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Tamika Nunley

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Abstract: This article examines the life and work of Phillis Wheatley and her interlocutors to consider how African-descended people conceptualized liberty and formed an intellectual community during the American Revolution. Her poetry and epistolary exchanges, shared with a range of acquaintances in the Atlantic World, reveal an intellectual universe that she created for herself and one that drew her into the political spotlight. Leaders of the founding generation began to question the intellectual possibilities for an African girl in ways that held political implications for the future of slavery. I argue that Wheatley's life and work opens critical avenues for exploring intellectualism as an aspiration of Black life in early America, and that her world of ideas sheds light on the possibilities of Black girlhood in the late eighteenth century.

In recent decades, historians and literary scholars have examined the life and work of Phillis Wheatley to offer critical context and interpretations of her body of poetry.[1] The publication of her, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, in 1773 coincided with the Age of Revolution and enlightenment thought. The political ferment leading up to colonial rebellion advanced impassioned debates about liberty and the future of the North American British colonies. Colonial discontent and grievances about British tyranny filled the streets, taverns, and parlors with talk of colonial subjects at risk of enslavement to the crown. These juxtapositions of slavery and liberty resonated with Africans in the colonies who lamented their own proximity to lifelong bondage within the colonial outposts of the British empire. The era of revolutions reverberated through the hearts and minds of enlightenment thinkers, shaping the philosophical and intellectual blueprint of the American body politic. This departure from monarchy to a republic premised on principled convictions of liberty breathed new life not only on the form and organization of government but on the very impact that intellectualism could maintain in understanding the social worlds and, more specifically, the political grievances expressed among the colonists.[2] Intellectualism conceptually reflected a person's capacity for reason. Theories about the intellectual fitness of the races placed Africans as the least likely to demonstrate an ability for reason and, thus, civic virtue.[3] Racialized assumptions about the incapacity for civic virtue disqualified African and African-descended people from political equality during the late eighteenth century and early American republic. But as scholars have shown, many African and African-descended people throughout the colonies and the Atlantic World defied these

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claims.[4] They articulated arguments for freedom in an age where political dissenters touted their entitlements to liberty while also preserving bondage as a vital source of labor. Still, those deemed unfit for liberty and political inclusion continued to speak to these conditions in clear and creative ways.

African women and girls thought about liberty in the Age of Revolution, and Wheatley offers one lens into the social and political dimensions of early Black girlhood and life as a public intellectual. Wheatley developed her thinking about liberty in an era when colonists deemed an African girl and later young woman of her talents an impossibility. The ideas expressed by African-descended women and girls offer a critical lens through which to understand the epistemologies of liberty they created during the revolutionary era. Historian Jessica Marie Johnson deploys the term *black femme freedoms* to theorize the manner in which Black women created practices of freedom that transcended legal manumission given the violent experiences of both enslaved and legally free African-descended women in the Atlantic World.[5] This framework allows for an even more expansive approach to consider the ways that African girls and women enacted freedom. According to historians Catherine Adams and Elizabeth Pleck, enslaved women in New England viewed freedom in four dimensions: legal self-ownership, ownership of property, religious freedom, and freedom for members of their families.[6] Building upon this scholarship of the meanings of freedom in the lives of African-descended women, Wheatley's life and work opens avenues for exploring intellectualism as an aspiration of Black life, and perhaps adds a fifth dimension of freedom in the late eighteenth century. To understand Wheatley and her work requires engagement with her legacy, popular memory, and reception of her work over time.

Undoubtedly, Wheatley appears in scholarship as the foremother of African American literary traditions, but in what ways? Many literary historians have already thoroughly explored how the verse, language, and classicism reflected in Wheatley's work endured in the literary innovations of subsequent generations of African American writers, but might we see in her the liberatory possibilities of creative thought as well?[7] Scholar Tara Bynum argues that "her poems challenge the story that privileges her racial body and the scholarly expectation that race should operate as a governing principle in African American literature."[8] As Bynum reminds us, the racialized aspects of Wheatley's experiences and encounters were certainly central to her enslavement, but she also created community and experienced pleasure from reading and writing and from her spirituality. This article explores how Wheatley deployed literary creativity as a liberatory act while also navigating a late-eighteenth-century politics of genius. Genius here not only signals Wheatley's extraordinary intellectual abilities but the manner and method she employs to invoke an epistemology of liberation. Wheatley's work is both an adaptation of contemporary literary traditions and a meditation on African freedom that is not limited to European forms of learning. Her genius is not about exceptionalism but an indication of the presence of many Black girl intellectuals and poets with ideas and experiences that do not appear in the historical archive because of slavery, colonization, and laws that circumscribe their access to venues for intellectual thought.

The politics of genius reveals ways that race, age, and gender defined the meanings associated with figures validated as intellectuals in the late eighteenth century. Wheatley's life and work invite us to examine her own intellectual propositions that illumine the contours and possibilities of Black life in the era of revolution rather than settling for an explanation of exceptionalism or dismissing her as an anomaly. Moreover, I am less inclined to situate Wheatley as a maternal and religious heroine; I suggest a more expansive way to think about the intellectual possibilities of Black girlhood when afforded access to literacy and space to develop intellectual thought in the late eighteenth century. Black girlhood studies scholarship challenges the "adultification" of Black girls that comes with African slavery and colonization while revealing the ways that Black girls navigated power dynamics and developed what educator Charlotte Jacobs refers to as "Black girl literacies" or epistemological ways of processing the racialized, gendered, and violent worlds they inhabit.[9] Moreover, literary scholar Nazera S. Wright explains that "Phillis Wheatley's girlhood in the eighteenth century began a trope in African American literature that reveals how youthful black girls are gifted with survivalist tactics, which include learning languages and gaining other literacies that help them survive their hardships."[10] At the same time, Jacobs and Wright show how Black girls grapple with these realities while imaginatively forging identities of their own.[11] Wheatley's work reveals this tension between the identity she creates for herself and how the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic World poses barriers to self-making for African girls. Historian Crystal Webster explains that "the material circumstances and social dynamics experienced by Black girls encapsulate the complexity of both the human experience and structures of power."[12] The circumstances and dynamics that Wheatley navigates reveals the complexities of her experiences and the wide range of responses to her work during the eighteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

So, then, how might Wheatley shape perceptions of the intellectual capacities of African girls and women, and why might this question read as a political one during the late eighteenth century? Those who possessed virtue enjoyed the privileges of liberty, with civic virtue granted to individuals who demonstrated the intellectual capacity for political independence. But this discourse of civic virtue persisted alongside racial theories based upon phenotypical differences.[13] These race classifications implied the impossibility of African independence. Thomas Jefferson concluded that "This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people."[14] Indeed, where some political thinkers stopped short at limiting the scope of liberty for white men, intellectuals like Wheatley tested and even modeled the epistemological bandwidth of this idea through her sustained and engaged presence as a member of the republic of letters.[15] Her body of work sheds light on the scholarly possibilities of people of African descent and the political threat that the intellectual realm posed for the viability of a republic of slavery.

