Murder and Authorial Control in the Early African American Criminal Confession

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Abstract: *The published biographies of executed African American criminals from colonial and early national America offer a rich field of study for scholars across multiple disciplines. Criminal confessions with black subjects point both to the creation of modern ideologies of criminality and the development of an African American literature. While receiving due critical attention, scholars have tended to view these biographies as a unified body, ignoring important formal differences among the texts themselves. As a corrective, this article focuses on two unique works in the early black-gallows tradition:* The Dying Confession of Pomp *(1795) and* The Confession of John Joyce *(1808). Both texts are rare to the genre, in that they appropriate the conservative form of the criminal confession to advance claims for greater African American rights. Pomp's scribe, printer Jonathan Plummer, defends Pomp's murder of his master and seeks out environmental factors leading to the crime. In Joyce's confession, author Richard Allen incorporates the newly influential form of the trial report to assert the lawful presence of free African Americans in the north. Plummer and Allen each respond to literary and publishing trends that transcend the race of their subjects to assert a political message regarding African Americans and crime.*

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The published confessions of convicted black felons from colonial and early national America provide a rich field of study for students and scholars of law and literature. Criminal confessions developed as an autonomous literary genre in colonial America out of the printed versions of execution sermons preached by Puritan ministers. As a part of the execution spectacle, large crowds first gathered to attend a church service at which the condemned was also present. Here a minister, typically chosen by the condemned and often of considerable fame, preached a sermon that rivaled the execution for the most important event of the day.[i] While sermons were a best-selling genre in colonial America, the printed versions of execution sermons had an added appeal, in that they typically contained a first-person biography of the executed criminal, usually written by the same clergyman. Beginning in the 1730s, and becoming more commonplace as the century progressed, the autobiographical narratives of condemned criminals

began to be printed and sold in pamphlet and broadside form apart from execution sermons.[ii] This enabled printers to produce their texts prior to the execution spectacle and sell them to the crowds gathered to witness those events, rather than weeks afterwards when public interest had somewhat abated. Printers and legal officials with access to the condemned in prison then began to replace clergy as the typical scribes of criminal confessions. The didacticism of religious authority thereby ceded some ground in the genre to a growing sensationalism and the more commercial concerns of printers.[iii]

Despite this more secular appeal, criminal confessions began to lose preeminence among other types of crime literature in America around the turn of the nineteenth century. The genre first came to be eclipsed, in terms of commercial viability and cultural influence, by the poly-vocal form of the trial report in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Documenting the multiple testimonies presented at criminal trials, rather than one person's slanted view of events, trial reports offered readers a greater semblance of objectivity and claim to truth than the subjective, first person criminal confession was able to convey.[iv]

While whites of varying ethnicities comprised the subjects of criminal confessions (and later trial reports), the appearance of African Americans in the genre conveyed a separate meaning. In terms of sheer numbers, there were more first-person biographies of executed African American criminals published during the eighteenth century than slave narratives. In fact, there were only four slave narratives published before 1800: those of Briton Hammon (1760), James Albert Gronniowsaw (1770), Olaudah Equiano (1789), and Venture Smith (1798). By contrast, there were at least nine known first-person biographies of executed African American criminals published during the same period: the confessions of Fortune (1762), Bristol (1763), Arthur (1768), Johnson Green (1786), Joseph Mountain (1790), Pomp (1795), Thomas

Powers (1796), Abraham Johnstone (1797), and Stephen Smith (1797). Overshadowing other types of African American life writing published in the eighteenth century, criminal confessions with black subjects further held a disproportionate place in the broader genre, in terms of population demographics at the time. Richard Slotkin records that texts with African American subjects make up "some 14% of the total" of all criminal confessions published prior to 1800, "higher by far than [the black] percentage of the New England population" during its highpoint in the eighteenth century.[v]

Accordingly, the popular genre of the criminal confession has had a lasting influence on the African American literary tradition and its corresponding theory and criticism. Although criminal confessions with African American subjects (almost exclusively authored by white scribes) mainly advance pro-slavery or pro-colonization arguments, suggesting that people of African descent are prone to criminality and thus unfit to exist in the developing nation, this punitively designed genre has received sustained, if sporadic, attention from important scholars of African American literature and culture since the 1970s.[vi] Yet, by mainly viewing criminal confessions with black subjects as an important stage in the evolution, or teleology, of the antebellum slave narrative, critics have elided over important formal differences among the texts themselves. Jeannine DeLombard has rightly pointed to *The Address of Abraham Johnstone* (1797) as an important turning point in the African American criminal confession genre.[vii] Johnstone was convicted and executed for murdering a fellow African American—"Thomas Read, a Guinea Negro"—in Woodbury, New Jersey.[viii] He not only used the occasion of his *Address* to proclaim his innocence, but apparently wrote the text himself, with little editorial interference after the fact. Yet Johnstone's "exculpatory first-person account" (DeLombard 155) appeared between two other remarkable texts from the era, *The Dying Confession of Pomp*

(1795) and *The Confession of John Joyce* (1808). If not wholly concerned with proclaiming the innocence of their black subjects, these texts likewise employ the criminal confession to advance contrary claims for greater African American freedom and inclusion. The confessions of Pomp and Joyce have further significance, in that they display the ways genre convention was (or can be) manipulated by the editor of black criminal narrative to assert political meaning concerning African Americans and the law.

In *The Dying Confession of Pomp*, the text's white scribe, printer Jonathan Plummer, offers an unqualified (yet not *exculpatory*) defense of Pomp's murder of his master, suggesting environmental causes behind the slave's actions. Appearing during the contemporaneous Revolution in Haiti (1791-1804), Plummer seeks to make a space for black citizens in the new American nation by divesting Pomp's crime of its broader, revolutionary significance. Plummer further dismisses apparently irrational explanations for the murder located in Pomp's own account of events. Refuting the subject's explanation for the cause of his violent crime, Plummer's work exposes many of the contradictions and limitations of Enlightenment rationality and liberality, even as it draws upon these intellectual currents to make bold claims for African American inclusion in post-Revolutionary, post-emancipation New England.

