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### Hurricanes and Revolutions

Michael J. Drexler

*Bucknell University*, [michael.drexler@bucknell.edu](mailto:michael.drexler@bucknell.edu)

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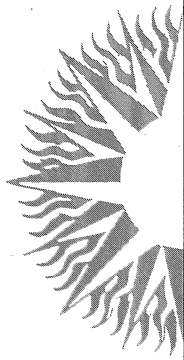
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## HURRICANES AND REVOLUTIONS

*Michael J. Drexler*

I begin with a coincidence. If one were to correlate areas under the threat of slave resistance with those subject to periodic and often devastating hurricanes, one map would suffice to capture an image of this doubly dangerous zone. The resulting map would correspond, perhaps unsurprisingly, to what Immanuel Wallerstein has defined as the extended Caribbean. Peter Hulme has offered one explanation of this region's extranational features: ecological integrity, its association in the European imagination with cannibalism, and its susceptibility to hurricanes (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

Hulme's study of the extended Caribbean closes at the end of the eighteenth century. For him, it "is essentially an historical entity, one that came into being in the sixteenth century and that has slowly disappeared," presumably replaced by the nationalized spaces that follow the U.S. War of Inde-

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1. Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (New York, 1986), 3-4. Similar claims about the extranational, regional integrity of the Caribbean can be found in Caribbean historiography and cultural studies. See, for example, Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean, the Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York, 1978); and Michaëlle Ascencio, *Lecturas Antillanas* (Caracas, 1990). Although Hulme's map of the extended Caribbean reaches northward to Jamestown, Virginia, Caribbeanists typically imagine the material geography of the region encompassing only the southern tip of Florida. In contrast, Silvio Torres-Saillant argues that any holistic account of the Caribbean must consider its insular, continental, and diasporic reach, three cultural spaces that extend the Caribbean to Latin America, the United States, and the immigrant communities in major European cities. See Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York, 2006), 21. Sites of slave insurrection included Cuba, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Florida, Louisiana, New York, South Carolina, several of the Virgin Islands, Virginia, and, of course, Saint Domingue.

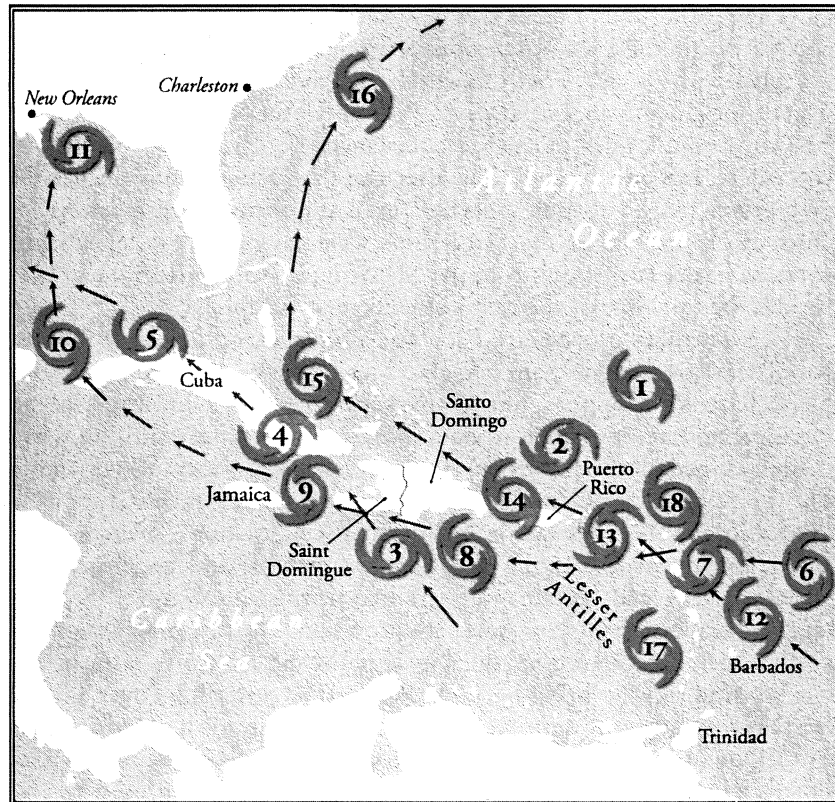


FIGURE 1. Verifiable Hurricane Strikes and Trajectories, June–November 1772.  
 Drawn by Rebecca L. Wrenn

pendence, the Haitian Revolution, and the later independence movements throughout the Antilles, the West Indies, and Latin America. Although Hulme does concede that the “transnational legacy” of the extended Caribbean is “still palpable,” a more robust account of the material and cultural salience of the extended Caribbean in the era of struggles for colonial independence and national autonomy seems warranted. A fluid geopolitics periodically restructured the political orientation of Caribbean spaces throughout the latter eighteenth and then the nineteenth century, but patterns of economic activity, human migration (forced and voluntary), and the nonanthropocentric sharing of flora, fauna, and weather continued to denote regional integrity.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, recent scholarly work has argued persuasively for privileging transnational determinants of political, economic, and cultural development.

2. Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 5.

Central to these studies have been the human responses to the long historical experience of periodic natural disaster in the region, namely, hurricanes. Stunningly, a simple transposition of terms drives a similar set of human responses to slave resistance. Scholars of slaveholding societies and resistance to them have explored not only the repressive and reactionary activities of the master class but also the circuits of communication among disparate Afro-Caribbean populations that leveraged an activist and productive notion of an extended or pan-Caribbean identity to transform history from below.<sup>3</sup>

What follows, then, is a stereographic analysis of semiotic continuities. Given these two bodies of scholarship that both work against the grain of nationalist historiography, what deeper connection might exist between their subject matter? Did cultural responses to either slave resistance or environmental catastrophe inform one another, and, if so, how? When period writers and respondents recognized the coincidence of slave revolts and hurricanes was the social, literary, or scientific imagination stifled or was critical reflection on the continuing interconnections across national boundaries empowering? What is happening culturally and ideologically when slave resistance takes on the figurative language of hurricanes? And, vice versa, what is going on when hurricanes are imbued with or deprived of instrumentality or agency—whether from a deity or because they are anthropomorphically yoked to human will? What does the specific, seemingly redundant, and only speciously subtle deployment of a literary trope tell us about material and social being or the struggle to represent it? We will approach these questions with four brief case studies ordered strategically, not chronologically: Herman

3. Some examples of relevant environmental historiography include Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville, Fla., 2001); Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783* (Baltimore, 2006); and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Winds of Change: Hurricanes and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001). For scholarship on slave resistance, of which I can only provide a sampling, see Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1983); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Julius Sherrad Scott III, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986); John K. Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of Caribbean History*, XXV, nos. 1, 2 (1991), 58–80; and Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (New York, 1992).

Melville's 1856 novella *Benito Cereno*, Philip Freneau's 1785 poem "The Hurricane," Benjamin Franklin's map of the Gulf Stream (1769), and a brief glimpse at Frederick Douglass's only work of fiction, *The Heroic Slave* (1853).

