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The Black Wanderer: Reading the Black Diaspora, Resistance, and Becoming in *The History of Mary Prince* in the Classroom

Abstract

This paper examines *The History of Mary Prince* as a pedagogical tool for exploring complexities within the Black Diaspora. As Paul Gilroy's articulations of the Black Atlantic inform my approach, Prince's circuitous journey through the West Indies and England situates her process of becoming as one mired in longing and loss. Encouraging students to consider Prince as a wandering soul in search of not only freedom, but also solid familiar connections lays the foundation for merging her narrative with other enslaved Black people traversing countries and regions on ships against their will. Ample research material available on the survivors of the 1858 illegal ship enslaving Africans "Wanderer" offer an opportunity to consider the constructions of Black Atlantic identities in which formerly enslaved Black people forge connections with each other while longing for a return to Africa. Additionally, Tessa Mars' and Yinka Shonibare's art forms a bridge for conceptualizing Black diasporic identities. Because the Caribbean is often perceived as a perpetual space of fantasy and play, The History of Mary Prince also challenges misconceptions of slavery as an institution peculiar to the United States. Of her brutal slaveholder sending her to another island, Prince expresses competing emotions, "At length he put me on board the sloop, and to my great joy he sent me away to Turk's Island. I was not permitted to see my mother or father, or poor sisters and brothers, to say goodbye, though going away to a strange land, and might never see them again." Encouraging students to consider Prince as a wandering soul in search of not only freedom but also solid familiar connections lays the groundwork for merging Prince's narrative with other enslaved Black people traversing countries and regions on ships against their will. Ample research material available on the survivors of the 1858 illegal ship enslaving Africans "Wanderer" serves as my teaching tool for considering the constructions of Black Atlantic identities in which formerly enslaved Black people forge connections with each other while longing for a return to Africa. One of these survivors, Cilucängy, expressed in a letter his desire to return to his homeland: "I am bound for my old home if God be with me." My essay also draws on student reactions to Yinka Shonibare's art piece entitled "Wanderer." Shonibare's artwork forms the bridge for conceptualizing the more complex definitions of the Black Atlantic, Black Diaspora, and transnational identities.

Keywords

Caribbean, Mary Prince, Shonibare, Turks and Caicos, Black Atlantic, Black Diaspora, slavery, enslaved Black women, teaching

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Cover Page Footnote

Special thanks to my students at Texas A&M San Antonio. Their insight enriched both our Spring 2022 class and this article.

As an educator with experience teaching in South Florida, upstate New York, and currently South Texas, I have noticed the common thread uniting both my past and present students is their shared frustration at the traditional public school system. In Spring 2022, while teaching an asynchronous online African American literature course entitled "Narratives of Enslaved Black People," I encountered students voicing this exact concern as they grappled with *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), and *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo* (2018). One student, Catherine Naranjo, expressed her disappointment in the United States school system, writing: "Mary Prince is a name that I honestly do not think that I would have heard if I had not taken this course. This is one of the biggest discrepancies within our educational system. There is so much censoring of the material that is taught; how can we expect to keep [students] from falling into practices that mirror ones like these if they are never taught and guided through this information?" Any instructor addressing the complex issues of race, gender, and identity has no doubt encountered musings similar to Catherine's in the classroom. However, because a sizeable percentage of my students at Texas A&M San Antonio, a public four-year university with a predominately Hispanic student population, pursue certifications in education, they are particularly attuned to the educational landscape plaguing Texas. Thus, addressing such erasures and silences remains fundamental to teaching Prince's narrative.