A more complete appropriation of the criminal confession as a tool in the struggle for African American freedom appears in *The Confession of John Joyce*. Joyce's confession was authored by Richard Allen, a founder of Philadelphia's African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, and a leading figure in that city's sizable, and ever expanding, community of free African Americans. Allen's involvement in Joyce's case seems activated by more localized concerns than Plummer's interest in Pomp, as the former works to shift the view of African Americans in his native city, asserting their lawful presence in the face of the murder of a white

citizen by a black criminal agent. In addition to this separate historical and geographical frame, Allen's work further appeared in a different literary climate than Pomp's text, at a time when the popularity of criminal confession literature had been surpassed by the newly influential form of the trial report. This shifting literary trend is key to an understanding of Allen's work. Much more than a standard criminal biography, *The Confession of John Joyce* resembles a skillful adaptation of the trial report, presenting a series of objectively recorded witness testimonies that both acknowledge Joyce's culpability in a murder, and work to exonerate his alleged accomplice, African American Peter Mathias. Allen's efforts on behalf of Philadelphia's black community thus springs from his knowledge and sophisticated use of literary convention. What we gain from a comparative analysis of *The Dying Confession of Pomp* and *The Confession of John Joyce*, then, is the sense of an evolution of authorial control for black authors in the African American criminal confession genre.

While the concept of authorial control has famously been used by Robert Stepto to explain the development of the antebellum slave narrative and the inception of an African American literary canon and tradition,[ix] a comparative reading of the narratives of Pomp and Joyce suggest a similar development at a much earlier date. Moreover, the type of authorial control exhibited in Allen's *Confession of John Joyce* significantly deviates from Stepto's critical model. As Lara Cohen summarizes the critic's work, "Stepto's influential taxonomy of slave narratives…charts the progression from the 'eclectic narrative,' characterized by a flurry of documentation and lack of authorial control, to the author's increasing ability to shake off an authenticating apparatus and step forth unaccompanied, and even authenticate others' texts."[x] A much different form of authorial control appears in *The Confession of John Joyce*, wherein the pull of its guiding force, Richard Allen, is difficult to locate through its seemingly objective

guise. Rather than an "authenticating apparatus," which the subject struggles to transcend, Allen's text provides an assemblage of voices that together advance a case for African American inclusion in the developing nation, even as it acknowledges the culpability of a black criminal agent. If *The Dying Confession of Pomp* and *The Confession of John Joyce* return us to the importance of the amanuensis in early African American life writing, Allen's work marks the radical intervention of the black editor in criminal confession literature.[xi]

Jonathan Plummer's Intervention

The Dying Confession of Pomp recalls the murder of James Furbush, resident of Andover Massachusetts, by his black slave or indentured servant, Pomp. Of all the crimes recorded in criminal confessions with African American subjects, murder would seem the most likely to provoke fears over black slave revolt and social insurrection. Yet Pomp's narrative was the first African American criminal confession published in New England during the eighteenth century to detail a slave's murder of his master. Most of the narratives of African American murderers that precede and follow Pomp's text during the century relate crimes of "passion" with female victims. The first single-subject narrative of an African American murderer printed in colonial America was Cotton Mather's *Tremenda: The Dreadful Sound with Which the Wicked are to be Thunderstruck* (1721), an execution day sermon, prison interview, and brief biography devoted to Joseph Hanno, a black resident of Mather's native Boston convicted for murdering his wife. Apart from Hanno's wife, the remaining victims of murders recorded in eighteenth-century African American criminal confessions were white. *The Last Words and Dying Speech of Edmund Fortis* (1795) relates the murder of a white female domestic worker by the slave Fortis; and both *The Dying Speech of Bristol* (1763) and *The Dying Speech of Thomas Powers* (1796) detail cases in which slaves murdered their masters' daughters.[xii] Relatedly, two other execution

sermons that antedate Pomp's tale, Mather Byle's *The Prayer and Plea of David, to be Delivered From Blood Guiltiness* (1751) and Henry Trevett Channing's *God Admonishing his People of Their Duty as Parent's and Masters* (1786), treat black female domestic workers charged with murdering white children under their care. These texts undoubtedly raise the specter of black revolution through their description of murders with white victims. Nevertheless, *The Dying Confession of Pomp* was the first criminal confession to recount a case of a slave, or bondsman, murdering his master, a fact that makes the text's explicit claims for African American rights even more remarkable.

Pomp's narrative was written and published by Jonathan Plummer, a printer based in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Plummer refrained from supplying any preface to Pomp's confession. Rather, he permits the condemned murderer to have his say first, and then offers his own complimentary analysis of the details found in Pomp's narrative. Plummer's analysis of Pomp's crime loses some of its weight through the self-deprecatory tone he strikes near the end of the text, when he advertises other services he provides. Here, Plummer claims to engage in "various branches of trifling business—Underbeds filled with straw and wheeled to the ladies [sic] doors—Any person wanting a few dollars at any time may be supplied by leaving a proper adequate in pawn—Wanted 1000 junk bottles."[xiii] In addition to distracting from his insights into Pomp's crime, the scribe's self-presentation as a junk dealer fails to accurately represent his efforts as a printer. Plummer, between the years 1789-1818, produced over forty broadsides of which we still know today. Sensational tales of death and dying appear as the printer's main topics of interest. A sampling of titles printed by Plummer includes: *Death of Mr. Charles Austin…Who Was Shot in Boston on the 4th of August Last by T.O. Selfridge, Esq.* (1806); *Death of Tamar Ham!...Who died in Boston, One Night in the Summer of the Year 1816, After Having*

Been Knocked Down and Stamped the Day Before (1816); *Deaths of Three Persons who Killed Themselves* (1807); and *Dreadful Earthquake and the Fatal Spotted Fever: A Funeral Sermon and a Funeral Psalm, on the Death of About Ten or Fifteen Thousand of People Killed by an Earthquake on the Twenty-Sixth of March 1812 in South America* (1812). Plummer then tried to capitalize on sensational scenes of death, particularly violent death; and he apparently held this literary output on the same level as his "other branches of trifling business." Considering this, it seems remarkable that Plummer would make such a significant contribution to early African American crime literature.