#### MELVILLE'S CAPE

Herman Melville sets *Benito Cereno* off the coast of southern Chile. The year is 1799, and the foundering ship *San Dominick* has entered the harbor of an isolated island and approaches another ship at anchor, the *Bachelor's Delight*, captained by Amasa Delano of Duxbury, Massachusetts. Captain Delano, who is a "person of a singularly undistrustful good nature" (681), fails to draw a connection between the foreboding natural environment and the *San Dominick*, which upon closer view is revealed to be a slave ship. Partially obscured by the fog, the *San Dominick* looms closer, a light from the cabin window streaming forth "much like the sun . . . which . . . showed not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye" (682). Among the first instances of irony, the comparison of ship to sinister woman is narratologically thick, initiating a series of geographical, ethnocultural, and categorical displacements.<sup>4</sup>

The *San Dominick*—a clear reference to the Haitian Revolution unfolding on the French colony of Saint Domingue at the time of the novella's setting—has been positioned, not in the Caribbean, but off the southern coast of Chile. The lawless sea is then compared to a plaza in Lima, seat of the Viceroyalty of Peru. The *San Dominick* reminds Delano of a monastery in the Pyrenees and then of untenanted balconies above the Venetian Grand Canal. This series of displacements leads ultimately to the most important one for our purposes: the *San Dominick* rests off the coast of Chile, not—as the concocted cover story crafted by the slave rebel Babo tells it—because of an environmental condition (a heavy gale followed by two months of windless seas and accompanied by an epidemic of scurvy aboard), but because of a slave mutiny.

Worth underscoring here is that Melville's narrative strategy for intertwining hurricanes (or gales) and black violence is one of displacement, not of relation. As we will see below, accounts of hurricanes and other oceanographic phenomena often manifest an excess, or supplemental, quality that *relates* them to the vocabulary of slave resistance. In Melville's story, this interpretive expectation is precisely reversed. The *San Dominick* is *either* where it is because of the storm *or* because of a revolt, the former designed to hide the latter. In a sense, Delano will reach any conclusion but one of relation, cate-

4. Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, in *Moby-Dick, Billy Budd, and Other Writings* (New York, 2000), 681–763 (page numbers for quotations are indicated in parentheses in the text).

gorically refusing the semiotic excess that reference to storms might otherwise generate. Moments of relation are fleeting and phantasmatic, the “apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs” (695) Delano tries to suppress “by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady” (716).

In a brief commentary on *Benito Cereno*, Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris insightfully mapped the operation of Melville’s strategy of displacements. Unwilling or unable to see the materiality of the situation before him—a ship in conflict—Melville’s Delano transfers the ghostly emptiness of his first impressions onto a plane where he is secure in his superiority over what lies before him. Delano’s train of associations are, according to Harris, not merely comic indicators of naïveté (the black slaves appear, at a distance, like monks wearing cowls). Rather, the semiotic substitutions reveal how Delano intuitively copes with uncertainty. “[I]ntuition,” writes Harris,

is not a turning away from concrete situations. It is, in fact, a revelation of other capacities at the heart of a concentration within and upon given situations. A revelation and concentration that exact a formidable price upon sensibilities which may recoil from what is “seen” or “learnt”: recoil as before a mirage or as before issues by which they are non-plussed: issues that lack an immediate philosophical anchorage and conventional explanation.

Although Delano sees the “true character” of the *San Dominick*—“a Spanish merchantman of the first class; carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight”—he ranges to explain its disarray and disrepair—what is “seen” or “learnt” (683). Following Harris, we can describe how Delano finds his answer. Rather than acknowledge the contemporary referents of the name *San Dominick*, the Yankee Delano opts for those more remote. Surveying the rotting hull and the “slovenly neglect pervading her” (683), Delano arrives at a sense of national superiority. His benevolent and tidy Yankee Protestantism supersedes the claustrophobic communal values of monastic Catholicism and imperial Spain; the robust cleanliness of mercantile trade overcomes the “warlike and Froissart pattern” (683) of inquisition and conquest, the corruption for which Venice was infamous. This exercise extends to Delano’s assessment of the *San Dominick*’s captain, Cereno, who cannot be Delano’s equal whether by rank or skill, but rather assumes the form of a “hypochondriac abbot” (687), wasting away the hours in all-consuming, but fruitless, preoccupation.<sup>5</sup>

As the novella continues, Delano vacillates between suspicion, benevolent

5. A. J. M. Bundy, ed., *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* (London, 1999), 124.

paternalism, and pity for Cereno. Matters come to a head in one of Melville's most accomplished vignettes, the dramatic shaving scene in the captain's quarters. In this episode, Babo, the mastermind of the slave revolt, draws "first blood" (727) from Captain Cereno's neck as Cereno and Delano discuss the implausible narrative of the *San Dominick's* journey around Cape Horn. Told that the *San Dominick* was beset by a gale off the Cape and then foundered for two months before arriving at Saint Maria on the southern coast of Chile, Delano is incredulous, having himself navigated those seas in a matter of days. When Cereno strategically *forgets* having mentioned traversing Cape Horn, Babo guides him to the cuddy for his daily shave and, when Cereno again falters in his description of the gales off the Cape, Babo cuts him to prevent him from alerting Delano to the ship's original itinerary, a northerly journey from the Port of Valparaiso, Chile, to the Port of Callao (Lima) in Peru. This original itinerary would not have taken the *San Dominick* around Cape Horn. The Cape Horn story is a necessary fiction to explain why the *San Dominick* lies off the southern coast of Chile—south of her point of departure for Lima. And, in reality, crossing the Cape would be in the vessel's future plans should Delano release it to continue its journey to repatriate the rebel slaves in Africa. After commandeering the ship, Babo has rerouted it on a southerly course to be followed by a northeasterly heading to Senegal (Figure 2).

Cape Horn is quite literally the point on which Melville's novella pivots. It is the polar counterbalance to the imperial ports of Valparaiso and Buenos Aires, a point relatively equidistant from either seat of imperial power. It also marks the divide between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, the former aligned with trade (Delano's ship, the *Bachelor's Delight*, is returning via the Pacific from China) and the latter with rebellion (Haiti and the Senegal plot). And, as the southern point on an imaginary, but significantly hemispheric, compass, it is the polar opposite to the absent northern referent, at once, or, rather, as a spinning turnstile, now Haiti and now the northeastern United States. Fundamentally, the Cape is the point of contention between Babo and Cereno. As we learn toward the novella's end, little has been resolved on the *San Dominick* at the moment Amasa Delano boards her, despite the slave revolt that has toppled the hierarchy of master and slave. True, the slaves' owner, Alexandro Aranda, has been killed, and Cereno has lost control of his ship; nevertheless, matters aboard have reached a tense stalemate. Having recklessly killed the ship's navigator, the blacks must rely on Cereno to transport them to Senegal.

