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With this book Zachary McLeod Hutchins makes an important contribution to the growing scholarly interest in expanding our understanding of what a published “slave narrative” was by investigating the eighteenth-century origins of what is usually understood to be a nineteenth-century Anglo-American genre. In recent years scholars such as Gloria Garcia, Kathryn McKnight and Leo Garofalo, Sean Kelley, Paul Lovejoy, myself and Robert Hanserd, and others have explored Cuba, South America, West Africa, French Louisiana, and other places throughout the Atlantic world to find, publish, and analyze African voices, so that we may go well beyond the offerings of the familiar Anglo-American publications and heighten our understandings of African perspectives on transatlantic slavery throughout the Americas until emancipation and beyond. Hutchins traces the origins of nineteenth-century Anglo-American narratives in eighteenth-century newspapers (especially runaway ads), published works containing slave narratives, and documents related to individuals appearing in those two sources. With this he studies how the narrative style evolved, thereby reevaluating the slave narrative in relation to printing and demonstrating how the familiar approach to slave narratives overlooks developments in eighteenth-century slavery.

In his book, Hutchins argues three important points. First, eighteenth-century newspapers are filled with accounts about slavery and should be read as slave narratives. This is an intriguing point based largely on conjecture that stresses the perspective of audiences—those who read British North American newspapers. It is worth noting that many other texts (some mentioned but not emphasized by Hutchins) really do describe events from the perspective of enslaved people themselves—they contain the voices of enslaved African people, voices speaking about their lives in Africa, the Americas, and on the slave ships in between. Nevertheless, the perspective Hutchins offers via newspapers is valuable. Second, eighteenth-century readers imagined and reconstructed lively narratives about slavery from textual fragments in newspapers and other texts. This in-
triguing and certainly plausible point is also asserted but not demonstrated. Third, eighteenth-century slave narratives were associated with global politics, foreign relations, and war. This is the most important point, which Hutchins demonstrates quite well, and it is the most valuable contribution of the book.

Hutchins makes the case for his three points in five chapters. The first addresses Samuel Sewall and his well-known tract, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (1700), which Hutchins argues was hardly an abolitionist tract or even a harbinger thereof since Sewall traded in slaves before and after writing it. Instead, Sewall critiqued unlawful enslavement, a critique shaped by war and the politics of the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, Sewall's work fits a pattern increasingly stressed by scholars, namely that with rare exceptions antislavery writings before the Revolutionary era criticized not the immorality of slavery altogether but rather how slavery was practiced. Further, Hutchins writes that early eighteenth-century Boston newspaper ads about enslaved people involved in destructive fires linked their actions to the legitimacy of international political events, not the legitimacy of their enslavement. Hutchins postulates that readers developed attitudes about slavery, legitimacy, and foreign policy that contributed to what would later become the published slave narrative. This point was convincing, and I would add that this development happened in a world shaped by the international transatlantic slave trade and the politics and diplomacy thereof. It was a world of slavery before natural growth rates of enslaved people (as opposed to imports on slave ships) dominated North American slavery demographically and before revolutionary and Christian ideology and independence shaped the actions and reactions of enslaved people, free Blacks, and whites.

The second chapter addresses serial runaway ads in newspapers and speculates that audiences imagined the trajectory of the runaways' lives by following them in the serial ads. This, too, helped pave the way for future audiences who were learning how to read and understand the lives of people resisting slavery. An important part of the story of a man named Daniel (and by extension many others in similar situations) was shaped by his life and experiences in the maritime world, which were connected to international politics, and those politics influenced how readers judged Daniel and other individuals, as well as slavery itself. Hutchins's emphasis here is less on the lives of the individuals and their voices and more on how audiences read them. This aspect of the book is quite speculative, since the documentation favors the lives of individuals and the context that one might develop to better understand them.

The third chapter addresses the familiar cases of elite Africans, whom Europeans and colonials in the Americas considered to be "princes," who had been caught up in slavery. This included Ayuba Sulayman Diallo (Job ben Solomon), Ansa Sarraku (William Ansah Sessarakoo), and others described in contemporary publications. We know that these works were not connected to the abolition movement (which hardly existed at the time), but rather promoted criticism that people of high birth were treated so poorly. Hutchins clearly shows that in each case the circumstances of enslavement, release, and publication were related to British imperial-diplomatic interests—developments readers fully understood. These enslaved individuals used diplomacy and diplomatic interest to leverage an improved position or freedom itself, and these works became what Hutchins calls a blueprint for anyone seeking emancipation. Quoting Herman Bennett, he writes "your free-born Briton could feel for a prince, particularly a prince in distress."[1] In other words, the emphasis on diplomacy in the eighteenth century was a product of how the international transatlantic slave trade (not natural growth among enslaved populations in individual colonies and empires) dominated Atlantic slavery
in during that time. This trend began waning in the late eighteenth century at the same time the nature of published slave narratives also began changing.

The fourth chapter investigates Briton Hammon and other enslaved people who chose sides during international conflict, and these developments shaped their published narratives. For Hammon and others, the published narrative reflected a perception of themselves as caught up in international slavery, as was the case in nineteenth-century narratives. Hammon and others constructed narratives of their lives to intertwine with international diplomacy to gain public sympathy for their pursuit of freedom. Hammon’s 1760 published narrative had this in mind, which explains the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of some of its details.