Serious consideration of this early African intellectualism challenges any linear political discourse of liberty that excludes the voices of African-descended people during the late eighteenth century.[16] Like Wheatley, Black thinkers developed what

historian Joanna Brooks referred to as "black counterpublics" or print traditions that articulated and enacted a politics of Black culture and thought.[17] Counterpublicity originated as a concept that emphasized the marginalized and disfranchised in society. Brooks explains that "ex-slaves were designated for exclusion from the public sphere, which was constituted by propertied men engaged in philosophical and economic exchange."[18] Wheatley employed Christian theology and the literary traditions of the classics in ways that politicized freedom for Africans in North America. Her literary voice does not reach the tone of criticism that Black activists apply to their work in the early republic, but the development of print traditions informed by Black experiences and the use of print culture as a political space is evinced in Wheatley's work. Black voices emerged in print with the broader aim of exposing the coexistence of slavery and liberty—two enduring concepts that shaped politics during and after the Revolution. Indeed, Wheatley's genius bears light on the political tensions of slavery and the contested ground upon which vigorous racial justifications for chattel slavery became a hallmark of the largest political contradiction of revolutionary America. Moreover, countless women and girls circulated poetry that expressed political sentiments and exchanged poetry as a means of building community.[19] Phillis's intellectual evolution began in Africa and continued during her enslavement and exposure to the intimate social worlds of the Wheatleys, the English couple who purchased Phillis and allowed her to make acquaintances with the people she encountered. The social networks and bonds forged among people with whom she crossed paths inspired the beginnings of her work.

The emergence of Wheatley's poetics in the eighteenth century signals the interconnectedness of stories, ideas, and beliefs among African-, Native-, and European-descended peoples in colonial North America.[20] Her work emerged from her own experiences and ideas as well as her everyday encounters and acquaintances in colonial and revolutionary New England. The Atlantic World brought people from far distances within proximity to the hearths of people in New England, where enslaved people and indentured servants heard tales of voyages and the near kiss of death on the violent seas. George Hussey, a Quaker merchant, and Nathaniel Coffin, a merchant and slaveholder, dined with the Wheatleys after a calamitous Atlantic crossing. Phillis listened carefully as visitors and friends entered the Wheatley home and exchanged a range of pleasantries and accounts of their expeditions. She committed to memory Hussey and Coffin's story of their journey and animated the details of the nearly wrecked voyage with Calvinist themes (grace and divine intervention) and lyrical prose. In 1767 Wheatley's first published poem appeared in print.

> Did Fear and Danger so perplex your Mind,
> As we made you fearful of the Whistling Wind?
> Was it not Boreas knit his angry Brow
> Against you? Or did Consideration bow?
> To lend you Aid, did not his Winds combine?

To stop your passage with a churlish Line,
Did haughty Eolus with Contempt look down
With Aspect windy, and a study'd Frown?
Regard them not;—the Great Supreme, the Wise,
Intends for something hidden from our Eyes.[21]

Scholars liken poems such as this one to Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, situating her poetics in the classics and Christian traditions of tribulation and salvation.[22] Wheatley knew of Coffin and Hussey from previous visits to the Wheatley home and likely waited on them at the residence. While we do not fully understand the depth of their interactions, the fact that she published her first poem indicates that their exchange, if any, likely inspired Wheatley to make the two men the subjects of her odyssey. Both men were merchants and Christians, but one was a slaveholder. In other parts of the poem, Wheatley invokes the divine,

Hussey and Coffin to the raging Sea;
Where wou'd they go? Where wou'd be their Abode?
With the Supreme and independent God,
Or made their Beds down in the Shades below

With this classical and Christian hybrid of themes and gestures, Wheatley postures herself as a poet, one who observes, comments, and exhorts. Her work reveals the making of an intellectual, and yet she was thirteen and just six years apart from her forced arrival on the shores of Massachusetts. The poem reveals the adeptness of a young thinker who skillfully deploys the limited intellectual offerings and effusive theological proselytization available to her in New England to make her poetic introduction. Her exposure to literature and her budding epistolary network made possible the rehearsals for such a debut. The work offers a window into a world in which her owners not only permitted her instruction in reading and writing but allowed for her social evolution to live the life of the mind in connection with others.[23] African girlhood in late-eighteenth-century New England rarely allowed enslaved girls access to literacy. Wheatley's first poem signaled a gesture of refusal—a rejection of a world that limited the scope and breadth of her imagined self as an intellectual and interlocutor of a New England coterie of letters. Her poem features themes that resonated and appealed to the primarily Protestant readership of the *Newport Mercury*. She appeals to an audience by using familiar themes from the voice of an African girl who otherwise might not see their work in print. With girlhood came the beginning of Wheatley's career as a published poet. Her literary aspirations mapped out the possibilities for African girls at a time when the apparatus of slavery and race continued to foreclose such prospects.

Phillis Wheatley came of age as a late-eighteenth-century poetess after surviving a harrowing 240-day journey across the Atlantic and landing at the shores of Massachusetts to be sold and named after the very vessel that imprisoned her. Twentieth-century Black feminist June Jordan meditated on the purchase of "Phillis Miracle":

> Seven-year-old Phillis changed the slaveholding Wheatleys. She altered their minds. She entered their hearts. She made them see her and when they truly saw her, Phillis, darkly amazing them with the sweetness of her spirit and the alacrity of her forbidden, strange, intelligence, they, in their own way, loved her as a prodigy, as a girl mysterious but godly.[24]