Only during the deposition of Cereno—in the last third of the novella—do readers learn the true state of affairs on board. Earlier on, readers must choose between the narrator's or Delano's point of view. A third possibility—that

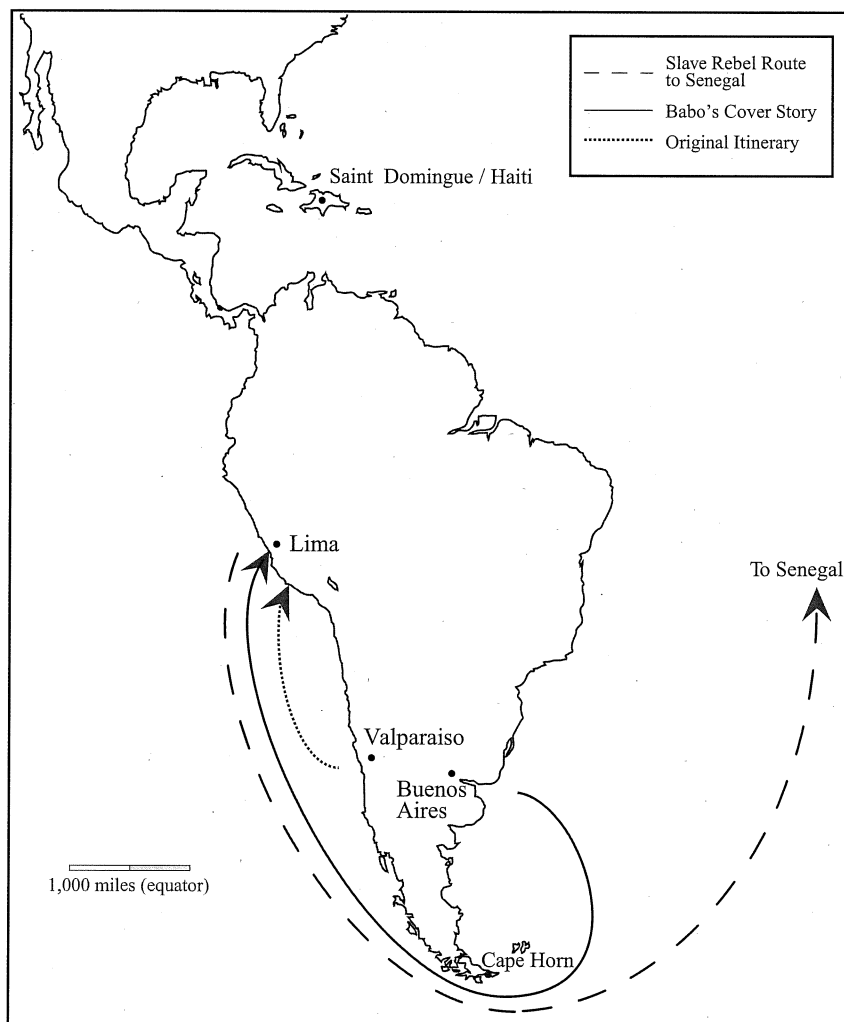


FIGURE 2. The Itineraries of the *San Dominick* in Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1856). Drawn by Michael Drexler

the ship remains divided, in the midst of conflict—is strategically occluded. Let us return to the beginning of the novella, where readers witness the first sighting of the *San Dominick* by sailors aboard the *Bachelor's Delight*. By re-visiting Melville's opening scene, we will be able to see the false choices Melville devises to tempt his readers into errors of interpretation. Once again, we note that Melville's Delano fails to perceive the connection between the natural environment and the mysterious human drama playing out before him. The narrator provides the first sleight of hand, placing the *San Dominick*



in a natural setting that has already been invested with semiotic richness. The seemingly neutral grayness of the scene is quickly imbued with sinister overtones: the “troubled gray fowl” and the “troubled gray vapors,” the “shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come” (681). Within this loaded setting, the narrator suggests that the *San Dominick* itself is a malign agent. Here, the personification of the ship misleads by insinuating that the vessel has the integrity of a human subject. Delano, too, mistakes the *San Dominick* for a subject; however, his view differs significantly while falling for the same categorical fallacy. Like the narrator, Delano also feminizes the *San Dominick*, applying the conventional, if figurative, language of the sea to her: “The ship, in navigating into the harbor, was drawing too near the land, for her own safety’s sake, owing to a sunken reef making out off her bow” (682). Unlike the narrator, however, Delano does not view the ship and the setting as of a piece; rather, he sees the two at odds.

For Delano, the *San Dominick* is subject to the hazards of nature. If, as the narrator suggests, the *San Dominick* is driven by ill intent, then Delano is the dupe of his own “singularly undistrustful good nature.” Delano, however, is convinced that he has nothing to fear because the actions of the *San Dominick* mark her as an incompetent subject. Here we enter the discourse of the feminine invalid, the damsel in distress, and the broader terminology of domesticity. Delano, the patriarch or knight errant, positions himself to husband the distressed ship. In Delano’s eyes, the *San Dominick* is an incapacitated agent; incompetent in her surroundings and unable to cope with duress, she is reduced to the status of an object. With regard to the forces of nature in which she is positioned, she has no power to realize her will. Though the inkling of subterfuge flickers continuously on the periphery, Delano suppresses his concerns by recourse to his own unflappable egotism. Unlike the *San Dominick* and its hypochondriac captain, Delano imagines himself as a fully realized, competent subject: a master of wind and sea.

Melville’s circuit of displacements brings us back, then, into the time present of the novella, yoking Delano’s theoretical, nationalist chauvinism to his applied maritime skills. This synthesis, not unimportantly, also allows the absent United States to supersede absent Haiti as Delano’s northerly point of reference. Thus, the geographically mapped plot (zones of confusion to those of clarity) connects Cape Horn to the diminished seat of Spanish power in Lima and then to the United States, now figured as the rightful successor. This series obscures another that would add Haiti to the mix, thereby radically transforming its narrative. In place of a diachronic story of imperial succession, this latter, occluded narrative would draw synchronic ties between north and south, highlighting points of complicity with and resistance to

the slave trade. The first might be represented by a series, whereas the latter would look like a cycle.

Narrative I Series	Cape Horn ?	Lima —		United States +
	Confusion	Mismanagement		Resolution
Narrative II Cycle	Cape Horn X	Lima Y	Haiti X	United States Y <sup>1</sup>
	Revolt	Stasis	Revolt	Stasis

Because Delano sees only Narrative I, the material referents of the *San Dominick*, the “negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight” (683), recede from view. For the plot, they are negligible: objects, not agents. With blind confidence in his own maritime skills, Delano is able to discount Cereno, the *San Dominick*’s now, but nominal, steward, the effeminate, bad captain— incompetent, ill prepared, and perhaps batty to boot. And, when the black characters/cargo come under his appraisal, Delano’s behavior mirrors the same self-satisfied posture. Like the winds and sea, natural phenomena pacified under the exercise of human agency and skill, the blacks appear naturalized in Delano’s view, thus subservient to his authority. To him, they are like Newfoundland dogs, or, as a black woman is described, “like a doe in the shade of a woodland rock” (712). Despite hailing from the slave-free state of Massachusetts, Delano even offers to buy Babo from Cereno for fifty doubloons.