Plummer likely modeled Pomp's broadside after another Massachusetts text published two years prior, *The Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost* (1793). Evidence indicates that Plummer either reprinted or merely resold extant copies of Frost's *Confession* from his Newburyport office.[xiv] Isaiah Thomas was the original publisher of Frost's broadside, another fact that suggests the influence of the text. Based first in Boston and then in Worcester, Massachusetts—the latter being the sight of Frost's crime and trial—Thomas is remembered for his substantial capital and distribution chain.[xv] Thomas is also famous for having produced what is commonly designated as the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), among other culturally influential texts.[xvi] Like Pomp's later narrative, Frost's *Confession* is divided into two parts that are nearly equal in length: the criminal's recounting of his biography and capital offense, and an editor's commentary on that account. There is an additional sophistication to the design of Frost's *Confession*, which begins with a recitation of his murder of his father, a crime for which he was acquitted ten years earlier. The details of this act foreshadow Frost's final murder, as both crimes involve scenes, as well as the tools, of agricultural labor. Recounting his murder of his father in the opening paragraph, Frost then states, "My mother is dead; I always

regarded her, and ever thought my father had no affection for her, and that he used her ill; this induced me to kill him, which deed I executed on the 23rd of September, 1783, as we were digging a ditch together; I knocked him down with a handspike, and then beat his brains out."[xvii] Frost's final murder of "Capt. Allen" contains similar circumstances: "Capt. Allen was going to set out cabbage plants, and ordered me to go with him, and to get a hoe…when I returned with the hoe, I found him stooping to fix a plant—I then thought it would be a good time to put my design in execution, and accordingly went up to him and gave him a blow on the head." "Capt. Allen" additionally represents a symbolic father figure in Frost's narrative, the last in a line of indenture masters with whom the killer is forced to reside after his murder of his own father. Frost's earlier, unpunished crime then appears in his *Confession* as a tragic error of the legal system, which has permitted this final assault. An act that was likely defended in terms of natural rights in the Revolutionary climate of 1783 becomes transmuted ten years later into a call for greater social control and discipline to ensure the development of the newly formed nation. As the text's anonymous editor states in his complimentary analysis: "[Frost] thought it no great crime to kill such as he supposed treated him ill…He was a most dangerous person to society."

The fact that Pomp's broadside, with its bi-part structure, so closely resembles an earlier text from a culturally influential printer suggests that Plummer's treatment of Pomp's crime was guided mainly by generic convention, rather than an emancipatory politics. John Sekora has made a similar argument in his illuminating, history of the book approach to *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing* [sic] *Deliverance of Britton Hammon* (1760), the text commonly designated as the first African American slave narrative. Sekora argues that the publishers of Hammon's text, the Boston firm of Green and Russell, were merely capitalizing on a contemporary demand for Indian captivity narratives—produced by the current Seven Years'

War—which Hammon's biography includes. Consequently, Sekora affirms that Green and Russell should not be mistaken as "radical printers" for producing this historically significant text with an African American subject, further noting that "Boston did not possess a radical or opposition press in 1760."[xviii] Similar claims can be made about Jonathan Plummer, as his larger print catalogue reveals scant, if any, impetus toward abolition or reform. As we have seen, Plummer is more aptly characterized as a printer of popular and sensational ephemera. His involvement in Pomp's case, therefore, can be attributed, like most criminal confession broadsides of eighteenth-century New England, to the geographical proximity of the printer to the crime.[xix] Yet by placing Pomp's text not only in a generic or cultural context, but in the political context of Massachusetts' post-abolition debates, the radical nature of the printer's work emerges.

Pomp's crime occurred nearly a dozen years after slavery was officially abolished in Massachusetts, following the decision of Chief Justice John D. Cushing in the 1783 State Supreme Court Case *Commonwealth v. Jennison*. However, emancipation measures in the state thereafter appeared under the ambiguous designation of "voluntary," leading to the confusion of many slaves and even some masters, as well as outright abuses of the law. Joanne Pope Melish explains that, "The ambiguity was never resolved in Massachusetts. After 1783 some white slave owners sent their slaves away, or began to pay them wages, or sold them out of the state (breaking the law or acting in ignorance of it), or did nothing, some of their slaves simply ran away."[xx] Although slavery "was declared to have ended when no slaves were reported in the first federal census [of 1790]," the lives of many former Massachusetts slaves altered little in the decade following emancipation (Melish 76). "Public indenture" was a condition many former slaves fell into, wherein a governing body of selectmen issued and controlled indenture contracts

(Melish 100). Moreover, the unfinished business of emancipation, as well as the unavoidable presence of the newly freed, led to debates among whites, both in Massachusetts and the broader Northeastern region at the time, about the proper course of action to take with African Americans. Plummer's printed response to Pomp's crime engages in this debate, whether intentionally or inadvertently, as it makes stalwart claims for African American inclusion in post-emancipation New England.

Pomp's narrative evokes the vulnerable situation of "free" African Americans in Massachusetts following the abolition of slavery in the state. The subject explains that at the time he murdered his master, Captain Furbush, he had been residing with him "ten or a dozen years." This marks the beginning of Pomp's time with Furbush around 1783 to 1785, either immediately before, or sometime after, the State Supreme Court decision in *Commonwealth v. Jennison*. Pomp's relation of his experiences appealing to the local selectmen for new masters suggests that he was kept as a public indenture, rather than illegally held as a slave. Pomp then states, "I went to the Select men of Andover to know whether I had not a right to leave [Abbot's home], and by their advice continued there a considerable time longer. But after a while it came to pass that Captain Furbush took a notion to have a black man; and applying to the Select men, obtained their consent that I should be his servant." While Pomp sways local authorities to allow him to switch masters and reside with Furbush, he is apparently unable to escape from Furbush through similar legal channels. After realizing that "I did not like [Furbush] any better than the man with whom I last lived," Pomp explains that "I ran away from him, but was pursued, found, brought back, and severely flogged by him for my pains. I afterwards ran off again but met with the same fate." Pomp's cycle of dissatisfaction, flight, and recapture establishes the close resemblance of

"free" African American indenture to enslavement in post-emancipation Massachusetts of the 1780s and 90s.

As a bondsman, Pomp expresses that he expected some modicum of freedom and financial compensation for his labors. It is when these are denied, in fact, that he begins his series of failed attempts at escape. Pomp insists that the financial success or failure of Furbush's farm rested entirely on his skill and expertise. He explains that when he first began to reside with Furbush, his master "did some work himself, but I did not like the way he carried on his business, and after a while he left off work entirely, and by my desire left the whole management of the farm to me. I performed nearly all the work that was done on the place, cut all the hay, and with a trifle of help…raised a hundred and seventy bushels of corn in a year." Despite these efforts, Pomp complains that Furbush "still continued unkind to me, never letting me go to meeting on Sundays, and forcing me to clear out cattle on those sacred days. When I asked him for money, he commonly gave me no more than four pence half penny at a time: and even on election day he gave me no more, nor would he suffer me on those days to go frolicking till after one o'clock in the afternoon." Pomp's troubles with Furbush thus ensue from a lack of personal freedom and financial compensation he feels rightfully due anyone in his position.