Jordan sets the scene for Phillis's purchase, lest we forget the rituals of slave ownership that made the economic mobility of countless New Englanders possible. But historians remind us that the Wheatleys were good people who contemplated alternative approaches to slave ownership. They furnished her with unusual learning opportunities and permitted her to join them in entertaining guests, exchanging letters, and attending church services. Her writing reveals exposure to history, religion, classical literature, and geography; a departure from the education typically reserved for the most established white daughters of New England.[25] Still, Christina Sharpe (a scholar of English literature and Black Studies) beckons us to contemplate the gravity of naming an African girl after the ship that carried her in the holds of terror. "The Wheatley's made an experiment of her," Sharpe offers.[26] Taken captive, slave traders forced Phillis away from kin and into an experience that created distance from all the ways her community of relatives afforded her protection and affirmed her sense of identity and purpose.[27] Indeed, what did seven-year-old Phillis see and endure in the holds of the slave ship? Eighteenth-century writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano recounts having witnessed the sexual brutality African girls experienced, testifying, "I have even known them to gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old; and these abominations some of them practiced to such scandalous excess, that one of our captains discharged the mate and others on that account."[28] By the time Wheatley arrived in Boston, her experiences on the ship taught her what enslavement meant. She did not need to await her arrival in North America to know that slavery fundamentally changed the course of her life. Phillis landed in the possession of the Wheatleys with a new name, a different residence, and forged social ties in a world that defined people by slavery, race, and gender. Black feminist scholar and literary critic, Hortense Spillers, writes that the child born into slavery is not orphaned but "does become, under the press of a patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal order, the man/woman on the boundary, whose human and familial status, by the very nature of the case, had yet to be defined."[29] Indeed, they made an experiment of her and the possibilities of her life as they also tested the breadth of their own moral convictions by making literacy, religion, and intellectual life available to her. This power wielded over her life remained tethered to the custom that foreclosed such possibilities in the lives of millions of African girls that arrived on North American shores—slavery.

Over time, masters bore the responsibility of serving the political interests of their dependents (their wives, children, and the enslaved) through their political participation. In the 1760s and 1770s, Wheatley referred to herself as a "girl" and, as literary scholar Lucia Hodgson points out, "Children made up a small but significant portion

of colonists who challenged their political subordination."[30] The republic made possible the inclusion of white inhabitants in North America based upon this organization of social and political relationships in the home, and yet such arrangements emphasized the infantilization of those recognized as dependents. Africans in the colonies appear in scholarship on fluctuating terms of age, with some people appearing on the infantilized terms of slavery and others appearing hypermature and even menacing grown women and men.[31] This convoluted imposition of adolescence and adulthood render our understandings of someone like Wheatley impervious at best. Her life as a public intellectual began in the context of girlhood, and from there Wheatley charted a course that illuminated the possibilities of Black girlhood in the late eighteenth century. She challenged the suppositions of what was imaginable for African girls in the colonies, even as the expectations of white boys, like a precocious Benjamin Franklin, assumed a different world of possibilities.

In 1773 Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* appeared in print just two years after Franklin's first autobiography and just shy of three decades since Lucy Terry Prince, a formerly enslaved poet and storyteller, penned the ballad poem, "Bars Fight."[32] Franklin embodied the idea of the self-made individual, a quintessentially "American" concept used to make sense of the phenomena of people emerging out of cruel and burdensome conditions and circumstances. Wheatley met Franklin on a trip to London organized to introduce her to her patron, the Countess of Huntingdon, in 1773. She ultimately did not meet the Countess but made a number of acquaintances who expressed interest in her forthcoming book. History offers numerous portrayals of Franklin's crafted persona of himself but largely neglects the complexities of his commitments both as a slaveholder and a political leader who expressed antislavery sympathies. Franklin's life represents all the romance that fuels the American mythology of the possibilities of coming of age in a "rags to riches" story.[33] But this romance looks different from the realities of young girls like his sister Jane Franklin. As historian Jill Lepore explains, "While Benny was improving his writing by arguing about the education of girls, Jenny [Jane] was at home, boiling soap and stitching."[34] Indeed, his intellectual innovations are a testament to the reality that, as a man of European descent in the colonies, one could emerge from servitude to political prominence. For men like Franklin, genius was always possible. Historian David Waldstreicher, however, does not allow us to sit so comfortably with Franklin's view of himself, as he explains that the very mention of the visit with Wheatley in Franklin's correspondence attests to her growing popularity in the Atlantic World. Whether driven by curiosity, skepticism, or admiration, Wheatley emerged as a public figure at the center of debates about the intellectual and creative capacities of Africans.

As a young African woman who survived slavery and precipitously demonstrated her acumen for the literary arts, she shared some similarities with the simplified romance that enshrined memories of Franklin. He was self-made and the recognition of her genius was made possible by the power wielded by slaveholders. Unlike the narrative that shaped America as a place both hostile and filled with possibility for industrious

men like Franklin, the American colonies do not appear as such a place for Phillis. The structures of slavery, race, and gender shaped access to the prospects of the self-made.[35] As an intellectual, Wheatley embodied a critique of arguments for such barriers by participating in the republic of letters. As literary historian Derrick Spires explains, "black citizens were forming citizenship practices based on their own experiences and understandings of political and religious texts."[36] Citizenship in this context does not hinge upon the recognition of governing bodies, and this proved true of Wheatley, an enslaved girl not viewed within the context of belonging to an intellectual conversation among important political thinkers. Indeed, June Jordan captures this sentiment when she states, "It was not natural. And she was the first: Phillis Miracle: Phillis Miracle Wheatley: The first black human being to be published in America."[37] For some Africans and colonists, the late eighteenth century was an era of intellectual self-making, albeit a process very much circumscribed for enslaved Africans but nonetheless a rare possibility. Indeed, intellectual and literary developments among Africans, Natives, and Europeans appeared intermittently in the colonies in the decades leading up to the Revolution.

Not long after her arrival to the Boston port in 1761, Wheatley mastered the language and customs of a foreign people with lightning speed. In the preface to her *Poems on Various Subjects*, her former owner, John Wheatley, explains: "Without any assistance from school education, and by only what she was taught in the family, she, in sixteen months' time from her arrival, attained the English language, to which she was an utter stranger before."[38] Unabashedly named after the vessel that confined and carried her small frame through the heavy and violent currents of the Middle Passage, Wheatley had arrived in Boston at the age of seven.[39] Susannah and John Wheatley purchased the petite African girl and, for reasons unknown, taught her to read and write, and introduced Latin and the classics to a girl who possessed a voracious appetite for learning. In some ways, the Wheatleys might be viewed as the midwives of Phillis's genius. At the end of the letter, John Wheatley wrote, "She has a great inclination to learn the Latin Tongue, and has made some progress in it."[40] She engrossed herself into the world of learning and yet countless African girls discovered such opportunities as both limited and rare.

