



Cultural Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcus20>

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Version of record first published: 06 Jan 2012

To cite this article: Simone Browne (2012): EVERYBODY'S GOT A LITTLE LIGHT UNDER THE SUN, Cultural Studies, 26:4, 542-564

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.644573>

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EVERYBODY'S GOT A LITTLE LIGHT UNDER THE SUN

Black luminosity and the visual culture of surveillance

This article examines the production of The Book of Negroes during the British evacuation of New York in 1783 and situates it as the first government-issued document for state regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly links corporeal identifiers to the right to travel. I do this to argue that the body made legible with the modern passport system has a history in the technologies of tracking blackness. I explore surveillance technologies of transatlantic slavery, namely lantern laws, and I examine arbitration that took place at Fraunces Tavern in New York City in 1783 between fugitive slaves exercising mobility rights claims by seeking to be included in The Book of Negroes and those who claimed them as property. Coupling the archive of The Book of Negroes with a discussion of rituals and practices engaged by free and enslaved blacks, I suggest that these interactions with surveillance served as both strategies of coping and critique, and in so being represent acts of freedom. This article begins with a story of black escape by taking up the surveillance-based reality television programme Mantracker to question how certain technologies instituted through slavery to track blackness as property anticipate the contemporary surveillance of the racial body.

Keywords The Book of Negroes; surveillance; slavery; passports; American Revolution; Black Canada

Thus despite the bland assertions of sociologists, ‘high visibility’ actually rendered one *un-visible* – whether at high noon in Macy’s window or illuminated by flaming torches and flashbulbs while undergoing the ritual sacrifice that was dedicated to the ideal of white supremacy.

(Ellison 1989)

Our history takes place in obscurity and the sun I carry with me must lighten every corner.

(Fanon 2008)

Introduction

Billed as ‘the ultimate cat and mouse chase through the Canadian wilderness’, the reality television series *Mantracker* made its debut on the Outdoor Life Network in 2006. With only a compass, a map and a 2 km head start, each episode of this reality game show sees the aptly named ‘prey’ given 36 hours to reach the finish line, by foot, some 40 km away. Riding on horseback with a lasso and spurs, *Mantracker* carries neither map, nor compass and supposedly has no idea where the finish line is located. He is equipped with binoculars and an assistant, however. *Mantracker* is Terry Grant, and as the show’s opening title sequence tells its viewers he is an ‘accomplished rider. No nonsense cowboy. He’s trained to track and capture whoever is on the run’. *Mantracker* began its third season with the episode ‘Al and Garfield’. With this episode, viewers are invited to ‘watch as these urban warriors draw on the history of the Underground Railroad for inspiration to escape the unflappable *Mantracker*’. *Mantracker*’s assistant in this episode is Barry Keown, a local horseman who cites John Wayne as one of his idols and who is familiar with the area of Deerhurst, Ontario where the episode was filmed. At one point in the programme, Keown jokes: ‘I guess I’m a little bit of a redneck at heart’ and ‘we’ll have those pilgrims rounded up so fast they wouldn’t believe it’. With its greenish, grainy night-vision footage mimicking on-screen GPS transmissions, high-resolution satellite aerial photograph mapping, and contestants offering staged ‘confessions’ into a hand-held video camera called a ‘preycam’, *Mantracker* has all the trappings of the surveillance-based reality television genre. Each one-hour episode also fulfils a certain pedagogical role as viewers are instructed on anti-tracking techniques, shown ambush plan schematics, and definitions for useful tracking terminology are flashed on the screen. That the human ‘prey’ has to be accompanied by at least one camera operator, a boom mike and proper lighting, does not seem to interfere with the appearance that the prey are evading their predators unabated or hindered by the necessary film crew and equipment needed to stage such a production.

Described as ‘Toronto boys’ from the ‘hard knocks hood of Toronto’s Jane and Finch’, contestants Al St. Louis and Garfield Thompson repeatedly invoke the Underground Railroad throughout the episode. At one point, the show’s announcer even refers to the two as ‘fugitives’. In one scene, the two remark:

Al: This definitely reminds me of, uh, the Underground Railroad and the slaves running away. You know, two black guys on the run, man. We’re keeping that in mind and that’s what fueling us forward.

Garfield: It’s kind of like we’re doing it for our ancestors, man. You know what I mean?

Al: That's deep. That's deep. That's deep. That's deep

Announcer: The prey draw on the past for inspiration.