Alongside these claims to personal liberty and a just wage, Pomp further presents his crime as the result of a suppressed sexuality. He explains that he "entertained an idea that Mrs. Furbush and the farm would be mine, after the death of my master. The hopes of being master, husband, and owner, on the one hand, and the cruel treatment I had received from Furbush on the other, prompted me to wish for his death, and produced an idea of hastening [it] by [killing] him myself." Pomp's expressed desire to become a "master" here may be viewed as an even greater extension of the appeal for monetary compensation made earlier in the narrative. At the same

time, his hope of acquiring Mrs. Furbush following the murder grants a sexual motivation to his crime. Pomp, in fact, mentions a suppressed sexual desire for Furbush's daughter earlier in the text. He thus recalls, "I was frequently troubled with convulsive fits and sometimes crazy in such a degree, that I was generally bolted in to a chamber every night in order to hinder me from getting into the chamber where my master's daughter slept." Rather than a simple desire for mastery, or material wealth alone, Pomp's violent actions toward Furbush are explained in his narrative through an enforced isolation and suppressed sexuality.

In addition to a desire for financial compensation or sexual gratification, Pomp offers a quasi-spiritual explanation behind his killing of Furbush. Pomp states that on the morning of the murder he "arose considerably disordered having a great singing noise in the ears, and something whispering strange things to me," and explains that later that night "something still kept whispering in my ear, that now is your time to kill! kill him now! now or never! now! now!" Heeding the command of this mysterious voice, Pomp recalls that he "took an axe and went softly into the room of my master, and the moon shining bright, distinguished him from my mistress, I raised the ax before he awaked and at two blows, I so effectually did the job for him that he never even stretched himself." Pomp's claim to have been directed by a supernatural voice resembles two other famous murder cases of the era. In 1782, William Beadle killed his wife and children and then himself in the town of Wethersfield, Connecticut. In a journal left for posterity, Beadle insisted that his actions were "directed by the hand of heaven."[xxi] The case of James Yates, who also murdered his family, likewise claiming that he was directed to do so by God, took place in the year following Pomp's trial, 1796. In a criminal confession published that same year in the *Philadelphia Minerva* and *New-York Weekly Magazine* entitled "An Account of a Murder Committed by J—Y—upon His Family," Yates asserted that, "a spirit had appeared to

him while he read his Bible, commanding that he destroy his idols."[xxii] Reports of both killers have long been viewed as source texts for Charles Brockden Brown's 1798 novel *Wieland: or, The Transformation*. Readers familiar with Brown's work will recall that the novel relates the case of Theodore Wieland, who murders his family after he is instructed to do so by what appears to be a disembodied voice. Discussing these two sources for the novel, Caleb Smith observes that "Both documents belonged to the growing body of sensational crime literature and to a wider conversation in the press about the dangerous tendencies of [religious] unorthodoxy" (90). Pomp's narrative contributes to this cultural trope present across a constellation of texts published in close temporal proximity yet introduces another potential outcome of religious fanaticism. Whereas Beadle, Yates, and Brown's fictional Wieland cite supernatural instruction as their explanation for murdering their wives and children, Pomp claims it as one of several factors leading him to slay an oppressive master.

Pomp's reiteration of a cultural trope that would feature so prominently in Brown's *Wieland* suggests the influence of the gothic on the text. In *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (1998), historian Karen Halttunen elucidates the influence of gothic tropes and conventions in late eighteenth-century American crime narrative, particularly the confessional biographies of murderers. Halttunen reminds us that colonial era criminal biography, almost exclusively produced by Puritan clergy, sought to present "the condemned murderer as [an] exemplary sinner."[xxiii] By contrast, "The new Gothic murderer," commonly encountered in American criminal biography from the 1780s forward, "like the villain in Gothic fiction—was [depicted] first and last [as] a moral monster, between whom and the normal community yawned an impassable gulf" (5). Halttunen then asserts that "The most important cultural work performed by the Gothic narrative of murder was its reconstruction of the criminal

transgressor: from common sinner with whom the larger community of sinners were urged to identify in the service of their own salvation, into moral monster from whom readers were instructed to shrink" (4-5). Halttunen attributes this new figuration not simply to an increasingly secular culture, but to "the new understanding of human nature provoked by the Enlightenment" (35). As she states, "Horror was about the essential meaninglessness of evil within an Enlightenment worldview committed to the basic goodness of humankind" (56). Pomp's text clearly displays the influence of the gothic in its focus on the violent details of the murder and its allusion to a sexual motive underlying the crime. Yet Plummer's work significantly differs from both Puritan and Enlightenment-era narratives of killers, as described by Halttunen. Rather than depicting the killer as someone with whom the reader should identify because of a shared sinful nature, or as someone from whom the reader should "shrink" because of his alien status as a "moral monster," the text presents Pomp as someone for whom a privileged community of readers bears some responsibility, because of the existence and corrupt practices of societal and governmental institutions.

In his complimentary analysis of the killer's first-person account, printer Jonathan Plummer considers the factors that shaped Pomp's crime. Doing so, he echoes, though always expands upon, points found in Pomp's own version of events. Taken together, these points comprise a stunning case for an advancement of African American rights in post-slavery Massachusetts. The first explanation Plummer offers is Furbush's financial exploitation of Pomp. Plummer states that Pomp "was very capable of contriving business on a farm, and such was his strength and industry, that besides the [board,] which he received for his labor, Capt. Furbush could very well have afforded him 50 dollars per year—With such wages…he might soon have acquired money enough to purchase 50 acres of excellent land, and to have enabled him to clear

and improve the same." Plummer here echoes Pomp's own point regarding his great value to Furbush's business and lack of pay for his labors, as he seeks out environmental explanations behind the murder.

Alongside a claim to due wages, Plummer echoes the subject's own point that a suppressed sexuality contributed to his crime, thereby claiming the black subject's sexual rights. Plummer suggests that if Pomp had been paid a fair wage "some unfortunate white woman might possibly have sought asylum in his arms, or at least the…girl that fell within the line of his acquaintance would have sprung like a nimble doe [upon] his marriage bed—The animating sweets of freedom, and of domestic life, had then been all his own—He would neither have sullied his hand with innocent blood." There is certainly an element of racial condescension in Plummer's assertion that Pomp would have made a good husband for "some unfortunate white woman." Here, the printer seems to suggest that free men of color can play a useful role in society only by emulating socially respectable white men: owning property and even marrying "unfortunate" women of the dominant race. Yet, aside from this lapse into racial condescension, and apart from merely fleshing out a point embedded in Pomp's own narrative, Plummer's appeal here speaks to a broader sexual interest that pervades the text. After stating at the close of the broadside that he conducts "various branches of trifling business," including "Underbeds filled with straw and wheeled to the ladies [sic] door," and the purchasing of pawned articles and "junk bottles," Plummer advertises his services in the fields of sex and romance: "A certain secret disorder cured privately and expeditiously—Love-letters in prose and verse furnished on the shortest notice—The art of gaining the object beloved reasonably taught." With this final advertisement, even Plummer's offer to provide "Underbeds filled with straw and wheeled to ladies [sic] doors" carries sexual undertones. On a literal level, the printer here is merely selling

his time to (single) women looking for help moving a cumbersome piece of household furniture. But combined with his imaginative match making for Pomp, as well as his offers to cure venereal disease and write love letters, Plummer's offer to deliver mattresses to single women strikes a lascivious note.