And what did Wheatley make of such prospects? It is nearly impossible to understand the interiority of the lives of Black girls in the late eighteenth century, and the prevalence of African bondage made any disclosure of vulnerability a perilous enterprise. To explore this query, Wheatley offers "On Being Brought from Africa to America," a poem both complex and controversial that endures as much as it haunts contemporary scholars. In the first three lines of "On Being Brought from Africa to America" Wheatley offers, "Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land, taught my benighted soul to understand." Here, the poet attributes her religious convictions and intellectual evolution to being brought to the colonies from her place of birth. She continues:

That there's a God, a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
"Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
'Their colour is a diabolic die.'
Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train"[41]

During the 1960s and 1970s, some Black audiences read these lines as largely apologist in tone and substance, and they criticized the notion that any good could be gleaned from captivity, pointing out the connections that slaveholders made between slavery and Christianity to justify the practice.[42] But some scholars like John Shields have recently revisited this poem to show its significance in the formation of Wheatley's "evolving liberation poetics."[43] The characterization of Wheatley's style as one shaped by complex and astute literary maneuvers and devices offering a window into her philosophical deliberations might prompt a different reading of these lines.[44] "Their colour is a diabolic die" not because Wheatley supports this notion, as indicated with the decision to wrap the phrase in quotation marks, but rather points to the view or white perception of African peoples constructed at the time. The poem exposes the "scornful" views of the "sable race" as an unfounded claim deeply rooted in what "may" or may not happen because of the unimaginative limitations of slavery. The spiritual dimensions are less about a cowering to the superiority of European beliefs but more pointedly reveal the spiritual and intellectual prospects of Africans when afforded the opportunities to be "refin'd" or to "join th' angelic train," which is about the liberty to think and believe as a matter of selection, choice, and personal conviction. This way of life is a foil to the libidinous machinations of slavery. These lines emphasize the intellectual capacities of Africans in the face of profound displacement. Her experience as a survivor of the Middle Passage and the manner in which she reconstituted life in her new world point to the choices Wheatley made about what she believed about God and humanity, and she wrote to conjure the possibilities of African intellectual and religious thought as a liberatory practice. The quotation marks lead the reader to interpret the statements as both dubious and unconvincing. Wheatley, the first African American woman to publish a book, wrote poetry imbued with themes of racial equality and the moral imperatives of liberty for the enslaved. Hers was the theology of God in the judgment seat in the face of slavery. The lines within "On Being Brought from Africa to America" resituate Africans as unique arbiters of liberation discourse.[45] Thus, it was not the slave trader that enacted mercy upon Africans but the spiritual forces that validated their very existence and survival. "Redemption" offered a scathing critique of slavery and turned the logic of racial inferiority on its fragile head. Implied in this poem is a caste position shaped by race as a result of European formulations, ideas that stand inferior to the knowledge of God. But often the contemporary reviews were as mixed as the twentieth-century responses to her work, and many people struggled to reconcile her literary choices and themes she selected or even believe the possibility of her authorship.

Wheatley's life and work refuted racial arguments that justified African slavery. As literary scholar Henry Louis Gates argued, even in the face of acclaim, Wheatley knew all too well the realities of a world doubtful of the origins and authenticity of her work. According to Gates, in the autumn of 1772, Wheatley stood before eighteen of the "most respectable men" in Boston to assess the validity and verify the authorship of her poetry.[46] The governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchison; Rev. Mather Byles; and James Bowdoin were among the luminaries who issued a statement that verified the literary gifts of this young African woman. The record is silent regarding whether a trial actually occurred, but Shirley Graham Du Bois fictionalized the scene in a 1949 biography of Wheatly, which is unsurprising given that Du Bois was both a dramatist, novelist, and composer.[47] Her embellishment of the petition submitted by the eighteen men made sense for someone renowned for setting the scene for us to vividly imagine Wheatley's social world. Wheatley met and exchanged correspondence with some of the men on this list, who may have dined at the Wheatleys' on various occasions. The men signed the statement that follows:

> We whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges and is thought qualified to write them.[48]

Waldstreicher reminds us that a petition of this sort appeared commonplace in the form of a subscription list, but the racial and gendered significance of such a statement is not lost on readers.[49] The statement addressed the premise that such a petition inspires in Wheatley's case—namely, that of the impossibility of the genius of Black women and girls. "An uncultivated Barbarian from Africa" could only become intellectually effective by some phenomena of the extraordinary—Phillis Miracle. The dichotomy drawn between Africa and Europe, barbarian and civilized, meant that in North America, Wheatley's genius is only made possible through European epistemologies and patronage. To come from Africa and within years master Latin and the classics, meant that Wheatley must be the exception and thus only acceptable upon the thorough endorsement of the "best Judges" in New England. In his study of "the trial," Gates states, "Essentially, she was auditioning for the humanity of the entire African people."[50] Whether or not the trial actually happened, every encounter she experienced with men and women "judges" of the republic of letters signaled an audition of sorts at a time when the African intellectual confronted countless obstacles to publishing their work.

Wheatley demonstrated a significant degree of her own agency in securing a publisher for her collection of poems. Publishers required most first-time authors to seek subscribers to ensure a manuscripts potential to attract enough committed supporters to produce revenue from a book's sales. Wheatley made a tremendous effort to seek

subscribers by sending unpublished manuscripts to people within her network and possible supporters in London and by placing advertisements in colonial and British newspapers. The network she drew upon included acquaintances as well as people with whom she crossed paths as a result of her residence in the Wheatley household. Included in these solicitations were signatures of dignitaries from Boston attesting to the validity of her work and authorship.[51] Authors often sought publication in England which enforced British copyright laws, so Wheatley maintained correspondence with potential publishers in England. Wheatley initiated a transatlantic campaign to publish her manuscript, a testament to her expanding network as well as her role in building and persistently sustaining a global circle of supporters at a time when Europeans were dismissive of the intellectual contributions of African girls.