Indeed, in the past few years state officials have enacted a series of legislative attempts preventing teachers from introducing subjects germane to K-12 public school. Restrictive bills such as Senate Bill 3[1] limit not only what educators can teach but also "how they go about their class, how they design the class — how they might address really sensitive issues of race and gender and identity and sexism in their classrooms" (Lopez). Passed by the Texas legislature in December 2021, the bill states that a "teacher may not be compelled to discuss a widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs." If an educator does discuss these topics, they must "explore that topic objectively and in a manner free from political bias." At the time of this writing, there are several proposed Texas State Senate bills designed to prohibit Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, eliminate tenure, and anti-racist teaching (Klein). However, as most educators can attest, pedagogy grounded in the diverse society we inhabit empowers rather than impoverishes students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Teaching African American literature courses amidst this political backdrop presents the unique opportunity for me to imbue my students, many of them future educators, with tools for engaging these "sensitive issues" in culturally

relevant and responsible ways. To do so, I adopt a pedagogical approach built on the key principles established by Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Although aimed at writers, the series of articles, reviews, essays, and speeches provide advice useful for educators as Walker asserts "that the truth about any subject only comes when all sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one" (49). Applying Walker's insight, I guide students towards constructing a counter-narrative for addressing the stories, legacies, and histories of marginalized people.

The History of Mary Prince presents students with such an occasion. While most have encountered *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in high school, they are far less familiar with *The History* and slavery in the Caribbean. Orienting students to the text first requires addressing a number of misconceptions regarding the scale of North American slavery. The interactive graphic "The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes" fills this gap (Kahn and Bouie). Beginning with the year 1545 and culminating in 1860, the graphic showcases a dispersal of tiny dots flowing out of the African continent and into various countries. With each dot symbolizing the unfortunate individuals sold into slavery and transported to distant lands, the stunning visual makes a remarkable statement on slavery's breadth: of the more than ten million enslaved Africans forcibly removed from their homeland and exiled to foreign lands only 388,747 people arrived in North America. At times multiplying and lessening in volume, the dots confirm that less than four percent of the ten million Africans trafficked across the seas arrived in North America. Ultimately, the graphic unveils a staggering visual signifier in which 4 million people were brought to British, French, Dutch, and Danish holdings in the Caribbean, another 4.8 million people to Brazil while 1.3 million arrived in Spanish Central America. One student observed, "I also learned that my assumption that more [enslaved people] were brought to North America was incorrect; in fact North America only received about 4-5%." Following their encounter with the visual, students are better equipped at conceptualizing slavery as a global practice ushering the world into its current modern dystopic state. This last point is essential. It is not unusual for students to perceive slavery as a relic of a bygone era, reducing it to a mere catalogue of horrifying information, as my student Catherine explains: "Yes, I was taught some of the brutal facts [of slavery], but it was just another historical fact from a time gone from recent memory." Due to slavery's frequent depiction as an antiquated institution peculiarly exclusive to southern regions in the United States, I employ Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* as a theoretical rejoinder. Although written over twenty-five years ago, *The Black Atlantic's* foregrounding of slavery as "internal to modernity and intrinsically modern" provides students a lens for rendering Prince's enslaved condition as

precursor to present day exploitative wage labor and working conditions (Gilroy 125).

Importantly, students do not read Gilroy's entire book but rather the first chapter, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity." Prior to encountering the chapter, students engage with my lectures in which I address the following topics: the Black Diaspora, hybridized Black Diasporic identities, and enslaved Black people's use of ships as a means of securing freedom. In these lectures, I also address the Haitian Revolution's significance upon enslaved Black people living near the coast or enslaved near maritime locations. The Northern topography of Douglass's enslavement counters traditional notions of slavery as agrarian, a Southern plantation singularity. In class, we review maps of Douglass's circuitous journeys along Northern coastal cities to his eventual escape to freedom. We spend significant time focusing on how northern enslavement in coastal cities afforded enslaved Black people access to boats and trains—escape routes both Douglass and Harriet Tubman used with consistency. Because students have previously read a chapter from Jeffrey Bolster's *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, they quickly spot the intersections between Haitians and Black Americans enslaved in cities along the shore. Indeed, the Haitian Revolution spurred a sense of self-actualization so noticeable among enslaved Black Americans that the revolution not only soured slaveholding market demands for Caribbean descended enslaved Black people, but also stoked fears of domestic uprising in the United States.[2] For these reasons, a crucial part of my scaffolding process is our engagement with Douglass' *Narrative*. We devote substantial time to considering his enslavement in Maryland, his subsequent proximity to the shore, and his eventual escape via train. In discussing Douglass's ambassadorial work in Haiti, we think of Douglass as a hybridized figure, emblematizing the complexities and contradictions existing within the Black Diaspora. Because courses in African American literature are few in high school and relegated to a set of tokenized figures, my pairing of Prince with Douglass is an intentional decision to render African American histories a constellation of global referential communities.