Still, we should not let indications of a personal sensibility diminish the radical nature of Plummer's appeal to Pomp's sexual rights. By citing this particular environmental cause of Pomp's crime, Plummer goes against the grain of most early African American crime narrative, which typically promote fears regarding miscegenation. Plummer was writing at a time when rape, particularly the rape of white women, was the dominant crime recorded in first-person criminal narratives with African American subjects. The years 1790-1804 saw the publication of the narratives of five African American rapists condemned to death for raping, and in some cases also murdering, white women: those of Joseph Mountain in 1790, Edmund Fortis in 1795, Thomas Powers in 1796, Cato in 1803, and John Battus in 1804. These texts each provoke fears of miscegenation in order to strengthen their cases for a greater suppression of African American freedom and mobility.[xxiv] While it seems that Plummer is drawing upon the same sexual stereotypes when he records Pomp's expressed desire for his mistress and her daughter, and further suggests an African American proclivity for white women through his speculative matchmaking for the deceased bondsman, his purpose greatly differs from these texts. Plummer, by contrast, invites an interracial union for the oppressed Pomp, and further suggests that this sexual and domestic relation would have prevented his crime. The scribe thus endorses greater sexual and domestic freedoms for recently emancipated blacks to combat violent crime, rather than advocating for a suppression of freedoms to meet the same ends, which appears in the contemporaneous narratives of African American rapists and rapist-murderers.

Although he echoes Pomp's claims for certain environmental or material factors underlying his crime, Plummer refutes Pomp's supernatural explanation for his murder of Furbush. Plummer insists that the condemned murderer was lying when he claimed to have been instructed by a disembodied voice. He writes, "As to [what Pomp] said of something telling him to kill his master, I believed it to be a falsehood…contrived to excuse his conduct." Governed by an Enlightenment sensibility that seeks out rational, environmental explanations for crime, Plummer is unable to accept Pomp's irrational explanation for his actions. William L. Andrews thus views Pomp as "an antagonist to the white amanuensis-editor's power to rationalize and thus explain away the slave's violation of social and moral norms," and further notes, "Like many in the nineteenth century whose ontological and semiological assumptions where contradicted by slave narrators, Plummer perseveres his worldview by denying Pomp's" (51). In a text that seeks to promote greater freedom for African Americans, we thus see the white editor's stubborn persistence in maintaining dominance over his black subject.

Plummer's analysis also appears short-sighted in that it refuses to acknowledge the revolutionary import of Pomp's criminal act. This feature of Plummer's commentary is more muted and suggestive than his explicit refutation of Pomp's supernatural version of events. It appears in the scribe's lament over Pomp's lack of education, when he states that Pomp, "knew nothing of ancient or modern history, nor even the late revolution in France, or the consequences of it so often rung through the universe… [or of] geography." Plummer here places Pomp's violent assault on an unjust master in the context of the Age of Revolution. Especially relevant at this time, of course, is the contemporaneous Revolution led by enslaved blacks in Haiti. Yet, Plummer denies the possibility that Pomp is guided by the same principles as the Haitian and other revolutionaries based on a rather confused claim regarding the slave's lack of historical

knowledge and "geography." We should add, though, that Plummer's denial of Pomp's revolutionary spirit is no doubt informed by his desire to promote greater freedoms for African Americans, particularly in his home state of Massachusetts following its ambiguous emancipation statutes. Plummer, then, likely has the best interests of Massachusetts' African American population in mind when he divests Pomp's crime from the Age of Revolution. At the same time, Plummer's implicit denial of the revolutionary import of Pomp's actions, like his explicit refutation of Pomp's supernatural explanation for the murder, further betrays the limits of his analysis and his need to maintain authorial control.

What we find in the *Dying Confession of Pomp*, then, is the African American criminal confession employed for the first time as a tool of black liberation, though a partial and limited tool at best. Although the conservative form of the criminal confession is appropriated by Jonathan Plummer to advance claims for African American rights, the subject of the narrative is ultimately unable to free his version of events from the authorial sway of his scribe and commentator. Appearing as a radical statement for African American rights in the context of Massachusetts' gradual abolition of slavery, the text nevertheless falters as a complete appropriation of the criminal confession form. For that, we must turn to *The Confession of John Joyce* and the efforts of the text's author, Richard Allen.

Richard Allen's Case

With *The Confession of John Joyce*, author Richard Allen entered the criminal proceedings surrounding the December 1807 murder of Sarah Cross, a white shopkeeper in Philadelphia, for which two black men, John Joyce and Peter Mathias, were convicted and sentenced to death. By the time of Joyce and Mathias' 1808 trial, Allen had become a luminary in Philadelphia's ever-expanding community of free African Americans. Born into slavery in the

state of Delaware in 1760, Allen worked to purchase his own freedom in 1780, and was ordained as a minister in Philadelphia in 1786. With Pennsylvania as the first state to abolish slavery, in 1780, Philadelphia became a primary destination for both free, and recently *freed*, African Americans. As Joanna Brooks explains, "Hundreds of newly freed slaves migrated to Philadelphia in the next decades, establishing the foundations for the United States' largest free black community."[xxv] To aid this community, Allen, along with fellow minister Absalom Jones, founded the nondenominational, mutual aid Free African Society in 1787. Also, alongside Jones, Allen helped found Philadelphia's African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in 1794, which holds the distinction as the first independent religious denomination founded by blacks in America. Allen's eminence would cause him to be named the Church's first bishop in 1816. Yet, by the early nineteenth century, Allen was also well known beyond his religious community for his intervention on behalf of black Philadelphians in print.