Colonial New England played an important part in reinforcing the limitations that African girls and women might face in their aspirations for a literary career, and this became evident when an arrangement with a Boston publisher failed. With the colonies on the empire's periphery, the exorbitant costs of printing, and the growing resistance against the Crown, few New England printers and patrons risked offending the southern colonies with public financial support of Wheatley's literary debut.[52] The very act of publishing and the people held responsible for such an effort seeped into the political culture of the colonies grappling with the composition of their civic futures. Printers published pamphlets, essays, and newspapers that increasingly emphasized the political sentiments of colonists demanding the freedom of the press and facilitated patriot resistance against British tyranny.[53] Publishing Wheatley's poetry might be viewed as an unnecessary indulgence or even a divergence from more pressing issues that publishers should print. Without a significant number of subscribers, a patron was necessary to cover the book's printing cost. In 1773 Wheatley could not secure a publisher in the colonies and ultimately sought the patronage of Selina Hastings, countess of Huntingdon. Patronage from Hastings came because of Wheatley leveraging her network, which included the Wheatleys, Rev. Samson Occom, and John Thornton, a philanthropist who collaborated with Hastings.[54] Wheatley sent unpublished versions of her work to the countess, who then consulted her inner circle to verify Wheatley's authorship and reputation. People who met Wheatley, dined with her, and maintained correspondence with her could attest to her abilities as a poet. But none of this mattered without Wheatley taking the initiative to seek patronage and subscribers to publish her collected works. Historical analysis of Wheatley's life and work can easily emphasize her position as a beneficiary of the Wheatleys and her New England network, but she too placed her unpublished work in the hands of numerous potential subscribers and patrons and became her own advocate for her poetry. She believed her own work to be worthy of publication and subscription, and as literary scholar Vincent Caretta explains, the decision to dedicate the book to the countess "serves to assure readers that the book is deemed worthy of being dedicated to someone so eminent."[55] The publication of *Poems on Various Subjects* was made possible by Wheatley's initiative and persistence in building transatlantic support for her work and strategically targeting

subscribers to market the book. Wheatley became a key agent in ensuring that the book not only secured a publisher but also appeared in print with the endorsement of dignitaries who could attest to the literary quality of her work.

Wheatley did not publish with a New England firm, but the British colonies undoubtedly became aware of the publication of *Poems on Various Subjects*. Despite the persistence of slavery in the colonies and the discrimination she faced, Wheatley's poetry reveals her support for the Revolutionary War. Indeed, many African-descended people in the colonies viewed the cause of liberty as one that aligned with their own aspirations. Like many subsequent military conflicts in American history, enslaved and free Black people viewed these conflicts as sources of political leverage in which they might fight on behalf of the patriot's cause or accept Lord Dunmore's offer to join the British ranks.[56] Her loyalties remained with the patriots, but her support did not manifest without critique. In "His Excellency General Washington" Wheatley regaled George Washington in verse that both praised his efforts in battle and offered undercurrents of criticism for not permitting the enlistment of Black soldiers in the military. Beginning in line 23 Wheatley writes,

> Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
> Enough though know'st them in the fields of fight.
> Thee, first in peace and honors—we demand
> The grace and glory of thy martial band.[57]

"We demand" connotes a call for framing the colonial struggle as a collective one even as she carefully confers honor upon the general. In the last stanza, Wheatley warns, "Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales" to underscore the opportune moment for an inclusive definition of liberty and thus an expanded understanding of the possible legacies of the Revolution. Beginning in line 39 she ends with a resounding tribute, declaring,

> Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
> Thy ev'ry action let the Goddess guide.
> A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
> With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! Be thine.[58]

Washington responded to Wheatley, stating, "I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant Lines you enclosed; and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyrick, [*sic*] the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical Talents."[59] He invited Wheatley to meet in person at his military headquarters and submitted the poem to his secretary for publication in the spring issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine* in 1776. Thomas Jefferson, however, felt quite differently about the praise that Wheatley received.

Jefferson mocked: "Religion, indeed, has produced a Phyllis Whatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism."[60] This criticism remained consistent with Jefferson's belief

in the capacity of Africans to mimic and remember but in no form demonstrated their ability to innovate. "Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior," Jefferson argued.[61] Over the course of the late eighteenth century, Jefferson fixated on what he believed to be the limitations of Africans. He made the case for the sensitivity and emotion that inspired moving literature and yet asserted that "misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry."[62] He intended these observations to offer an objective truth that reinforced the veracity of his logic about race. Wheatley's literary prowess gained international acclaim, and while figures such as Voltaire and George Washington recognized her talent, some remained obstinately incredulous. In the age of American Revolution, the social and political transformations increasingly closed in upon the prospects for future Phillis Miracle Wheatleys. Her presence as a public intellectual posed a grave threat to the political project of the patriots; theirs was to be a republic of free white men.

Thomas Jefferson followed the career of Phillis Wheatley as someone interested in the literary arts and classics but also as the sentinel of any intellectual developments that emerged from the American colonies. He dismissed her poetry as mere imitation. Yet his engagement with her work made her emergence as a public intellectual a political issue. One historian notes, "From the start, her poetry was always at one level a political symbol because it represented her mastery of Christian spirituality and polite letters—her integration into the highest levels of provincial British culture."[63] If African women and men were so degraded and inferior as Jefferson would claim in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* a little over a decade later, how can the argument stand if Wheatley's poetry showcased the strengths of her literary gifts and wielded the epistemologies of Europeans more skillfully than her Anglo-American counterparts? Furthermore, what might the intellectual abilities of African women and girls reveal about the impact of slavery and the question of the legal status of Africans—and women and girls in particular—in civil society? This is not a new consideration by the time Jefferson dismisses Wheatley's literary contributions. Christopher Leslie Brown examined how early British emancipationists grappled with the alternative prospects of Africans and the possibilities of civic inclusion based on the premise of "compliance with prescribed cultural norms."[64] The approach of British emancipationists marked a shift in colonial governance that emphasized the need for a different labor model other than slavery but preserved racial hierarchies and labor exploitation that defined colonial slavery. Still, these considerations aligned well with the Jeffersonian reading of Africans as culturally inferior and politically unworthy. Any admonition from Jefferson worked in service to his growing corpus of writings and philosophies that encoded the racial and gendered underpinnings of chattel slavery.