What Melville has done here in *Benito Cereno*, bringing together Massachusetts and Saint Domingue in the tranquilizing waters of the Pacific Ocean round Cape Horn off the coast of Chile, is remarkable. Transposed from the Caribbean Sea, the slave revolt on the *San Dominick* is at first unrecognizable and then wholly containable. Even though Delano gets it all wrong until the moment when, like a flash of lightning or a slumbering volcano at once awoken, he captures the real state of affairs before him, he nevertheless maintains control. The mask torn away, the revolt revealed, does not incapacitate him; it spurs him into efficient action. He hails his crew, has the guns run out, and leads the assault that brings the revolt to an end. This ending, which may seem at odds with the history of the slave revolt on Saint Domingue, is sustainable because of the deterritorialization of the slave rebellion. Much as Delano euphemistically refers to the slave ship as a “negro transportation-ship” (684), taking the slave revolt out of the Caribbean plays on readers’ gullibility. It may also signal Melville’s broader pessimism about the outcomes of Haiti’s inde-

pendence. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the stormy revolutionary energy of the rebellion had drifted, wracked by internal division, unstable and draconian leadership, internecine violence, and corruption.<sup>6</sup>

If geographic deterritorialization enables Melville to sustain the believability of Delano's mastery of both nature and man, how do literary representations actually located in the Caribbean region function? If mastery of the sea is a trope for managing or stabilizing the relationship between master and slave, what happens to this literary figuration when wind and sea are out of control?

#### FRENEAU'S ABYSS

We can explore these questions by jumping back to 1785 and Philip Freneau's thirty-six-line poem "The Hurricane." Freneau spent many years working and sailing in the Caribbean and the Atlantic. He worked on a Danish West Indies plantation in the 1770s, managed the transport of goods between New York and the Azores in the eighties, and was operating his own brig in the Caribbean Sea in 1785 when "The Hurricane" was written:

Happy the man who, safe on shore,  
Now trims, at home, his evening fire;  
Unmov'd, he hears the tempests roar,  
That on the tufted groves expire:  
Alas! on us they doubly fall,  
Our feeble barque must bear them all.

Now to their haunts the birds retreat,  
The squirrel seeks his hollow tree,  
Wolves in their shaded caverns meet,  
All, all are blest but wretched we—  
Foredoomed a stranger to repose,  
No rest the unsettled ocean knows.

While o'er the dark abyss we roam,  
Perhaps, with last departing gleam,  
We saw the sun descend in gloom,  
No more to see his morning beam;  
But buried low, by far too deep,  
On coral beds, unpitied, sleep!

6. Jean-Pierre Boyer abdicated his presidency in 1836, initiating a long period of instability that eventually led to President Faustin Soulouque's declaring himself emperor in 1849.

But what a strange, uncoasted strand  
Is that, where fate permits no day—  
No charts have we to mark that land,  
No compass to direct that way—  
What Pilot shall explore that realm,  
What new Columbus take the helm!

While death and darkness both surround,  
And tempests rage with lawless power,  
Of friendship's voice I hear no sound,  
No comfort in this dreadful hour—  
What friendship can in tempests be,  
What comfort on this raging sea?

The barque, accustomed to obey,  
No more the trembling pilots guide:  
Alone she gropes her trackless way,  
While mountains burst on either side—  
Thus, skill and science both must fall;  
And ruin is the lot of all.

Freneau's apocalyptic poem begins by distinguishing the man at home from the sailors on a ship at sea. Within the domestic space, the man ashore is doubly "unmoved," the winds neither control his bodily fate nor his emotions; he hears the howling gales but remains in repose, not fearing for his own safety. For the shipmates on the barque caught in the middle of the storm, however, all is in a state of flux; they are doubly *moved*. On shore, the man and the animals of the natural world are connected. Each finds within nature a place of comfort, but the sailor in the storm is wretched, while all others seem blessed. He is a stranger to repose, subject to the movement of the natural world—apart from it, its object, its target.<sup>7</sup>

A transition occurs in the next couple of stanzas. Whereas the beginning of the poem separates domestic tranquillity from seafaring dangers, stanzas 3 and 4 attempt to draw connections by transferring the figure of the storm from the materiality of the ocean tempest to the metaphysics of death. The sun descends into the abyss, sinking for these gazers for the last time, and the unknown realm of the afterlife is considered. Where the figuration of home and natural repose dominated in the first two stanzas, now the figuration of the sea directs the new topic. Death is that "uncoasted strand" for which all

7. Philip Freneau, "The Hurricane," in Fred Lewis Pattee, ed., *The Poems of Philip Freneau: Poet of the American Revolution*, II (Princeton, N.J., 1903), 250–251.

humans are equally unprepared. Each lacks the tools to navigate it or a leader to follow, here denominated by an absent Columbus. The end of the poem returns us to the ship, *imaginable* as a tool subservient to the will of the sailors or a trusted pilot, but, here, as with the metaphorical ship-as-soul in the afterlife, wholly at the mercy of its environs. The “lawless” power of the storm baffles the sailors’ ability to maintain control of the ship. Neither science nor skill works any longer. “Ruin is the lot of all.” For Freneau, then, the hurricane is associated with a loss of agency that is the polar opposite of the master’s repose gained within a secure domestic space. In this way, both Freneau and Melville are thinking through a similar problem. Each tries to imagine how to link the experience of the sea and wind to life on shore, and for each the Caribbean Sea, with its unpredictable and “lawless” winds, proves to be the limit case.<sup>8</sup>

The link between the uncontrollable storms of the Caribbean and colonial management goes back to the beginnings of English colonization of the West Indies. In 1638, John Taylor published a pamphlet in London entitled *Newes and Strange Newes from St Christophers of a Tempestuous Spirit, Which Is Called by the Indians a Hurry-Cano or Whirlewind*. In his pamphlet, Taylor yokes the hurricane to the unruliness of the native inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. Slavery and bondage, Taylor writes, have the advantage not only to extract labor value from Caribbean bodies but also to discipline the soul: “Through slavery and bondage many people and Nations that were Heathens, and barbarous, have been happily brought to Civility and Christian Liberty.” “Yet in the latest Daies of the World,” Taylor continues, “all are not civliz’d; there are yet many Heathens, *Indians*, and barbarous Nations unconverted: as for knowne Examples in *America*, and in divers Islands adjacent, where this *Hurri Cano* is frequent.” Here Taylor perhaps initiates the trope where the cartography of danger that maps the area where “lawless” hurricanes are frequent is also the same zone wherein the disciplinary regime of slavery is least effective or is frequently resisted.<sup>9</sup>

Taylor places the storm in a grand, providential narrative, where the storm lies beyond or outside the dominion of the true religion. The source of the

8. In a complementary move, Sean X. Goudie argues that “lawless power” may also refer to “British tyranny over U.S. commerce in the Caribbean.” Thus, if the domestic scene demonstrates mastery (the successful prosecution of the American Revolution and the establishment of independent law), the sea is that place where U.S. merchants remained vulnerable to British assault, to seizure warranted by the disadvantageous terms of the Treaty of Versailles. See Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia, 2006), 132.