By the time Allen took up Joyce and Mathias' case, the first-person criminal confession was coming to be viewed as something of a belated, or hackneyed, literary form. Criminal confessions began to lose relevance at the close of the eighteenth century, only to be eclipsed by the newly influential form of the trial report. Historian Daniel Cohen explains: "Although criminal trial reports had not been a particularly popular form in New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, printers issued more than a dozen during the first ten years of the nineteenth century, at least twenty-four during the decade after that, and many more throughout the antebellum period" (26). As the name implies, trial reports document the multiple testimonies presented at criminal trials, rather than one person's slanted view of events, as in criminal confession literature. Cohen then suggests that the trial report began to overshadow the first-person criminal confession because it provided the semblance of greater truth and

objectivity, "not by suppressing ambiguity and disagreement, but by providing a literary vehicle designed to present and fairly evaluate competing factual accounts and legal interpretations of disputed events" (28). Because of this, Cohen views the trial report as an even more conservative form than the criminal confession, as the former "tended to reclaim crime literature as an effective instrument of authority" by working to "restore public confidence in the moral nexus between crime and punishment" (28). As we have seen in the first half of this article, *The Dying Confession of Pomp* lends strength to Cohen's claims, revealing the great potential of criminal confessions to question both individual legal proceedings and larger social structures.

In *The Confession of John Joyce,* Richard Allen thus seems to adopt an outmoded literary form with a somewhat radical history at a time when it had largely been replaced the more conservative form of the trial report. Nevertheless, though entitled *The Confession of John Joyce,* Allen's text adheres far more to the structure of the newly influential trial report than the somewhat belated criminal confession. Neatly divided into separate sections, Allen's work objectively records multiple perspectives on Joyce's crime: his own, the sentencing judge's, an eyewitness', Joyce and Mathias' attorney's, Joyce's, and Mathias'. Offering these competing subjectivities, Allen then symbolically enters the legal proceedings himself, cross-examining the condemned in their cells, and refuting evidence presented at their trial.

The Confession of John Joyce was not Richard Allen's first foray into African American crime narrative. In collaboration with Absalom Jones, Allen produced *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the year 1793,* at text published in 1794. In this work, Jones and Allen systematically refute charges that black workers looted houses during Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic of 1793, accusations first promoted by Philadelphia printer Matthew Carey in a widely-circulated pamphlet.[xxvi] With

respect to the critical attention each title has received, Jones and Allen's collaborative pamphlet has far surpassed Allen's later *Confession of John Joyce*. Phillip Gould, Joanna Brooks, Samuel Otter, Jeannine DeLombard, and Derrick Spires have all provided sustained readings of *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People*.[xxvii] Otter and DeLombard additionally have placed the exculpatory *Narrative* in the broader tradition of African American criminal confessions and have included analyses of *The Confession of John Joyce* in their larger discussion of Jones and Allen's collaborative work. Yet their discussions of Joyce's text appear as complimentary to more expansive readings of the earlier *Narrative*.[xxviii] Additionally, DeLombard significantly clusters *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People* and *The Confession of John Joyce* with the similarly exculpatory *The Address of Abraham Johnstone* (1797).[xxix] Yet, rather than merely continuing a practice found in these earlier, exculpatory texts, *The Confession of John Joyce* deserves recognition for its radical manipulation of the criminal confession genre. By reprinting and reassembling already published documents pertaining to Joyce and Matthias' case, and adding new testimony that contradicts these condemnatory assertions, Allen's later work marks a new level of authorial control for black subjects and authors of criminal confession literature as it adopts the popular form of the trial report.

After a sermonic preface addressed to both black and white audiences, the remainder of Allen's text closely resembles the newly influential form of the trial report. Following his sermon, Allen next includes a "SUBSTANCE OF THE TRIAL, As it appeared in one of the public Papers."[xxx] Culling his information from this vaguely named source, Allen objectively records eyewitness testimony of the crime; yet he refrains from commenting upon it or critiquing it at this moment. The principal witness in the case was "Anne Messinger, a girl between 13 and 14 years of age" (7). Sent on an errand to victim Sarah Cross's store, Messinger testified in court

that she uncharacteristically found the door locked. Peering through the keyhole, Messinger claimed she observed "that Mrs. Cross at this time, was lying on the floor dead; that Peter [Mathias] was in the room with Joyce; that Joyce opened the drawer of the counter, and that he took out all the money; that he then lighted another candle and went upstairs…Peter going with him" (7). Allen ends this "SUBSTANCE OF THE TRIAL" by documenting the legal strategy of Joyce and Mathias's court appointed attorney. Fully admitting both of his clients' guilt, the text explains that, "The counsel then entered into an examination of the evidence, and endeavored to show, that although it proved the homicide, it did not fix upon the prisoners, such a previously formed design to take away life, as, under the statute of Pennsylvania, was required to warrant the punishment of death" (9). The attorney therefore worked to have both of his clients' sentences reduced from death to the full punishment for unpremeditated murder, "solitary confinement for 18 years" (9), a legal strategy that ultimately failed, as both Joyce and Mathias were sentenced to hang.

It quickly becomes evident in the text that Allen has a much different legal strategy in mind. Through the remaining sections of *The Confession of John Joyce*, Allen will build a case that both acknowledges Joyce's premeditated plan to murder and works to exonerate Mathias from any involvement in the crime, not merely premeditation. First objectively recording witness testimony, and then outlining counsel's failed strategy, Allen takes over Mathias's defense in a symbolic court of print. Rather than criminal biographies, the remaining sections of the text, which provide Joyce and Mathias's individual confessions, appear more like testimonies of witnesses Allen has called to the stand.

The inclusion of the "SUBSTANCE OF THE TRIAL, As it appeared in one of the public Papers" in *The Confession of John Joyce* establishes that Allen was entering an established print

discourse regarding Joyce and Mathias' trial. Moreover, Allen was attempting to contradict, or override, that very discourse by including confessional testimonies from the defendants not found in the "SUBSTANCE OF THE TRIAL." It is here important to note that another published report of the trial appeared after Joyce and Mathias' executions on March 14, 1808, in a text titled "The Fate of Murderers: A Faithful Narrative of the Murder of Mrs. Sarah Cross, with the Trial, Sentence, and Confession of John Joyce and Peter Mathias."[xxxi] The "Confession of John Joyce and Peter Mathias" mentioned in the title of this document refers only to testimonies presented at the criminal hearing, and not to the confessional narratives of the defendants gathered by Allen after the trial and included his *Confession of John Joyce*. "The Fate of Murderers" thus contains a report of the trial likewise found in Allen's text, but fails to include later testimonies that, as we will see, seek to establish Mathias' innocence, at least of a crime punishable by death: premeditated murder. Thus far I have been unable to determine whether "The Fate of Murderers" or *The Confession of John Joyce* was published first. As no copyright was filed for either text, establishing a more precise date of publication would seem to rely on advertisements for the sale of each text placed in Philadelphia newspapers, which I have currently failed to discover. It therefore remains unclear whether Allen was further responding to this report of the trial, or if "The Fate of Murderers" sought to refute the version of the crime presented in *The Confession of John Joyce*. In any event, "The Fate of Murderers" further places Allen's work amid a multi-textual discourse of African American criminality taking place in the urban north at the time, if only in response to one specific trial.