However, Prince, writing in England before emancipation, had far less authorial control over *The History* than Douglass in *The Narrative*. The paradoxical origins of *The History* speak to this. Prince first told her story to Susanna Strickland, an up-and-coming white female author, who compiled the details and wrote the narrative before sending it to abolitionist Thomas Pringle for editing. While collaboration between enslaved people and abolitionist writers was not a rare occurrence in the United States, the challenge in teaching *The History* alongside *The*

Narrative lies in centering Prince as a politically engaged subject politicizing her enslavement to correct and revise a number of historical myths. In class, we read Prince as a modern subject, disrupting hegemonic fabrications of history despite her circumscribed position. Following our engagement with the "The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes" interactive and Gilroy, students turn a critical gaze to key passages in the text, examining how Prince counters notions of the Caribbean as an idyllic paradise. Through Prince's eyes, Turks and Caicos emerges as an unrelenting and harsh landscape due to the brutal conditions in which slaveholders worked the people they owned. Closely reading passages such as the scene of Prince toiling in the salt ponds and the subsequent harm it inflicts on her body scripts an alternative, more historically accurate Caribbean ontology:

> I was immediately sent to work in the salt water with the rest of the slaves. This work was perfectly new to me. I was given a half barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, from four o'clock in the morning till nine, when we were given some Indian corn boiled in water, which we were obliged to swallow as fast as we could for fear the rain should come on and melt the salt. We were then called again to our tasks, and worked through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment. We came home at twelve; ate our corn soup, called *blawly*, as fast as we could, and went back to our employment till dark at night. We then shovelled up the salt in large heaps, and went down to the sea, where we washed the pickle from our limbs, and cleaned the barrows and shovels from the salt. (15)

Scenes such as these demonstrate the rhetorical aims of *The History*. In drawing attention to the devastating impact that the salt ponds wreak on the enslaved, Prince reclassifies Turk's Island as a "cruel, horrible place" (15). It is a critical intervention that Prince makes visible through enslaved Black people's labor. Students, learning of what her labor in the salt ponds entailed, position the

Caribbean as site of intellectual inquiry into how the aims of touristic capitalism obscure the vestiges of slavery, colonialism, and genocide.

Modern capitalist constructions of the Caribbean as a readily available site perpetually open for tourist consumption necessitate teaching *The History* as counter-narrative. The West Indies, as Mimi Sheller argues in *Consuming the Caribbean*, "has been repeatedly imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise in which the land, plants, resources, bodies, and cultures of its inhabitants are open to be invaded, occupied, bought, moved, used, viewed, and consumed in various ways" (13). Due to her focus on eighteenth-century travel advertisements Sheller's book is particularly expedient. To clarify, we do not read Sheller's entire text but instead concentrate on chapters Two and Four: "Iconic Islands: Nature, Landscape, and the Tropical Tourist Gaze" and "Orienting the Caribbean: When East is West." Both chapters provide students with language for examining how tourist economies situate the Caribbean as an idyllic space. To guide students through these readings, I upload both chapters to Perusall, a free online social annotation platform, where students comment on and highlight the document itself. The platform allows instructors to respond directly to student concerns and questions. Incorporating Perusall into my class generates meaningful and interactive discussions about unclear sections within the assigned readings. In our class modules, students also select key passages to include in our discussion board posts on Blackboard.