9. John Taylor, *Newes and Strange Newes from St Christophers of a Tempestuous Spirit, Which Is Called by the Indians a Hurry-Cano or Whirlewind . . .* (London, 1638), 2, 3–4. Taylor’s pamphlet is discussed in Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 97–101.

hurricane is located in a region associated with barbarism and theologically by extension with the agency of Satan. Similar notations exist in North American Puritan texts, which figured the colonial frontier as a howling wilderness. In 1639, John Winthrop described a tempest that, while damaging some property, allowed the Massachusetts Bay Puritans to marvel at how “the Lord miraculously preserved old, weak cottages” and also to see divine justice in the death of five Indians “pawwawing in this tempest” and thus subject to the devil’s machinations. Throughout the seventeenth century, New England Puritans refined the interpretive schema of reading the signs of the natural world and of its un-Christianized inhabitants. We can recognize here the familiar Puritan sermon tradition in which the Indians or natural phenomena were not signs of Satan’s power but rather instruments of divine agency empowered to test or correct the behavior of the orthodox, if wayward, saints. Thus did Increase Mather and later Jonathan Edwards find comfort in thunderstorms and lightning strikes, both confirmation of the deity’s engagement in the affairs of believers and apostates.<sup>10</sup>

If there is a connection between this seventeenth-century theological view of hurricanes and the more secular attitudes of the eighteenth century, we might locate it in the manner in which those beings that lay outside the traditional protections of a providential narrative are treated: in these earlier accounts of devastating storms, native Americans, and in later accounts, African slaves. A number of accounts of hurricanes from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century focus on property losses, and almost always in these accounts one finds an accounting of lost slave laborers amid the list of wreckage. This treatment of slave lives as a class of property among the buildings and crops also destroyed is consistent with the earlier depiction of a storm’s devastating effect on pagan Indians. It is also consistent with the development of Anglo-Caribbean slave codes, which were different than Spanish counterparts; for the British islands, the slave was not a lesser human being but was reduced completely to a special class of property. True, the seventeenth-century believer wants dead Indians, or at least finds theological confirmation in their demise, while the slave master wants to avoid dead property. Nevertheless, in both cases, the tallying of losses confirms the special status of the survivor. In either case, a sense of control in the aftermath of the devastating experience of natural catastrophe is reestablished by keeping tabs of objectified losses, a ledger in which bodies are so many broken things.<sup>11</sup>

10. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle, eds., *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 286.

11. For example, here is how Aaron Burr described the aftermath of a storm he ex-

Among the slaveholding regions of the extended Caribbean was a countervailing anxiety in the aftermath of devastating natural disaster—that slaves would take advantage of the resultant chaos to revolt. Despite the absence of any major slave-revolt activity following on the heels of any particular storm, British West Indian authorities sated their fears with coordinated plans to thwart rebellion by making visible the already extensive policing regime, which included town watches, militia units, and regular troops. Moments of crisis thus tested the limits of slaveholding societies' self-assessment of their own vulnerability. In response to storms and the resultant feelings of existential insecurity, they ran out all manifestations of control to contain anxiety about the loss of sociocommunal agency.<sup>12</sup>

The supplemental or excessive display of already extensive policing regimes begs the question whether other mechanisms for rationalizing and thus gaining some control over the dehumanized forces of nature also illustrate a complementary excess. The most obvious challenge to the providential analysis of the source of hurricanes was scientific rationalism, whose practitioners took increasing interest in meteorological observation and analysis throughout the eighteenth century. Scientific theories of wind patterns and storm trajectories attempt to ameliorate the sense of disempowered human agency even if the knowledge alone could not prevent future catastrophes. The science of oceanography and wind analysis did, however, offer some predictive instruments that in turn diminished, if not supplanted, theological explanations of natural disasters. What is interesting about these early attempts to grapple scientifically with the phenomena of weather is how these forays into empirical analysis elevated regional, transnational networks over the artifice of political boundaries. This is one of the supplemental effects of Benjamin Franklin's determination that weather patterns in Boston and Philadelphia were linked to winds in the Caribbean basin.<sup>13</sup>

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perceived while visiting a plantation in Georgia in September 1804: "Major Butler has lost nineteen negroes (drowned), and I fear his whole crop of rice, being about two hundred and sixty acres. Mr. Brailsford, of Charleston, who cultivates in rice an island at the mouth of the Alatomaha, has lost, reports say, seventy-four blacks. The banks and the buildings on the low lands are greatly injured." See Aaron Burr and Matthew L. Davis, *Memoirs of Aaron Burr with Miscellaneous Selections from His Correspondence*, 2 vols. (New York, 1836–1837), II, 340. See also Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn., 1965); and Goveia, *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1980).

12. Mulcahy, *Hurricanes*, 100.

13. See Benjamin Franklin to Jared Eliot, Feb. 13, 1749–50, in Franklin, *Writings*,

#### FRANKLIN'S GULF

As early as 1749, Benjamin Franklin was already collecting observations that would lead to his plotting of the Gulf Stream, published first in 1768 and recirculated widely in 1785 (see Figure 3, below). In a letter to Jared Eliot, Franklin answered a query concerning why coastal northeastern storms begin to “lee-ward,” rather than coming into the coast from the east, and are thus experienced at North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania before in Boston. In his response, Franklin proposed a meteorological circuit of winds linking the Gulfs of Florida and Mexico to the Northeast:

Suppose a great Tract of Country, Land and Sea, to wit Florida and the Bay of Mexico, to have clear Weather for several Days, and to be heated by the Sun and its Air thereby exceedingly rarified; Suppose the Country North Eastward, as Pensilvania, New England, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, etc. to be at the same time cover'd with Clouds, and its Air chill'd and condens'd. The rarified Air being lighter must rise, and the Dense Air next to it will press into its Place; that will be follow'd by the next denser Air, that by the next, and so on. Thus when I have a Fire in my Chimney, there is a Current of Air constantly flowing from the Door to the Chimney; but the beginning of the Motion was at the Chimney, where the Air being rarified by the Fire, rising, its Place was supply'd by the cooler Air that was next to it, and the Place of that by the next, and so on to the Door. So the Water in a long Sluice or Mill Race, being stop'd by a Gate, is at Rest like the Air in a Calm; but as soon as you open the Gate at one End to let it out, the Water next the Gate begins first to move, that which is next to it follows; and so tho' the Water proceeds forward to the Gate, the Motion which began there runs backwards, if one may so speak, to the upper End of the Race, where the Water is last in Motion.<sup>14</sup>

Notwithstanding the accuracy of Franklin's observation, our interest must not stop here. Note Franklin's reliance on analogy to make his scientific description clear: cool air rushing toward the “rarified air” instigated by fire, water rushing toward a previously stopped gate, air in a state of calm. By extension, the hot, southerly climate of the Caribbean instigates a similar rushing motion, literally sucking the northern air downward and triggering, in

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ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York, 1987), 440–442. See also C. F. Volney and C[harles] B[rockden] Brown, *A View of the Soil and Climate of the United States of America; with Supplementary Remarks upon Florida; on the French Colonies on the Mississippi and Ohio, and in Canada; and on the Aboriginal Tribes of America* (Philadelphia, 1804), 159–160.

14. Franklin to Eliot, in Franklin, *Writings*, ed. Lemay, 440, 441.



Franklin's words, "violent" storms inland once the gates between north and south are opened. Here, the Caribbean is a weight that draws northern points down and exposes them to violence. It does not take a great leap of imagination to visualize how a system so described might animate a Puritan gloss on the slippery slope of sin. Thus, a rationalist approach to weather phenomena is pliable and, by metaphoric association, it can become an exemplum of what it putatively was designed to contest. Note that Franklin's initial interest in this particular weather pattern was owing to the frustration its effect caused him. Unable to view a lunar eclipse because it was shrouded from view by storm clouds at Philadelphia, Franklin is astonished that friends in Boston reported seeing it clearly an hour before the same storm arrived there. Prevented from witnessing a natural marvel and one often associated with omens and portents, Franklin ranges for an enlightened, rational explanation to supplant his previously blocked curiosity. Having assumed the storm would have originated off the Northeast coast, Franklin now has proof of an inland genesis. Insight into the cause of the storm assuages blindness brought about by its effect, an episodic event now mastered.