Jefferson and Washington, while both owners of enslaved people, responded inversely to Wheatley's success, but her achievements nevertheless warranted public attention. While Wheatley is "below the dignity of criticism," Jefferson inadvertently

built a case against her and the possibilities of women and girls like her in subsequent years. Washington stood on the wavering side of the possibility yet regarded Wheatley as an exception and remained rather reserved about his recognition of her work. Indeed, he wrestled with his own public struggles with enslaved women—namely, Ona Judge, an enslaved woman he owned who permanently escaped.[65] Washington launched a fervent search for her, but to no avail and much public embarrassment. Jefferson leaned into the impossibility and "preposterousness" of Wheatley's poetry and the intellectual rigor that such poetry demands. Wheatley did not require affirmation from Jefferson, but he wrote with such irritation and contempt for the growing recognition of her talents largely because he held views about race that her life and work undermined and contradicted. Might someone with her faculties offer evidence of the capacity of African-descended peoples for civic virtue? Wheatley did not respond to Jefferson or address him in any correspondence, but John Quincy Adams came to Wheatley's defense in his "Horace, Book II, Ode 4. To Xanthia Phoceus," which alluded to these contradictions about race in Jefferson's own intimate life:

> Yet, from a princess and a king
> Whatever be their hue,
> Since none but driveling idiots spring,
> And Gods must spring from you,
> We'll make thy Tommy's lineage lend;
> Black and white genius both shall blend
> In him their rays divine.
> From Phillis Wheatley we'll contrive
> Or brighter Sancho to derive
> Thy son's maternal line.[66]

Adams signals toward Jefferson's private affairs—namely, the widely known relationship with Sarah "Sally" Hemings, an enslaved woman with whom Jefferson fathered children.[67] Just as Wheatley's literary debut placed her at the forefront of debates about the African race, Adams brings Wheatley into political satire to highlight Jefferson's own deeply contradictory infatuation with women of African descent in a sexualized frame and the double standard that bears light on the juxtaposition of the intellectual gifts that Wheatley possesses. Given his renowned diatribe on the physical attributes and mental competencies of the African race, how might Jefferson situate the social prospects of his own offspring? Wheatley and enslaved women such as Hemings took center stage in political discussions about the possibilities projected upon Black women and girls in the budding republic. The politics of genius, however, were not shaped by the broader world of revolutionary politics and Anglo leaders alone.

Africans in the colonies corresponded and spoke broadly of the religious and political momentum building around them. Their voices illuminate the possibilities of a republic of letters inclusive of African and creole voices. As early as 1772, Wheatley penned numerous letters to Obour Tanner, an African woman recorded as a servant

of James Tanner, who lived in Newport, Rhode Island. It is unclear as to how they met one another; however, they maintained correspondence that gave them space to reflect on their personal convictions, experiences, and literary interests. Enslaved and free African girls in the late eighteenth century embraced one another in friendship, shared ideas, and extended critical support.[68] The two young women spoke passionately about their spirituality and convictions. They were intercessors and interlocutors. The two African-descended women shared ways of knowing and forged bonds of reconstituted kin as they mediated the tensions that both circumscribed and made possible their worlds. In one letter Wheatley called on her dear friend for prayer for healing, declaring, "While my outward man languishes under weakness and pa[in], may the inward be refresh'd and strengthened more abundantly by him who declar'd from heaven that his strength was made perfect in weakness!"[69] These lines were declarations of edification, the makings of beloved kin networks that literacy made space for. Tara Bynum explains that such spiritual exchanges in Wheatley's letters and theological deliberations in her work allow us "to imagine Wheatley as a receptacle for the pleasures of faith."[70] These kin networks allowed for young Black women to send signals through the spiritual shofar that called women to pray and signaled their own awareness of their spiritual place in an earthly realm wrought with bondage and discrimination. These epistolary exchanges gave Wheatley and Tanner a medium to deliberate survival and spiritual victory. Wheatley wrote, "Let us be mindful of our high calling, continually on our guard, lest our treacherous hearts Should give the adversary an advantage over us."[71] These words did not appear as mere ruminations blindly accepted by Africans but as theological considerations of evil and good, right and wrong. These theological underpinnings were the makings of liberation thought and the divine impetus for the "Love of Freedom" Wheatley notably writes about in a letter to Occom. "May the Lord bless us to these thoughts and teach us by his spirit to live to him alone," she writes. In other words, "If God be for us, who can stand against us"? African epistemologies that affirmed Black freedom appeared within these spiritual claims of divine favor and blessings. In a world where bondage increasingly encroached upon the lives of countless Africans, Wheatley and Tanner asserted the liberatory possibilities of scripture. The rhetoric of Protestantism became a feature of African epistolary culture to establish the correlation between such religious beliefs and the political liberty Africans felt entitled to. These connections between the spiritual and political appeared in public responses to Wheatley's work from African writers.

Wheatley garnered attention from literary figures such as Jupiter Hammon, an enslaved man from Long Island who published poetry around the same time that Wheatley's work appeared in print. Hammon became literate after his owner, Henry Lloyd, permitted him to attend educational sessions hosted by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, an arm of the Anglican Church.[72] The Lloyds leveraged his literacy to conduct business, but Hammon also developed an interest in poetry and developed his gifts as a writer. While they never met, Hammon

published a poem in honor of Wheatley, an ode to her remarkable life and an emblem of spiritual edification intended to encourage her in her faith. Hammon writes,

> Dear Phillis, seek for heaven's joys
> Where we do hope to meet.
> When God shall send his summons down,
> And number saints together[73]

Like Tanner, Hammon uses writing to embolden the faith of fellow Africans who look to the liberating possibilities of hope for a better hereafter. The trajectory of one's journey then draws upon African spiritual practices that transcend time on earth to extend before and beyond as a continuum of birth, rebirth, and life and death. These are the theological traditions of Africans in New England during the late eighteenth century. The pursuit of moral rigor, the role of Christ as an egalitarian Savior, and the promise of a liberated afterlife signaled some of the most compelling attributes of Protestant Christianity for people like Wheatley, Tanner, and Hammon. Their writings were the makings of spiritual and intellectual kinship that initiated a nascent African republic of letters where traditions and beliefs were deliberated and shared.

Tanner and Wheatley exchanged letters that reveal an affectionate spiritual and intellectual kinship. Such connections might prove vital for someone like Wheatley, who navigated spaces primarily composed of Europeans; but however much Europeans embraced her, most did not view her as their equals. Tanner wrote to learn of her well-being and thoughts and to celebrate her successes. As Wheatley's world rapidly changed with her rise in notoriety, Tanner's letters offered her a welcome respite from the curiosity and interrogations that shaped her encounters with European strangers. "Your tenderness for my welfare demands my gratitude Assist me, dear Obour! To Praise our great benefactor, for the innumerable Benefits continually pour'd upon me, that while he strikes one Comfort dead he raises up another."[74] The ups and downs of the turbulent years leading up to the Revolution and the efforts employed to market and successfully sell her *Poems on Various Subjects* were further exacerbated by figuring out how to financially support herself. Shortly after the publication of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1773, John and Susannah Wheatley agreed to terms of manumission, and both Phillis and Susannah fought to stave off bouts of severe illness.[75] Manumission for this public intellectual shifted her material circumstances, and her reputation as a renowned poet did not correspond with her financial prospects. Income-earning opportunities for African-descended women were limited to domestic service, cooking, laundry, and peddling goods.[76] The racial and gendered organization of labor and the educated elite in eighteenth-century New England foreclosed the possibilities for economic mobility for an African poetess.