So that students may engage more explicitly with visual iconographies, I also pair Sheller's text with Tessa Mars' "Untitled, Praying for the Visa Series." In this art series, Mars constructs a Caribbean landscape that is quite literally bleeding. The darkened figures of men standing and kneeling among bullet shells contrast sharply with the red background, one image depicting large semi-automatic guns hanging from an azure sky (Mars). As student Andrew Jimenez notes, "There's a frightening usage of the color red, paired with what seem to be blood streaks running down the portraits. Palms paired with weapons." Indeed, the blood dripping down the canvas and bullets scattering the land itself render the colonialist Caribbean imagery a chimera. Additionally, Mars' art speaks to the anti-immigrant sentiment Haitians face, a feature of the brutalizing aftershocks of slavery and colonialism. In our class wikis, students consider this piece in relation to Sheller's work, exploring the ways in which Mars' artwork challenges dominant narratives about the Caribbean. Marrying both Sheller and Mars together produces a cumulative or circular effect, in which students connect these works to our previous modules on Douglass, his ambassadorial work in Haiti, and the Haitian Revolution.

To further facilitate students' encounter with Sheller's theorizing on visual iconographies, I copy and paste the three images from the chapters onto a Google

Jamboard: Figure 1: Planter tropicalization as domestic corruption, Figure 2: Representing the uses of ‘nature’ in the contact zone, and Figure 3: Staging the Sugary Scene of Mastery.

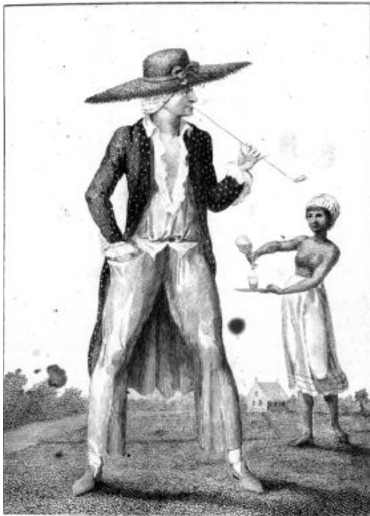
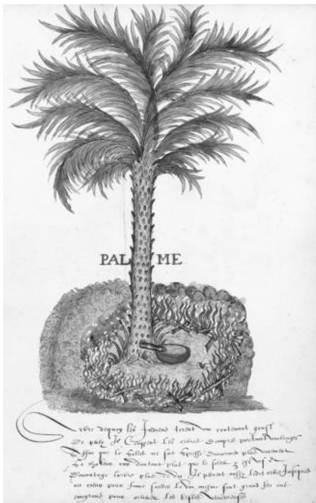


Figure 1: Sheller’s description: Planter tropicalization as domestic corruption.

William Blake, ‘A Surinam Planter in His Morning Dress’ from Captain John G. Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (London, 1796). Reproduced courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Figure 2: Sheller’s description: Representing the Uses of ‘Nature’ in the Contact Zone



‘Palme’ from The Drake Manuscript Histoire Naturelle des Indes. Credit: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MA 3900, f.33. Photography: David A. Loggie.

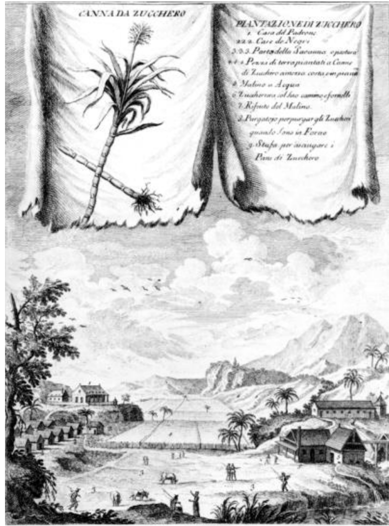


Figure 3: Sheller's description: Staging the Sugary Scene of Mastery.
Canna de Zucchero, Il Gazzetteire Americano, Vol. 2 (Loverno, 1763). Reproduced courtesy of the British Library