The first testimony Allen gathers to build his case for Mathias's innocence is Joyce's own. In a section of the text headed "CONFESSION," Joyce offers a version of the crime that differs greatly from his attorney's. Joyce here unequivocally admits to premeditating the murder

of Sarah Cross, yet he insists he never shared this plan with Mathias. He states, "On Friday the 18th of December last, early in the evening, I went down to the house of Peter Mathias or Matthews…while there, I conceived the plan of the murder, but did not relate it to Peter, at that, or any other time" (14). Joyce further claims in his "CONFESSION" that while Mathias had accompanied him to Sarah Cross's store, he had left the premises at the time of the murder. Detailing unaccounted for time that preceded eyewitness testimony, Joyce then claims that, "Peter was desirous to go, and proposed it…[he] then went out of the house. I called after him to tarry a little, and I would go along with him in a few minutes. The door was shut to by Peter. I then, holding the stick in my hand, felt strongly tempted to perpetrate the horrid act: I struck [Sarah Cross] on the head with the stick…and she fell to the floor" (14-15).

Objectively recording the murderer's testimony to build his case for Mathias's innocence, Allen is compelled to insert himself into the narrative after Joyce's "CONFESSION." He explains that after he had taken Joyce's testimony, Joyce was visited in prison by the mayor of Philadelphia, who was considering at that time a stay of execution on Mathias' behalf. When asked by the Mayor if Mathias's had been in the house at the time of Cross's murder, Joyce contradicted the testimony he had given Allen, answering, "that he was" (17). Although unable to reexamine the witness himself, Allen responds to this contradictory statement. He offers the testimony of unnamed witnesses to the interview who claimed that "as soon as the Mayor had withdrawn from the cell, an awful horror seemed to seize [Joyce's] mind and he exclaimed, 'Lord forgive me for what I have told the Mayor is a falsehood…I told him, Peter was present, when I killed Mrs. Cross but he was not. Lord! forgive me for it, for he is an innocent man" (17). Allen here steps in to collect and document more evidence after Joyce's previous testimony had been refuted through the Mayor's cross-examination. Adhering to the conventions of the newly

influential form of the trial report, Allen's text further appears as the document of a trial he has continued to carry on after Mathias' sentence and beyond courtroom walls.

The final section of the text, Mathias' "CONFESSION," both presents the most exculpatory evidence on the defendant's behalf and calls Allen's entire purpose for the text into question. Mathias here accounts for his presence at the crime scene following the murder. He explains that when he returned to Sarah Cross's store, having been out on the street at the time of the actual killing, Joyce refused to let him leave: "I then saw Mrs. Cross laying on the floor. I asked John what he was about, and whether he had killed the woman? he replied, 'No: she is not dead;' but he swore, 'he would have his money and property,'… I then told him this was not the way to act, and asked him to let me out of the house; he swore 'he would not until he got his property'" (33). Mathias here presents even more damning testimony regarding Joyce's character with information absent from the killer's own account of the crime. Joyce's testimony to Philadelphia's mayor, which sabotaged Mathias' final attempts at appeal, thus loses much of its credibility through Mathias' closing testimony. With Mathias' strongest claims to innocence appearing in this closing section, Allen's final remarks in the text strike a jarring note to a contemporary reader. In the last lines of his work, Allen asserts that Mathias "confirmed his confession in the presence of the Sheriff and Coroner between 9 and 10 o'clock the night before his execution, as he did under the gallows" (36). If Allen's skillful adaptation of the trial report has worked only to exonerate an already executed man, what was his ultimate purpose for the text, other than to clear Mathias' name and repair his tarnished reputation?

In answer to this question, we may first say that Allen's take on the trial report serves to exonerate African Americans from blanket charges of criminality. To achieve this, Allen stresses the importance of punishing individual offenders who are truly guilty. Such an impulse guides *A*

Narrative of the Proceedings of Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia. Near the close of their collaborative text, Jones and Allen state, "The few [blacks] that were discovered to merit public censure, were brought to justice, which ought to have sufficed, without being canvassed over in [Matthew Carey's] 'Trifle' of a pamphlet…for we conceive and experience proves it, that an ill name is easier given than taken away."[xxxii] After acknowledging these "few" instances of criminal culpability, Jones and Allen next establish their readiness to (re)appear in print to defend black Americans against future libel. "We have many enemies that begrudge us the liberty we enjoy, and are glad to hear of any complaint against our color, be it just or unjust; in consequence of which we…would not be backward to interfere, when stigmas or oppression appear pointed at, or attempted against them, unjustly" (13). In the authors' view, print is the most effective disseminator of negative stereotypes regarding African Americans, most especially stereotypes concerning criminality. Yet print is also the most effective tool for combatting such stereotypes. To fully achieve this, though, acknowledging the responsibility of individual offenders appears as essential as denying blanket claims that malign the entire race. In this regard, Jones and Allen, and later Allen himself, anticipate the work of later African American intellectuals, like Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. DuBois, who near the close of the nineteenth century acknowledged individual instances of black criminality but stressed the damaging effects of false and exaggerated reports on the larger community.[xxxiii] Mathias is best understood, then, to function symbolically in *The Confession of John Joyce*. The falsely accused defendant serves as a symbolic representative of his race, whose entire name Allen works to clear in his adaptation of the trial report.