We might trace a political analogy as well. Produced during the period of Franklin's career that has been described as one of "paracolonial ambivalence," might Franklin's explanation productively illustrate the dangers of too close a connection between mainland commercial networks and the slaveholding colonial economies to the south, the hot economy of the southern plantation system eventuating stormy troubles in the Northeast? The metaphoric associations Franklin used to explain his empirical insights, it seems, warrant a more basic observation. Empirical science would appear to be at odds with another imaginary discourse so much at the center of eighteenth-century colonial culture: the political borders that, however tenuously secured, momentarily defined and parceled the region. To put it succinctly: into the 1790s and beyond northerners aimed rhetorically to distinguish their own economies from the slaveholding regimes of the mainland South and the Caribbean region. Nevertheless, weather patterns and the trade routes that they enabled continued to tell a different story of mutual dependence and even moral complicity.<sup>15</sup>

Part of the work of the environmental historians discussed above has been to underscore how the especially tumultuous hurricane seasons during the later years of the eighteenth century reoriented trade alliances among British, French, Spanish, and colonial American mercantile entrepôts. They have

15. See Goudie, *Creole America*, on "paracolonial ambivalence," 111–152 (quotation on 111). Goudie helpfully surveys Franklin's writing on the Caribbean (36–54).

helped us understand that responses to hurricanes provide important and determinative insights into the scale, longevity, or failure of revolutionary movements. Human agency is now, it has been argued, contingent on antihuman forces of the natural world. The devastating late-century Caribbean storms led to intercolonial, but intrahemispheric, alliances as local officials turned to imperial rivals in neighboring colonies for assistance when support from the home country was delayed or denied. Colonial antagonists formed regional networks, even against official sanction, in response to catastrophic damage from storms. Anecdotal support for this mode of intercolonial cooperation can be found in Franklin's writings.

Consider the following from "Narrative of the Late Massacres," a text written to condemn the barbarism of the Paxton Boys, who murdered a community of Conestoga Indians in an act of collective punishment. In sympathy for the Indians and in outrage against the "CHRISTIAN WHITE SAVAGES," Franklin praises the rival Spaniards, alongside the "ancient *Heathbens*," "*cruel Turks*," and even the "*Negroes of Africa*," among whose company the Indians would have been safer:

Justice to that Nation, though lately our Enemies, and hardly yet our cordial Friends, obliges me, on this Occasion, not to omit mentioning an Instance of *Spanish Honour*, which cannot but be still fresh in the Memory of many yet living. In 1746, when we were in hot War with *Spain*, the *Elizabeth*, of *London*, Captain *William Edwards*, coming through the Gulph from *Jamaica*, richly laden, met with a most violent Storm, in which the Ship sprung a Leak, that obliged them, for the Saving of their Lives, to run her into the *Havannab*. The Captain went on Shore, directly waited on the Governor, told the Occasion of his putting in, and that he surrendered his Ship as a Prize, and himself and his Men as Prisoners of War, only requesting good Quarter. *No, Sir*, replied the *Spanish Governor*, *If we had taken you in fair War at Sea, or approaching our Coast with hostile Intentions, your Ship would then have been a Prize, and your People Prisoners. But when distressed by a Tempest, you come into our Ports for the Safety of your Lives, we, though Enemies, being Men, are bound as such, by the Laws of Humanity, to afford Relief to distressed Men, who ask it of us.*<sup>16</sup>

These ad-hoc colonial responses to storms point to analogous plans to prevent or quell slave resistance. Intercolonial and regional integration appears

16. Benjamin Franklin, "A Narrative of the Late Massacres, in Lancaster County, of a Number of Indians, Friends of This Province, by Persons Unknown, with Some Observations on the Same," in Franklin, *Writings*, ed. Lemay, 551, 555, 556.

to mitigate fear of slave insurrection in a way similar to how these transpolitical ties proved compensatory in the aftermath of natural disasters. Supranational civility here diminished the need to understand slave conspiracy, resistance, and revolution as the outcome of rational, coordinated, and strategic human responses to oppression. In other words, reducing slave resistance to a type of natural phenomenon on the order of scientifically explainable if not preventable natural catastrophes was a mechanism for suppressing a broader acknowledgement of what slave resistance was really about. Transferred then to the figural register, appeals to intercolonial comity provided an alternative explanation to the highly practical and rationalistic legal codes that explicitly acknowledged the likelihood of slave conspiracy and rebellion. It should be noted that these, too, were widely circulated. For example, one can trace the migration of provisions against slave insurrection in the Barbados slave code of 1661 as these were serially adopted throughout the Caribbean.<sup>17</sup>

Franklin's empirical study of the Gulf Stream, a band of water originating in the Caribbean and extending as a swift-flowing current hugging the eastern seaboard and then projecting eastward into the Atlantic, eerily illustrates a similar dynamic (Figure 3). Uncannily resonant of Amasa Delano's nautical chauvinism, Franklin had his map printed to instruct British packet ship captains how to speed their journey from London to the Northeast coast. Just as these captains had proven "too wise to be counseled by simple American fishermen" in the past, Franklin, too, found his own advice "slighted."<sup>18</sup>

It is instructive to view the larger map from which Franklin's chart was extracted for wider publication (Figure 4). Note that the darkened swath representing the Gulf Stream remains the map's most distinctive feature despite the grander scope of the complete Folger engraving. Excerpted, the Gulf

17. One should not overplay interimperial cooperation. It was also common for imperial rivals to take satisfaction in the other's struggles against both storm and rebellion. Another reason for differences between metropolitan policy and practical implementation was frequently shifting allegiances on the ground or at sea. Loyalty to king and country could be fickle among sailors who could be impressed into naval service multiple times on many sides of a given conflict. Merchants, for their part, desired the continuation of trade no matter what governing authority sanctioned it.

18. Benjamin Franklin, "A Letter from Dr. Benjamin Franklin, to Mr. Alphonsus Le Roy, Member of Several Academies, at Paris; Containing Sundry Maritime Observations," American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, II (1786), 315. Ellen R. Cohn dates the original map, produced for Franklin with the assistance of his cousin, Thomas Folger, sometime in February 1769. See Cohn, "Benjamin Franklin, Georges-Louis Le Rouge and the Franklin / Folger Chart of the Gulf Stream," *Imago Mundi*, LII (2000), 132.



FIGURE 3. Benjamin Franklin, *A Chart of the Gulph Stream*. From *Remarks upon the Navigation from Newfoundland to New-York in Order to Avoid the Gulph Stream on One Hand, and on the Other, the Shoals That Lie Ten Leagues Due South of Nantucket, and Southwest of the Shoalest Ground on St. George's Banks, Twenty-Eight Leagues* (Boston, 1790). Courtesy, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

Stream chart negates the Caribbean, though the current itself indeed originates south and west of the Florida peninsula.