By the time she returned from London, she learned of the Wheatleys' willingness to manumit her, and she tapped into her entire network. "This I am the more solicitous for, as I am now upon my own footing and whatever I get by this is entirely mine, & it is the Chief I have to depend upon."[77] Securing patronage for the first book proved

difficult enough, even with the endorsement of respected thinkers, and while she maintained correspondence with prominent leaders in New England, she struggled to bring her second volume into print. Wheatley employed her acquaintances and supporters to build her list of subscribers, demonstrating the great lengths she went to promote the publication of her own work and support herself financially. She explained in a letter to Col. David Worcester: "I beg the favour that you would honour the enclos'd Proposals, & use your interest with Gentlemen & Ladies of your acquaintance to subscribe also, for the more subscribers there are, the more it will be for my advantage as I am to have half the sale of the Books."[78] Many of these relationships were superficial at best, with individuals who occasionally lent their name and reputation to support her work, but, like Benjamin Franklin, some remained vacillated in their willingness to promote the publication of her work in the colonies. Her acclaim reached its limits in late-eighteenth-century New England as publishing an African public intellectual proved a highly political enterprise. The power dynamics and political tailspin of patronage, however, were not the only relationships that nurtured the emergence of Phillis Wheatley. To have a faithful friend such as Tanner in such times buoyed the young poet hard-pressed to figure out her next chapter.

Tanner and Wheatley's sisterly kinship also reveal ways they logistically navigated the material limitations that young Black women confronted in the colonies. Any titles beyond the Bible proved hard to acquire for Europeans and Africans alike, and young women such as Tanner and Wheatley discovered ways to get around the limited offerings in New England. "I have recd. the money you sent for the 5 Books & 2/6 more for another, which I now send & wish safe to hand," Wheatley wrote.[79] Wheatley leveraged her network of white supporters and acquaintances to purchase books, investing hard-earned wages in books in ways that show how the young women prioritized knowledge and learning in their lives. Wheatley conveyed to Tanner, "Your letter came by Mr. Pemberton, who brings you the book you wrote for." Ordering anywhere between five to seven books, Tanner and Wheatley shared an insatiable appetite for learning and reading. Add the costs of paper, ink, and postage, and their correspondence was one marked by financial commitment and devoted friendship. The sisterly kinship shared between the two reveal the intellectual, spiritual, and material support that bonded the young women in mutual affection. Kinship sustained early Black intellectual cultures.

By 1774 Wheatley continued to nurture her intellectual and literary abilities with study, writing, and thinking about God, freedom, and politics. Native American and African-descended writers in the late eighteenth century offer evidence of not only the significance of spirituality in their intellectual development but also how they articulated how racial distinctions shaped their experiences.[80] The biographical narrative and public persona of Indigenous and African intellectuals in the eighteenth century often emphasized a metamorphosis from "barbarian" and "heathen" origins to an "enlightened" and "refined" convert.[81] This contrast reinforced a racialized hierarchy of intellectual progress, a spectrum from which one ventures from one dimension to

the next. In this sense, the knowledge of Indigenous and African public intellectuals might be viewed in two ways: the epistemic values and insights cultivated organically and the public-facing knowledge put forth by these individuals. This public-facing knowledge can be seen as the way someone like Wheatley carefully navigated the political implications of her work with an acute sense of the ways that she communicated might be interpreted by a British provincial culture. Wheatley's writing offered a critique of the limited scope of liberty as defined in the late eighteenth century. She understood these limitations because of her own experiences during the Middle Passage and bondage in New England. She witnessed all the ways that freedom appeared layered according to the raced, gendered, and classed differences that shaped social relations in early America. In a letter to Occom in 1774, Wheatley wrote, "For in every human Brest, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance. . . . How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the Exercise of oppressive Power over others agree,—I humbly think it does not require the Penetration of a Philosopher to determine."[82] This love of freedom embedded in "every human Brest" coincided with the growing prevalence of enlightenment thinking.[83] These lines, frequently quoted to point to Wheatley's ideas about slavery and liberty, are spoken to Occom, a member of the Mohegan nation and someone quite familiar with the trauma of plunder, exploitation, and marginalization wrought by European colonists. In 1758 Occom became an ordained minister and delivered hundreds of sermons on a tour in England to raise funds for an Indian school, which ultimately became Dartmouth College. In addition to his sermons, Occom left a short autobiography, a book of sermons, and another book on hymns. His autobiography documents the impact of the Great Awakening, his experience with the scriptures of the Bible, and his efforts to evangelize among Native audiences in New England. Both Occom and Wheatley conveyed parallel experiences of spiritual conversion and the juxtaposition between their violent encounters with Europeans and the transformative discovery of faith. Intellectually, both figures pursued mastery of western theological concepts of Christianity. Historian John Sweet notes that "they discovered that the more completely they mastered English culture, the more successfully they displayed their refined sensibilities, and the more public recognition they won, the more they found themselves defined racially, as prodigies, examples, or exceptions."[84] Rather than emphasizing perceptions of their exceptionality, they used learning for edification and the expression of ideas. It seems that Wheatley and Occom shared a scholarly kinship grounded in spiritual and political convictions that played out in their philosophical deliberations over the conundrum of bondage and colonization in an age of egalitarianism.

Slavery and the continued violent extraction of land that came with colonization became the unspoken impetus and motivation for the colonists' demands for independence—and ultimately the legacy of the American Revolution for political liberty. African voices might be dismissed as disloyal or merely irrelevant to the politics of war and nation-building. Enslaved and free people highlighted the contradictions

of the political aims of the Revolution, even at the risk of appearing disloyal, as many people of African descent also supported independence from Britain.[85] But for those who imagined a republic in North America that included them in the new government, they daringly offered alternative possibilities inclusive of people of African descent and grounded in liberty for everyone confronted with bondage. Patriots, however, reserved the imagery and metaphor of bondage for themselves to reinforce the argument for representation and independence.[86] These African voices on the fringe, however, mattered enough to warrant a response from leading thinkers of the late eighteenth century. Wheatley's letter to Occom offers a commentary on the love of freedom for which many of her race and class hoped for during such transformative times. African claims to freedom undermined the very premise of the Revolution by adjusting the spotlight toward the people of African descent who remained enslaved and away from the patriots who based their cause on the claims of their own suffering. Anything that people of African descent, and formerly enslaved people in particular, might have to offer in verse or epistolary exchange became political for the incendiary potential to undercut the revolutionary cause in the eyes of those waging war. But intellectuals such as Wheatley did not view the aims for colonial independence and the abolishment of slavery as at odds but rather as mutually constitutive and reinforcing the merits of revolution.