Students, offering their assessments of each image using colorful virtual sticky notes, immediately recognize how power dynamics between colonizer and colonized are communicated via distorted displays of scale and size. Analyzing an image of a planter centered and exaggerated to nearly twice the size of the topless enslaved woman flanking him, student Crystal Lemons remarked, "I think it is important to note how big the white man in the picture is portrayed in relation to everything else in the picture. It speaks to the superiority complex." The next step is for students to examine current tourist iconographies via modern travel advertisements depicting the Caribbean as tropical paradise. In closely inspecting these advertisements, students consider what the ads both reveal and conceal. Often, students notice a recurring theme in which local people of color are excised from the landscape in what student Andrew Jimenez describes as a "motif of seclusion." Other students echo Andrew, surmising that these images of sprawling but deserted lands propagate myths of the Caribbean as a paradise precisely because of its seeming lack of Black people and people of color. Thus, the travel advertisement assignment provides students the opportunity for examining visual erasures of Black and Indigenous people from mainstream historical narratives. And, Sheller's theoretical arguments offer students a critical lexicon for articulating *The History's* break with hegemonic constructions of the Caribbean. The painstaking labor Prince performs on Turk's Island situates the Caribbean as a forced labor camp, generating discussions about the nature of slavery in these settler colonies. As Doris Garraway contends in *The Libertine Colony*, "By the end of the eighteenth century, the Caribbean had become the seat of the most

brutal regime of slavery in human history" (240). Historical records and data from Caribbean slave holding settler colonies elucidate slavery's corporeal toll via its high rates of death, injury, and infant mortality.

Addressing the Caribbean paradise motif as illusory sets my students on paths toward understanding thornier issues of violence, sexual abuse, and trauma. Since narratives written by formerly enslaved Black people frequently depict disturbing scenes of abuse, it is important to discuss the racial implications of a predominately white abolitionist audience reading a narrative about an enslaved Black woman. For all its political capital as anti-slavery text, *The History* nonetheless served as a voyeuristic escape for readers. Because of this, I adopt an approach paralleling Saidiya Hartman's decision in *Scenes of Subjection* to avoid reproducing Douglass's account of Aunt Hester's beating "in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body" (3). As Hartman cautions, too often these graphic recollections "reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). When my students encounter the slaveholder's beating of Hetty, in which she is "stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy," I allow space for them to articulate their disgust, pity, and even anger (Prince 12). I then ask them to consider their responses in light of Hartman's point about the economy of reading Black suffering. It is essential for students to understand that, while despicable, the slaveholder's abuse of Hetty cannot be our sole point of critical engagement. This does not mean avoiding an extensive discussion about slavery's harrowing effects: our responses to reading this abuse must also be registered and discussed. However, guiding students beyond expressions of sympathy avoid reductively sensationalizing the savage abuse Prince, Hetty, and other enslaved Black people endured. Such a methodology to deal with the violence and spectacle in Prince's text is crucial as it emphasizes the myriad ways enslaved Black people exercised limited agency within the confines of slavery. We are then able to produce a more fruitful consideration on how Black people maintained their humanity in the wake of slavery's crippling oppression.

As *The History* proves, Black people used a diverse set of strategies for contesting slavery. Prince strikes out against one of these pro-slavery myths as she details the competing emotions she experiences after her brutal slaveholder sends her aboard a ship bound for Turks Island:

> "At length he put me on board the sloop, and to my great joy he sent me away to Turk's Island. I was not permitted to see my mother or father, or poor sisters and brothers, to say goodbye, though going away to a strange land, and might never see them

> again. Oh the Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection. But my heart tells me it is far otherwise." (15)