Conclusion

Jonathan Plummer's *The Dying Confession of Pomp* and Richard Allen's *The Confession of John Joyce* represent an evolution of authorial control in the early African American criminal confession. Plummer and Allen both appropriate this punitively designed genre, one traditionally employed to advocate for a greater suppression of African American rights, to advance bold claims for black freedom and inclusion in the new American nation. As such, both texts highlight the paramount role of the editor in criminal confession literature. Despite its radical appeal, *The Dying Confession of Pomp* displays the pernicious influence of the (white) editor in early African American crime narrative. To advance his message, the text's printer and scribe Jonathan Plummer both contradicts Pomp's version of events and denies the revolutionary significance of the subject's actions. Governed by Enlightenment ideals in his search for rational explanations behind the killing, Plummer equally displays the racial condescension characteristic of much Enlightenment-era thought. For his part, Richard Allen also appeals to new standards of rational objectivity in *The Dying Confession of Pomp*, his adaptation of the newly influential form of the trial report. Unlike Plummer, however, Allen refrains from contradicting his subject's version of events. Rather, he permits Joyce to present testimony not offered at his trial to exonerate his alleged accomplice, who functions in the text as a symbolic representative of both Philadelphia's larger black community, and, by extension, African Americans as a whole in the developing nation. Since the 1970s, scholars have noted the influence of criminal confession literature on the development of the slave narrative and emergence of an African American literary subject. This article has worked to trace more fully the contours of that development, revealing criminal discourse as a fraught arena of struggle from which an early African American literature emerged.

[i] Published versions of execution sermons preached for convicted African American criminals in the eighteenth century include Cotton Mather's *Tremenda: The Dreadful Sound with Which the Wicked are to be Thunderstruck* (Boston: Printed by Green for Gray and Edwards, 1721), Mather Byles' *The Prayer and Plea of David to be Delivered of Blood Guiltiness* (Boston: Samuel Kneeland, 1751), Sylvanus Contant's *The Blood of Abel, and the Blood of Jesus* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1764), Thaddeus MacCarty's *The Power and Grace of Christ Displayed to a Dying Malefactor* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1768), Henry Trevett Channing's *God Admonishing His People of their Duty as Parents and Masters* (New London, CT: T. Green, 1786), James Dana's *The Intent of Capital Punishment* (New Haven, CT: T. & S. Green, 1790), Noah Worcester's *A Sermon Delivered at Haverhill…at the Execution of Thomas Powers* (Haverhill, NH: Coverly, 1796), and Timothy Langdon's *A Sermon, Preached at Danbury, November 8, 1798* (Danbury, CT: Douglas and Nichols, 1798).

[ii] Daniel Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, *Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture*, *1674-1860* (Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1993), 16-17.

[iii] In addition to Cohen's *Pillars of Salt*, for an overview of the development of the criminal confession genre, see also Daniel E. William's "Introduction" to his anthology *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993).

[iv] Cohen then suggests that trial reports worked to instill confidence in American legal institutions in the turbulent first decades of the new nation, and therefore provided a comforting attraction to early American readers (26-28).

[v] Richard Slotkin, "Narratives of Negro Crime in New England, 1675-1800," *American Quarterly* 25.1 (March 1973), 17.

[vi] See Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of the Antebellum Slave Narratives* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1979); William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1986); and Jeannine DeLombard, *In the Shadow of the Gallows: Race*, *Crime*, *and American Civic Identity* (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012).

[vii] See DeLombard, 142-155.

[viii] Abraham Johnstone, *The Address of Abraham Johnstone* (Philadelphia, PA: For the purchasers, 1797), 2.

[ix] In *Behind the Veil* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979), Stepto first employed the concept of "authorial control" to outline the development of the antebellum slave narrative, further establishing it as aesthetic criteria for the most sophisticated writing of early African American literature. Stepto thus argues that *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) is "more sophisticated" than other antebellum slave narratives (4), because Douglass offers "what is unquestionably our best portrait in Afro American letters of the requisite act of assuming authorial control" over the white editors and contributors to the text (26).

[x] Lara Langer Cohen, "Notes on the State of Saint Dominque: The Practice of Citation in *Clotel*," *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Stein (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012), 162.

[xi] DeLombard has noted that with *The Confession of John Joyce*, Richard Allen published "the first black-edited gallows pamphlet" (143).

[xii] Bristol, *The Dying Speech of Bristol* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1763); Edmund Fortis, *The Last Word and Dying Speech of Edmund Fortis* (Exeter, NH, 1795); Thomas Powers, *The Narrative and Confession of Thomas Powers* (Norwich, CT: John Trumbull, 1796).
[xiii] Jonathan Plummer, *The Dying Confession of Pomp* (Newburyport, MA: Jon. Plummer, 1795), broadside.
[xiv] The American Antiquarian Society's catalog lists Frost's *Confession* among Plummer's printed titles.
[xv] See Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986, 2004), 157-158.
[xvi] Thomas, for instance, published the *Massachusetts Spy*, a newspaper suppressed by colonial authorities in Boston in 1771; and in 1785 he published "his *New American Spelling Book*, designed to compete with Noah Webster's best-selling lexicon" (Davidson 158).
[xvii] Isiah Thomas, *The Dying Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost* (Worcester, MA: Isiah Thomas, 1783), broadside.
[xviii] John Sekora, "Red, White, and Black: Indian Captivities, Colonial Printers, and the Early African American Narrative," *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*. Ed. Frank Shuffleton (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 94.
[xix] Both located in Essex County, Massachusetts, current maps place Andover and Newburyport at around 35 miles distance.
[xx] Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998), 76.
[xxi] John Marsh, *The Great Sin of Striving with God* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1783), 21.
[xxii] Quoted in Caleb Smith, *The Oracle and the Curse: A Poetics of Justice from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013), 98.
[xxiii] Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 5.
[xxiv] See Brian Baaki, "Circulating the Black Rapist: *Sketches of the Life of Joseph Mountain* and Early American Networks of Print," *The New England Quarterly* 90.1 (March 2017), 36-68.
[xxv] Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 152.
[xxvi] Matthew Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*, 1st Ed. (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1793).
[xxvii] See Philip Gould's "Race, Commerce, and the Literature of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia," *Early American Literature* 35.2 (2000), 157-186; Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010); and Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2019).
[xxviii] See Otter, 40.
[xxix] See DeLombard, 130-142, 142-163, 143.
[xxx] Allen, Richard. *The Confession of John Joyce* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Benefit of Bethel Church, 1808), 6.
[xxxi] Anonymous. "The Fate of the Murderers: A Faithful Narrative of the Murder of Mrs. Sarah Cross, with the Trial, Sentence and Confession of John Joyce and Peter Mathias, Who Were

Executed Near Philadelphia on Monday 14, March 1808" (Philadelphia: Printed for Purchasers, 1808).

[xxxii] Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year, 1793* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Authors, 1794), 13.

[xxxiii] Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record*. 1895. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates and Valerie Smith (New York: Norton, 2014), 676; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, 1897 (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996), 259.