In chapter 5 Hutchins addresses two themes with varied success. In the first, he shows how an enslaved man named Caesar and the well-known Phillis Wheatley Peters appropriated revolutionary ideology during the Imperial Crisis to attack slavery. He then goes on to investigate a debate between Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and John Dickinson concerning the impact of new British policy and whether it “enslaved” Americans, as Dickinson claimed. Hutchins views the interactions of these two as a debate over the racialization of slavery. He believes their debate contributed to a later style of slave narrative that attacked arbitrary abuses by those in power over others. Hutchins asserts that the “War of American independence established slavery as a product of racialization, not war,” after which race-based slave narratives followed (p. 189). Hutchins notes that after the Revolution established the racialization of slavery, writers no longer used the slavery metaphor to describe abusive power. This may have been true, but one should also consider that the reason Dickinson and others stopped using the metaphor was that they associated it with the British, whom they had gotten rid by then via independence, so they no longer needed the metaphor. Although it may have lingered in other corners, the use of this metaphor in national political debate and crisis came and went with the Revolutionary era. The meaning of the debate between Crèvecoeur and Dickinson is a bit murky. It would have been helpful if Hutchins had mentioned that Crèvecoeur (a French noble) supported the American cause, emigrated to the United States, and wrote sympathetically about Americans. Yet he was also somewhat critical of them, not unlike two other French nobles of the day—Lafayette (who criticized American slavery) and Tocqueville (who wrote about America after the French Revolution). Hutchins makes it clear that Crèvecoeur attacked Dickinson for his use of the slavery metaphor, but the link from Crèvecoeur to the nineteenth-century slave narrative is not clear. Further, while there is an argument to made for racialization in this era, it is not entirely clear how this debate contributed to it.

Hutchins’s final chapter or conclusion effectively stresses how change after the 1808 slave trade ban removed the international, diplomatic component to American slavery. Thus, the slave narrative shifted to domestic issues (including the growth of slavery due to natural increase), and with that race became a more prominent factor. Hutchins argues that Olaudah Equiano’s published work was the end of the old-style narrative with its diplomatic, international emphasis and not the beginning of something new. This is based on his view that later narratives by Africans like Boyer-eau Brinch (Jeffrey Brace) and Brotere (Venture Smith) focused on the domestic agenda, not international issues. In other words, to Hutchins, Equiano’s work was closer to that of Diallo and Sessarakku than that of Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs. I disagree. The vast majority of Brinch’s 1810 published account (twenty-one years after Vassa’s) is about international events—life and warfare in West Africa, the transatlantic slave trade via the Caribbean to New England, and
the Revolutionary War, which became an international conflict that Brinch describes in detail from the perspective of an African fighting in it. And while the bulk of Broteer’s 1798 account describes his life in New England, its initial chapters are significantly international in character, describing the loss of freedom in his West African homeland followed by transport to the Caribbean and finally to New England. The point is that the transatlantic slave trade shaped the international character of the narratives—a major point that Hutchins himself promotes—and as long as that trade continued, so too did the international character of the published narratives. The published account of Vassa (as Equiano preferred to be called) marked not the end of an era or turning point but rather was part of a transition era in the publication of African voices, since Vassa rigorously promoted abolitionism, yet presented a tale heavily shaped by international events, as did Quobna Ottabah Cugoano (John Stuart) in his influential 1787 account (two years prior to that of Vassa).[2] On the other hand, Hutchins’s point that newspapers remained important in the nineteenth century, but in a different way, is well taken. Further, he believes that the desire for citizenship and associated rights shaped later slave narratives and African American literature. This too is a good point and speaks to the importance of independence and the American Revolution in shaping these developments.

It was not a coincidence that published accounts began to emphasize the desire for citizenship and associated rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: enslaved people were telling their stories during changing times. Hutchins does not emphasize this point, but the American Revolution unleashed an ideology that many Africans and African Americans appropriated to attack slavery, usually stressing the irony or problem that they remained enslaved in a new country supposedly based on freedom. Further, in addition to offering new ideologies, the Revolution set into motion the forces that finally banned the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, after which the vast increase in slavery resulted from the natural increase of the enslaved population. Thus, the basis of what shaped the earlier narratives described by Hutchins—the transatlantic slave trade and its accompanying politics—disappeared. This happened in a newly independent and expanding country defined largely by westward conquest and enslavement of people born there.

Hutchins has traced an important literary development regarding slave narratives at this time by seeking the origins of a specific Anglo-American genre, yet it is worth noting that what he describes was part of something happening throughout the Atlantic world in many languages. Hutchins appropriately takes an expanded view of where to look for printed material involving the lives of Africans, yet there was much, much more happening in the same era—in Spanish, German, and other languages in published works from Brazil to North America to Europe. We would all do well to pay more attention to African voices (and with that, their narratives) and interpret the well-known Anglo-American genre within a larger context. In other words, what Hutchins describes was part of a much larger (forgotten) story that began even before the eighteenth century and developed throughout the Atlantic world.

Notes

[2]. Quobna Ottabah Cugoano (John Stuart), Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species... (London: 1787).
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