On one level, the Gulf Stream map, embedded in Franklin's own narrative of disrespected Yankee ingenuity, once again illustrates the power of Enlightenment science to tame natural forces. Whereas the British literally sail against the current, the rival North Americans have harnessed nature and have begun to reroute the conventional mercantilist hierarchy. The Gulf Stream carries the commercial fecundity of the New World to the Old. Nevertheless, his public-spirited intent notwithstanding, Franklin's chart reveals much more than a natural phenomenon and how commercial interests ought to profit from it. There is something excessive about the darkened channel, its origins truncated, sweeping along the contrastingly blank American coast.

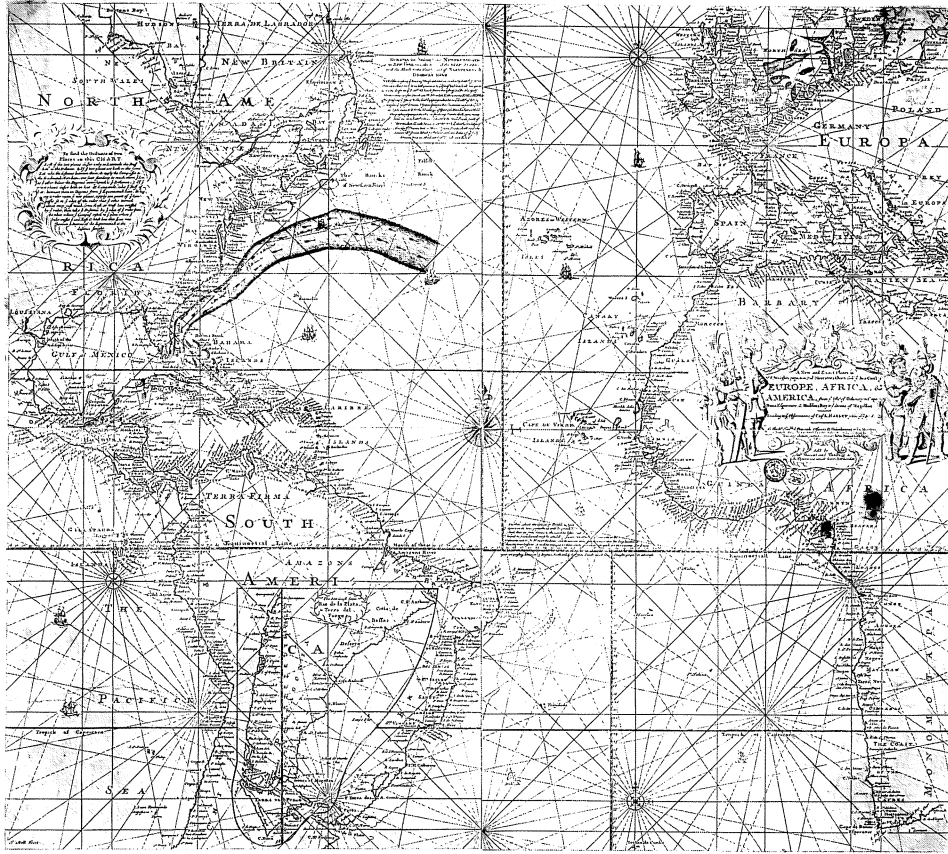


FIGURE 4. Benjamin Franklin, Franklin-Folger Chart of the Gulf Stream (London, [circa 1768]). Courtesy, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

Though he joined the ranks of the abolition movement later in life, writing satiric attacks on slavery and developing paternalistic schemes to manage the gradual emancipation of Philadelphia's slave population, Franklin's earlier writings attack slavery through a white supremacist fantasy to purge North America of the "Sons of *Africa*." In "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind" (1751), Franklin writes that "the Number of purely white People in the World is proportionally very small."

While we are, as I may call it, *Scouring* our Planet, by clearing *America* of Woods, and so making this Side of our Globe reflect a brighter Light to the Eyes of Inhabitants in *Mars* or *Venus*, why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People? why increase the Sons of *Africa* by Plant-

ing them in *America*, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red?

Might Franklin's black swath contain an anamorphic solution to the conundrum of racial mixing? Might the Gulf Stream offer a solution sanctified by nature to contain the force of black slave labor, harness it, convert it for profit, and safely keep it at a distance from the North American mainland? Or, perhaps, is it a natural conduit for purging the hemispheric economy of its black slaves, sweeping them speedily back to Africa?<sup>19</sup>

Franklin's chart might remind us of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's discussion of urban sewer systems in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, where the relationship between the visible street level and the filthy conduits below constitutes a symbolic system. The sewer contains, renders invisible, and sweeps away evidence of the material and social formations that sustain the sanitized domain of the rising bourgeoisie. Stallybrass and White describe this system as "one of the dominant tropes of western metaphysics: truth lies hidden behind a veil." Look again at Figure 4, above, where well-masted and well-laden ships navigate the surface of the black channel below, carrying eastward the fruits of slave labor that has been disciplined under the repressive apparatus of the plantation system. Only the black swath indicates the residue of the slave economy, black bodies—both their labor power and their potential for revolt—veiled from view. The illustration appears to have anatomical correlates as well. As with the sewer, associated in Stallybrass and White via Victor Hugo and Sigmund Freud with excrement, the Gulf Stream resembles a cloaca or rectal canal.<sup>20</sup>

The dehumanizing reduction of slave labor to an anamorphic black swath on Franklin's chart of the Gulf Stream is especially pronounced when placed next to Winslow Homer's *Gulf Stream* (Figure 5). Produced in a different context at the end of the nineteenth century, Homer's painting embraces human agency by featuring a black man as its focal point.

19. Benjamin Franklin, "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," in Franklin, *Writings*, ed. Lemay, 374. See "An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage," "Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks," and "Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade," all *ibid.*, 1154–1160.

20. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), 140. Franklin's efforts to cleanse the streets of Philadelphia are famously recounted in Part 3 of *The Autobiography*; see Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, Conn., 1964).