In calling attention to the white "Buckra people" for propagating pro-slavery myths, Prince engages this rhetoric as a means of countering prevailing ideologies via enslaved Black people's refashioning of familial ties. This is evident upon Prince's encounter with Hetty, an enslaved French Black woman. Hetty and Prince establish a close relationship mirroring that of a mother-daughter dynamic. In fact, Prince's affection for the woman is so strong she claims Hetty as her aunt: "Poor Hetty, my fellow slave, was very kind to me, and I used to call her my Aunt" (11). Scholars have long addressed the bonds enslaved Black people developed among each other as a result of forced familial separations. Specifically, Prince's relationship with Hetty represents what sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins calls "othermothering," a phenomenon by which Black women extend care for children not biologically their own (378). For Prince and Hetty, "othermothering" emerges as a safeguard for shielding them away from slavery's brutalizing psychological effects. Providing students with Hill-Collins' "othermothering" term offers them a vital Black sociological lens for understanding the kinship mapping in the text, slavery's structural impact on typical familial units, and the varied dimensions of resistance within Black communities.

As with Hetty's "othermothering," Prince's tortuous journey through the West Indies provides a pedagogical moment for exploring Black people's resistance under capitalistic regimes. Whenever I have taught topics surrounding the issues of slavery, students have consistently expressed a desire to know how enslaved Black people fought back against their oppressors. Prince's narrative serves as foundation for robust discussions on the myriad and mundane ways enslaved Black people asserted their humanity. As Prince is forcibly shipped to Grand Turk Island, her brief encounter with other enslaved Black people illuminates these acts of mundane resistance essential for survival: "I should almost have been starved had it not been for the kindness of a Black man called Anthony, and his wife, who had brought their own victuals, and shared them with me" (Prince 15). Although large scale rebellions certainly occurred, Prince's emphasis on the kindness Anthony and his wife display towards her encourages students to reimagine the ways in which Black people aboard slaving ships exhibited compassionate resistance through small yet significant gestures. Thus, this tender act informs my students' perspective on the diverse interactions among enslaved Africans packed into slaving ships. Because my students have previously reviewed 3D videos of

slaving vessels on The Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American Slave trade databases in earlier modules, they are well aware of the cramped, inhumane conditions occurring aboard these slaving ships ("3D Videos of Slaving Vessels"). Even more, extensive focus on scenes like these generate substantive discussion on the likely exchanges of information between enslaved Africans despite their different languages and cultures, ultimately contributing to larger scale rebellions at sea à la the *Amistad*. Once again, Gilroy's theorizing proves especially expedient here as his definition of modernity hinges on enslaved people negotiating their humanity despite systemic state sanctioned violence. For Gilroy, ships and their significance to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade extend beyond the practice of separating families. Rather, the image of the ship also draws attention to "the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs" (4). In remaking themselves under extreme duress, enslaved Black people emblematize a modern day David and Goliath fighting against colonial behemoths. As Gilroy argues, "the concentrated intensity of the slave experience is something that marks out Blacks as the first truly modern people, handling the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later" (220). Reading Prince through Gilroy's lens, coupled with their understanding of material conditions aboard slaving ships, students can more clearly theorize her as a distinctly modern subject struggling against an exploitative capitalist machine and consider how her experiences represent the complexities within the Black Diaspora.

Thus, we read Prince as wanderer in search of not only freedom but also identity as she is forced from place to place by her enslavers. The scattering of Black people to distant lands, resulting in immense longing and loss, informs our understanding of the Black Diaspora as a seismic event, producing newfangled identities and cultures. Juxtaposing Prince's experiences with other enslaved Black survivors displaced "away to a strange land" extends the Black Diaspora's scope. For instance, students learn of Cilucängy, a Congolese man captured in 1858 and forced aboard the slaveholding ship, the *Wanderer*. Of the more than 400 enslaved Africans trafficked to Jekyll Island, Georgia, a letter penned by Cilucängy highlights the sorrows afflicting enslaved Black people traversing regions on ships against their will. In his appeal to the public for donations to help him return to his homeland, he reinforces an overwhelming sense of longing and loss that Black people experienced even as they started families and formed communities in the United States: "Please help me….I am bound for my old home if God be with me" (Bentley 45). Although he never returned to the Congo, Cilucängy's designation of it as his "old home" reinforces the sense of dualism enslaved Black people experienced as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. To

