handkerchief"	Gives warning to anyone who might harbor him	Five dollars	Robert Browning
09-18-1798	South Kingston, RI	Cudgo	M	20	"about 5 feet 5 inches high, a black, stout, well made smart, active fellow,"	"carried away with him, a mixed light colour'd broadcloth coat, 1 red speckled jacket, 1 strip'd flannel jacket, 2 pair of trousers, 1 pair of shoes, a round hat almost new, and sundry other articles, which he stole and carried off."	Gives warning to vessels	Ten dollars	Rowland Brown
06-18-1799	Little-Compton, RI	Sukey	F	40			Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her	Ten cents	Peregrine White
06-25-1799	Exeter, RI	Flora	F	34-35	"a short, squaddy-built wench;"	"had on, when she went away, a green quilt, and a dark calico short gown, and bonnet; and carried with her a light calico gown, and striped green, and two short gown; one calico, the other striped; and three pair of shoes, four or five pair of stockings, and five or six handkerchiefs, with sundry other articles of clothing;"	Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her and mentions "I have heard, she went into a house and told them, she never intended to come back again."		Daniel Sunderland
07-09-1799	South Kingstown, RI	Simon	M	38	"Six feet high, a thickset well-built fellow...his eyes are rather red, with a scar on the calf of one of his legs;"	"wore away a thick leather pair of boots, brown tow-cloth trousers, brown tow-cloth shirt, striped flannel vest, and full cloth jacket, with a great coat of the same cloth as his jacket, and an old felt hat; carried away one pair of nankeen overalls"	Gives warning to vessels	"a reasonable reward"	William Willcox
07-02-1799	Stonington, CT	Peter Denison	M	20	"a Negro boy...six feet high, of a yellow complexions, stout built, one of his ankles larger than the other, plays on the violin,"	"carried away a bundle of clothes"	Gives warning to vessels	Five dollars	John Holmes
07-09-1799	North Kingstown, RI	Jenny	F	20	"with her child about 4 years old;"	"took with her several articles of clothing, &c."	Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her, interesting to note that she is traveling with her child, listed in the same ad as Nancy, but ran away in March while Nancy ran away in April.	Ten Cents	Phebe Browning
07-09-1799	North Kingstown, RI	Nancy	F	50			Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her, listed in the same ad as Jenny, but ran away	Ten Cents	Phebe Browning

							in April while Jenny ran away in March		
04-15-1800	Charleston, SC	Anthony	M	15	"a creole Negro boy"		"supposed to be enticed away by some person on board a vessel"	Fifty dollars	John Thomas
11-18-1800	North Kingston, RI	Rose	F				Gives warning to anyone who might harbor her.	One Cent	Phebe Browning
11-03-1801	Portsmouth, RI	John Robbins	M	19	"a Negro indentured servant...five feet six inches high, slim built, a scar on his left cheek, and one of his fore teeth broken off"		Indentured servant, not a slave	Fifteen dollars	Benjamin Brown



## Appendix B



Source: Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The World Wide History of Dress* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 553.

## Appendix C



FIGURE 4. Unidentified artist, *Flora*, 1796. Silhouette, cut paper and brown ink with bill of sale, 14 in. × 13 in., unsigned. The Stratford, Connecticut, Historical Society.

Source: Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, “‘Moses Williams, Cutter of Profiles’: Silhouettes and African American Identity in the Early Republic,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 1 (March 2005): 32, JSTOR.

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