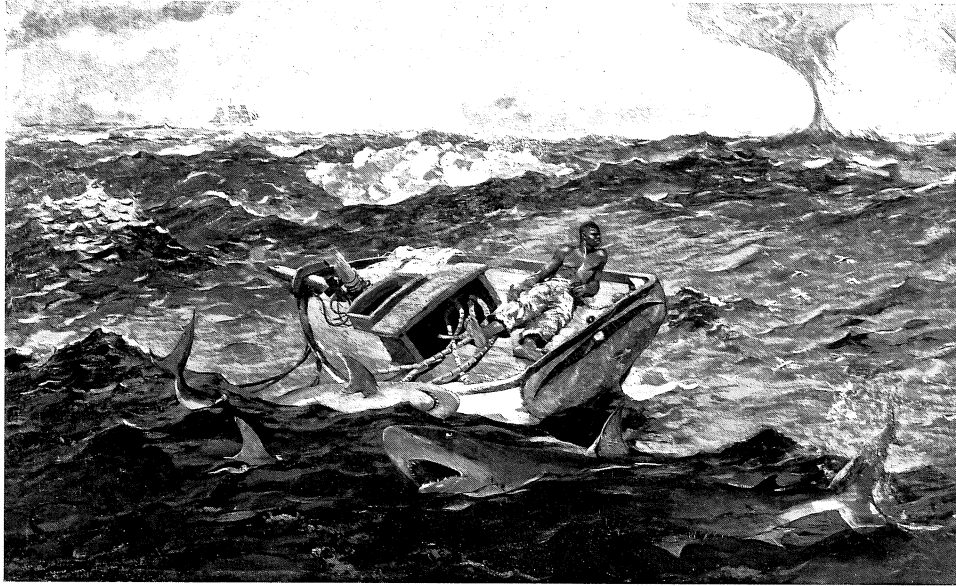


FIGURE 5. Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream*. 1899. Oil on canvas, 28  $\frac{1}{8}$   $\times$  49  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1906 (06.1234). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Homer produced this striking image in 1899 after visiting the South, where he witnessed the collapse of Reconstruction and the increasingly hostile environment faced by the region's black citizens, newly subject to nationally sanctioned segregation laws and de facto policing by lynch mobs. Here we see a heroic and muscular black man, perhaps dressed in military fatigues, charting a course between voracious sharks and an oncoming squall. The ship apparently has been dismantled during an earlier storm, but the human figure nevertheless appears to be at rest, seemingly unconcerned with the dangers that surround him. Though the black man's presence and posture caused confusion among Homer's patrons and reviewers, some even suggesting that the figure is irrelevant to the broader symbolism of the work, his realistic and detailed treatment undeniably draws the eye. In contrast to the repressed black presence in Franklin's chart, Homer represents a fully humanized subject that, as one recent critic notes, "marked a new direction in the graphic interpretation of African-American character and identity." Compelling is Peter H. Wood's fascinating and elegant interpretation, which employs the black figure and other objects associated with him to explore how Homer's work "deals in subtle and extended ways with slavery, U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean, southern race wars, and Jim Crow segregation." And yet, despite

the prominent placement of the black man, he is still represented as a victim of his circumstances. Homer does not indicate whether the Gulf Stream is a temporary respite from the hurricane of white racism on the horizon and the ravenous sharks below. In addition to the damaged state of the sloop, which diminishes the black man's agency, Homer also depicts the man bound to the boat by the sugarcane spilling from the hull that may represent chains.<sup>21</sup>

#### DOUGLASS'S BILLOWS

Homer was one of the earliest white American artists to place black people at the center of the frame. Among his earliest works in this vein was a sketch of Frederick Douglass addressing an abolitionist convention in Boston for *Harpers Weekly* in 1860. It is fitting, then, to conclude with Douglass's own contribution to the use of wind and sea in his antislavery writings. In Douglass we can witness how African American writers worked to reappropriate the figurative energy of the hurricane into the middle of the nineteenth century. Following the passage of the fugitive slave law in 1850, Douglass's attitude toward violent resistance to slavery changed. Having broken with William Lloyd Garrison over whether the U.S. Constitution was a pro-slavery document, Douglass began to vigorously tie resistance to slavery to the revolutionary discourses of American independence. In 1853, he wrote his only work of fiction, a novella entitled *The Heroic Slave*, which celebrated the successful slave mutiny led by Madison Washington in 1841. At the end of the novella, Madison wins over the respect even of his former captors, despite having violently commandeered the slave ship. The mutiny coincided with an oncoming squall, and the tempest strikes the ship right after its conclusion. Tom Grant, the mate formerly in control of the vessel, describes his estimation of Madison:

During all the storm, Madison stood firmly at the helm,—his keen eye fixed upon the binnacle. He was not indifferent to the dreadful hurricane;

21. An extensive reading of Homer's *Gulf Stream* can be found in Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 36–46. See also Henry B. Wonham, *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (New York, 2004), 3; Peter H. Wood, *Weathering the Storm: Inside Winslow Homer's "Gulf Stream"* (Athens, Ga., 2004), 91. Wood suggests that the waterspout may indicate the storm over Cuba in 1898 (43–47). African American troops were deployed to Cuba, sparking controversy among both whites and blacks. Even if, as Wood writes, Homer's "juxtaposition of a strong black man with a spiraling storm over Cuba should not be surprising," it remains unclear whether the storm is a source of the black man's strength or evidence of racial strife in the United States linked to events in Cuba.



yet he met it with the equanimity of an old sailor. He was silent but not agitated. The first words he uttered after the storm had slightly subsided, were characteristic of the man. "Mr. mate, you cannot write the bloody laws of slavery on those restless billows. The ocean, if not the land, is free."

"I confess, gentleman," Grant continues, "I felt myself in the presence of a superior man; one who, had he been a white man, I would have followed willingly and gladly in any enterprise." Like Amasa Delano, then, Madison Washington solves the dilemma of slave resistance by guiding the ship safely into port. But unlike in "Benito Cereno" where in Lima the slaves are brought to justice—the slave rebel Babo's head impaled on a stake—here, to the horror of Grant, "a company of *black* soldiers came on board, for the purpose . . . of protecting the property," but they refuse to recognize the former slaves under that category. When told that, "by the laws of Virginia and the laws of the United States, the slaves on board were as much property as the barrels of flour in the hold," the black soldiers "rolled up their white eyes in horror, as if the idea of putting men on a footing with merchandise were revolting to their humanity." And, as a consequence, the slaves' freedom is acknowledged, and they leave the ship never to be property again. Douglass thus reanimates the forces of nature, restoring to the desacralized winds a purposive and progressive trajectory.<sup>22</sup>

The contrast between Madison Washington's mastery of the wind and sea and that of Amasa Delano could not be starker. Faced with the incomprehensible, Delano objectifies his surroundings. As agent, Delano pacifies an unruly world and reduces it to an order that corresponds unproblematically with his intuition: blacks are cargo, the Spanish have let *things* get out of hand, order must be restored. One can only imagine how Madison Washington's slave rebels and the Bahamian soldiers might respond to Delano's sunny disposition at the conclusion of the novella, where he is caught off guard by Cereno's continuing gloom. Melville leaves speculation on this account to our imaginations.

Interestingly, Madison Washington and Amasa Delano share the view that the *meaning* of sea and sky cannot be fixed. But Madison Washington's "restless billows" (162) that resist any attempt to engrave upon them the laws of slavery are not Amasa Delano's clear blue sea and sky that, having "turned over new leaves," bear no traces of historical memory. This Don Benito Cereno understands: to Delano's "astonished and pained" question, "... you are saved;

22. Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (1853), in William L. Andrews, ed., *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader* (New York, 1996), all quotations on 162–163.

what has cast such a shadow upon you?" Cereno replies, "The negro" (762). The ensuing silence envelops Cereno's cryptic answer, drawing a lasting equivalence between him and Babo, who after his capture resolved to utter no sound whether by volition or force. Their silence, however, is the silence of human agency and memory, not the forgetfulness of Delano's anthropomorphic nature.

The language of storms provided a rich vocabulary, a discursive reservoir, for representing phenomena that denoted broad and deep social, commercial, and natural connections that belie the significance of arbitrary national and political borders. Nevertheless, even as this vocabulary pointed to the centrality of the Caribbean, or the circumatlantic more broadly, it was neither precise nor efficient enough to be exhausted by any particular signification. In a sense, the geographic, meteorological, and oceanographic representations of regional commonality worked against those that might have leveraged more human-constructed trans-Caribbean connections; thus, rather than together adding to the evidence of foundational regional solidarity, these representations effectively cancelled out one another. That is not to suggest a hermeneutic dead-end. There is much to learn about how various appeals to the lived experience of regional integrity intersected with the projects of nationalism, anticolonial struggle, and race consciousness in the Americas.