render the transnational longing of the Black Diasporic individual more visible, I include Yinka Shonibare's art piece "The Wanderer" into our class modules. Shonibare's replica of the slave ship bound for Jekyll Island displays sails outfitted in batik fabric, typically associated with African fashions but originating from Indonesia and produced by the Dutch. Students immediately recognize Shonibare's fabric selection as a means of drawing attention to the modes of travel, commerce, slave trading routes, and consumerism along the African continent. Upon learning of Shonibare's deliberate decision to use batik following his knowledge of its Indonesian and Dutch origins, student Andrew observed the "amalgamation of influences that came into the making of the fabric." Although his focus is on Shonibare's authorial decisions, Andrew's observation speaks to the "The Wanderer" as visual signifier of the diverse cultures, histories, and languages developing as a result of the negotiations enslaved Black people made once separated from their homes of origin. Indeed, "The Wanderer" showcases the various cultural identities, displaying slippers of various sizes scattered across the sails, alluding to the men, women, and children forever separated from their families and homeland. As student Jade Moreno's analysis of Shonibare's piece reveals, despite the tremendous psychological trauma Black people within the holds of these ships endured they spawned a hybrid, multi-dimensional barrier for protecting themselves against this displacement:

> I feel that the piece represents the hybridity of African/Black identities by showing how the slave trade took so many millions of African people from different parts of the continent and dispersed them across the world. This opens up the possibility for different cultures from within Africa itself to have crossed paths either in transit or once sent to a new land, and we can begin to think about the ways they connected to each other despite different backgrounds. It also represents hybridity by thinking about how African people established roots in the countries they were forcibly sent to, and how their presence there remains to this day. We can see the ship as what made African people and African culture a diverse and dispersed presence throughout the world, but also does not let us forget the brutal and inhumane costs at which this hybridity was achieved.

This process of creolization, whereby enslaved Black people assimilated while simultaneously creating hybridized identities as a result of their forced exile to foreign lands, surfaces again when students encounter the oral and written testimonies of Africans captured via the transatlantic slave trade. I use Oluale Kossula's oral testimony in *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo* to

make the “brutal and inhumane costs at which this hybridity was achieved” explicit. In a series of interviews conducted by the anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, Kossula recounts his capture from West Africa at the age of 19 as a captive on *Clotilda*, one of the last ships carrying human cargo. Students quickly connect the parallels between Kossula’s longing to return to his West African home to Cilucängy’s and Prince’s desire to reunite with their families. Even more, *Barracoon* explicitly symbolizes the multi-varied aspects of the Black Diaspora: Hurston, a descendent of enslaved Black people, conducts the interviews of the 86-year-old African American at his Alabama home. A remarkable historical document for a number of reasons, *Barracoon* ties all the major theoretical points together as it is a markedly modern text (Hurston conducts the interviews with Kossula in 1927), countering archetypal constructions of enslaved Black people passively accepting their fate.

The nexus between Prince’s narrative, Shonibare’s art, and testimonials from Cilucängy and Kossula evinces the intricacies of the Black Diaspora. Engaging archival testimonies of enslaved Black people via art, the written, and spoken word, shifts the paradigmatic way history is traditionally taught. Applying a pedagogical approach that accounts for Black people’s humanity allows Prince, and other formerly enslaved Black people penning similar narratives, to emerge as primary actors in their own journey towards self-actualization.

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Notes

This essay is part of a special issue: "Teaching *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), guest edited by Kerry Sinanan," *Aphra Behn Online* 13, no. 1 (Summer 2023). To read the essays in the cluster, follow this link: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol13/iss1/.

[1] Senate Bill 3 censors what can be taught in K-12 classrooms, restricting discussions and teachings about race, gender, history, and oppression.

[2] After President John Adams reinstated trade with Saint Domingue in 1799, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Adams: "We may expect therefore black crews, and supercargoes and missionaries [from St. Domingue} into the southern states…We have to fear it." *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail.*

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