Introduction: Teaching *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), guest edited by Kerry Sinanan

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This special issue on *The History of Mary Prince* is the first volume of essays dedicated to teaching this vital text of Black freedom. Each essay draws on the extrinsic, radical voices and theories of Black, Indigenous, and Borderlands Studies to offer emancipatory frames for Mary Prince’s words that bring her into communities of resistance and dispossession with a common aim of justice. If, as bell hooks tells us, “education is the practice of freedom” then it is vital that we read Mary Prince with pedagogies that are grounded in the commitment to freedom that she herself fought for.\(^1\) This means that these essays are as much mediations on the philosophy of pedagogy for freedom as they are guides: no two classrooms are the same, our student cohorts vary widely across universities across both sides of the Atlantic and across the global north and south. These essays, then, are not simply models to be replicated, but accounts of our teaching that offer reflections on wider goals and ethics within institutionalized academies. These essays are invitations to think about what ways specific instructors, in their own universities, be they PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions), HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), HSIs (Hispanic Serving Institutions), community colleges, or public and private institutions, can learn the lessons of freedom that Mary Prince has to offer. We hope that these essays inspire colleagues to go beyond the boundaries of disciplines and established practices to consider what might be needed for their own particular place of teaching and learning in ways that center students’ lives.

**Nicole Carr** discusses teaching Mary Prince’s narrative in South Texas in the context of repressive legislation that seeks to censor education on the histories of race and slavery. Carr considers what is needed, then, to make the often occluded history of the Middle Passage clear to students and how to ensure that this space is also part of African American literary history. She places Prince alongside Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, as well as with visual representations of the Caribbean including Tessa Mars’ “Untitled, Praying for the Visa Series.” In this way, Carr opens out several literary and visual contexts for exploring *The History*.

**Kristina Huang’s essay** offers an original model for close reading Prince’s text while fully understanding it as a highly mediated narrative. Huang simultaneously addresses the contexts of *The History*’s production, while also attending in detail to its rhetorical and poetic dimensions. She does this by drawing on Ann Stoler and Marisa Fuentes’ methodologies of reading with and against “the grain,” a metaphor which considers the text as textile, as a way to engage with enslaved women’s lives in the archive.
Carolina Hinojosa’s essay presents an original digital map that places Prince’s narrative into a new spatio-temporal framework allowing us to travel with Prince both in her time and to see the spaces of the Caribbean and England in their current context. The digital map reads Prince along with Saidiya Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother* in which Hartman travels to Door Of No Return. In this way Hinojosa’s map engages the reality of the trans-historical facts of Prince’s Black Atlantic, and, as Christina Sharpe tells us, slavery’s pasts not yet past.

Kerry Sinanan’s essay reads Prince’s history as an undisciplining narrative that deeply questions not only how we teach but the formations within which we teach. She discusses how attending to her students’ lived experiences prompted situating Prince within the archive of counter-narrative and testimonio, so vital to the Broderlands where she works.

Shelby Johnson considers climate crisis, Plantationocene, and capitalism across a course that she teaches showing how Prince’s text mobilizes a powerful critique of extractive forms of modernity, harmful to all networks of life. Johnson describes classes delivered by several guest lecturer colleagues, thereby modelling a community of teaching collaboration and inclusive expertise that makes vital theories of decolonialism and ecology accessible for students.

Together these pieces engage deeply with Prince’s story as an intellectual, philosophical and activist-based critique of coloniality, the forces of which persist in our classrooms today.

Notes

This introduction 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/.