The epistemological work of people of African descent appeared on the surface as interludes of exceptionalism, but rarely do we consider the collective resonances and everyday development of African enlightenment thought. Obour Tanner demonstrated a commitment to ideas just as Wheatley did, even though she appears less prominently than her renowned friend. The politics of genius still play out in modern academic spaces that sequester women like Tanner to the periphery of history and regard Wheatley's work as either exceptional or accommodationist. Her body of work and the epistolary exchanges between African girls might easily be dismissed as mere imitation. These ideas echo the sentiments of Jefferson and bear weight on the possibilities of scholarly inquiry into the life and work of Phillis Wheatley. Historians have yet to plumb the depths of Wheatley's thought, style, and philosophy because the politics of scholarly subjects are yet still raced and gendered in how we frame our questions and the significance of her work. In our historiographies, she does not get to be a genius or simply a lover of learning, and the countless African women and girls such as Tanner who survived the Middle Passage and dared to inquire, think, and create do not substantiate our scholarly considerations. Wheatley, however, became her own advocate in her efforts to secure patronage of her work and to ensure that her passion and gifts might survive through the generations, which allows her to stand out in ways that other girls and women did not. Women and girls of African descent were by no means silent bystanders in a country that held the majority of the Black population in chains.[87] They listened, shared ideas, and developed their own knowledge about liberty, and this holds true for Wheatley.

Notes

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[2]David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975); John Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); D. H. Robinson, *The Idea of Europe and the Origins of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[3]Black people continued to define citizenship on terms they articulated. See Christopher James Bonner, *Remaking the Republic: Black Politics and the Creation of American Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 2021).

[4]Olivette Otele, *African Europeans: An Untold Story* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), chaps. 3, 4.

[5]Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 173.

[6]Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 12–14.

[7]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 40; Maureen Anderson, "Phillis Wheatley's Dido: An Analysis of 'An Hymn to Humanity. To S.P.G. esq'," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, ed. by John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 3–17, 4; Jennifer Billingsley, "Works of Wonder, Wondering Eyes, and the Wondrous Poet: The Use of Wonder in Phillis Wheatley's Marvelous Poetics," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, ed. by John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 159–190, 161–162; and Waldstreicher, "Ancients, Moderns, and Africans," 710.

[8]Tara Bynum, "Phillis Wheatley's Pleasures," *Common Place* 11, no. 1 (October 2010): 1–13.

[9]Corrine T. Field and LaKisha Michelle Simmons, "Introduction: Looking for Black Girls in History," in *The Global History of Black Girlhood*, ed. By Corrine T. Field and LaKisha Michelle Simmons (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022), 1–28, 4–5; and Charlotte E. Jacobs, "Identity in Formation: Black Girl Literacies in Independent Schools," in *Black Girl Magic*, ed. by Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, Janell Duchess Harris, Janell Hobson, and Tammy Owens (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019), 80–104.

[10]Nazera Sadiq Wright, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 11.

[11]Janaka Bowman Lewis, "Building the Worlds of Our Dreams," *South: A Scholarly Journal* 51, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 96–114.

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[13]Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000), 175.

[14]Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), Query XIV.

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[17]Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere," 67–92.

[18]Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere," 72–73.

[19]Rachel Hope Cleves, "'Heedless Youth': The Revolutionary War Poetry of Ruth Bryant (1760–83)," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (July 2010): 519–548, 534.

[20]Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 103.

[21]Phillis Wheatley, "On Messrs Hussey and Coffin," *Newport Mercury*, December 21, 1767.

[22]Anderson, "'Phillis Wheatley's Dido,'" 4.

[23]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 23.

[24]June Jordan, "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America or Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley," *Massachusetts Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 252–262, 254.

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[27]James H. Sweet, "Defying Social Death: The Multiple Configurations of African Slave Family in the Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 2013): 251–272.

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[32]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 48.

[33]David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang), 55.

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[39]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 1, 16.

[40]Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects*, v.

[41]Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects*, 17.

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[44]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 61; and Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 7.

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[46]Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, 5.

[47]Shirley Graham Du Bois, *The Story of Phillis Wheatley: Poetess of the American Revolution* (New York: J. Messner, 1949), 91–107.

[48]Phillis Wheatley, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley with Letters and a Memoir* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2010), xi.

[49]Waldstreicher, *The Wheatleyan Moment*, 531.

[50]Gates, *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, 27.

[51]Caretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 93.

[52]Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*, 203.

[53]Parkinson, *Common Cause*, 10, 176.

[54]Caretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 91.

[55]Caretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 99.

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[58]Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, 68.

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[61]Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query 14.

[62]Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 234.

[63]Sweet, *The Bodies Politic*, 127.

[64]Christopher Leslie Brown, "The Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1999): 273–306, 291.

[65]Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (New York: Atria, 2017).

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[69]Letter to Obour Tanner, July 19, 1772, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA (hereafter, MHS).

[70]Bynum, "Phillis Wheatley's Pleasures."

[71]Letter to Obour Tanner, July 19, 1772, MHS.

[72]Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 53.

[73]Jupiter Hammon. "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who Came from Africa at Eight Years of Age, and Soon Became Acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Hartford: n.p., 1778.

[74]Letter to Obour Tanner, May 6, 1774, MHS.

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[77]Letter to Col. David Worcester, October 18, 1773, MHS.

[78]Letter to Col. David Worcester, October 18, 1773, MHS.

[79]Letter to Obour Tanner, March 21, 1774, MHS.

[80]Katy L. Chiles, "Becoming Colored in Occom and Wheatley's Early America," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 Special Topic: Comparative Racialization (October 2008): 1398–1417, 1398.

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[82]Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 153.

[83]Chiles, "Becoming Colored in Occom," 1400.

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[85]Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*, 207; and Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 304.

[86]Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 179.

[87]William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution: With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: To which Is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855); and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).