I begin this article with the reality television programme *Mantracker* to think about histories of black escape and the ways in which they inform contemporary surveillance of the racial body. More specifically, I am asking: what of the surveillance technologies instituted through slavery to track blackness as property? When 'prey' Garfield announces 'it's kind of like we're doing it for our ancestors', he gestures to the injury, the redress and the 'negative inheritance' that Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman envision as that of the slave's progeny: 'the ongoing, production of lives lived in intimate relation to premature death (whether civil, social or literal)' (2005, p. 13). We might read Al and Garfield's call on their self-emancipating ancestors for inspiration – as they attempt to outrun *Mantracker* – as offering a particular rendering of Canada and the tracking of black bodies within this nation that is often made absent from official narratives, that being the accounting for blackness as property. Rinaldo Walcott, in arguing for a refusal of the black invisibility that is produced through Canada's official discourse of multiculturalism, suggests that 'recent black migrants not imagine themselves situated in a discourse that denies a longer existence of blackness' in Canada (2003, p. 14). Al and Garfield could be doing just this, naming a black Canadian presence prior to 1960s migrations that 'troubles and worries the national myth of two founding peoples' (p. 48). However, this rendering is mediated for a television audience in a rather synoptic fashion,¹ interpellating the viewer in a slick production of black escape as entertainment. In one scene that has Garfield complaining that 'this bush is killing me, guy', Al responds with:

Think of it like this, Garfield. This is what our ancestors had to go through and worse, you know, and they were literally on the run for their lives. So, a little bush, that ain't gonna do nothing. Suck it up. Let's go.

In a voice-over of a campfire scene sometime later and shown for the audience in night-vision, Garfield retorts:

There's no comparison in, um, us reflecting back on probably what it was like for our ancestors running for their lives. So later on in the nighttime, you know, we really, ah, we really connected, Al and I, talking about that, you know, and, it was a pretty sentimental and very emotional moment for us.

The screen then cuts to Al and Garfield singing the Negro spiritual 'Go Down Moses' which accompanies a black and white flashback montage highlighting scenes from the day's chase. The segment closes with the 'prey' singing the

line 'let my people go' as Mantracker's face flashes across the screen, eventually fading to the show's title card and then cuts to a commercial break. The episode closes with Mantracker catching Al and Garfield. Upon their apprehension, images of their faces with a crosshair superimposed are put up on a 'captured' screen.

Although this television programme's website states that 'the irony is not lost on these "two black guys running from a white guy on a horse"' ² this particular episode of *Mantracker* speaks to the historical presence of the surveillance technologies of organized slave patrols and bounty hunters for runaways, notably those journeying at the height of the Underground Railroad from the United States to Canada. The remains of such technologies and the networked resistance to them – namely Negro spirituals that were at once expressions of the desire for freedom as well as counter-surveillance strategies – in this case, now rendered as cable television entertainment. *Mantracker* therefore serves as an entry into a deeper discussion of black mobilities, the visual culture of surveillance and *The Book of Negroes*. A key argument here is that *The Book of Negroes*, and its accompanying breeder documents, ³ is the first government-issued document for state regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly linked corporeal markers to the right to travel. The document also serves as an important record of pre-Confederation black arrivals in Canada, and in so being 'ruptures the homogeneity of nation-space by asserting blackness in/and Canada' (McKittrick 2002, p. 28) as it historicizes the links between visibility, invisibility, migration and surveillance in the nation.

In the three sections below, I offer a discussion of the racial body in colonial New York City done by a tracing of the archive of the technologies of surveillance and slavery. The first section focuses on the technology of printed text, namely runaway notices and identity documents, in the production of *The Book of Negroes* during the British evacuation of the city. This section draws on archival documents to provide textual links that evidence the accounting of black bodies as intimately tied with the history of surveillance, in particular surveillance of black skin by way of identity documents. In so doing my analysis then raises the problem of my own surveillance practices in reading the archive: by accounting for violence do my reading practices act to re-inscribe violence and a remaking of blackness, and black skin, as objectified? Thus, I am mindful of both Katherine McKittrick's cautioning that there is a danger of reproducing 'racial hierarchies that are anchored by our "watching over" and corroborating practices of violent enumeration' (2010) and Nicole Fleetwood's urging for the 'productive possibilities of black subjects to trouble the field of vision' by virtue of 'the discourses of captivity and capitalism that frame' the black body as always already problematic (2011, p. 18). To question acts of watching over and looking back, in the second section I turn to lantern laws in colonial New York City that sought to keep the black body in a state of permanent illumination. I use the term 'black luminosity' to refer to a form of boundary

maintenance occurring at the site of the racial body, whether by candlelight, flaming torch or the camera flashbulb that documents the ritualized terror of a lynch mob. Black luminosity, then, is an exercise of panoptic power that belongs to 'the realm of the sun, of never ending light; it is the non-material illumination that falls equally on all those on whom it is exercised' (Foucault 2003, p. 77). Here boundary maintenance is intricately tied to knowing the black body, subjecting some to a high visibility by way of technologies of seeing that sought to render the subject outside of the category of the human, *un-visible*. My focus in the second section is the candle lantern and laws regarding its usage that allowed for a scrutinizing surveillance that individuals were at once subjected to, and that produced them as black subject. Following David Marriott in his reading of the spectacle of death that is lynching and its photographic archive, such laws, I suggest, operated 'through visual terror' in the management of black mobilities, warning of the potential to reduce one to 'something that don't look human' (2000, p. 9). Or perhaps too human. Rather than looking solely to those moments when blackness is violently illuminated, I highlight certain practices, rituals and acts of freedom and situate these moments as interactions with surveillance systems that are both strategies of coping and of critique. This is to say that 'ritual heals' and 'constitutes the *social* form in which human beings seek to deal with denial as active agents, rather than as passive victims' (Sennett 1994, p. 80). With the third section, I consider varied notions of repossession by examining the Board of Inquiry arbitration that began in May 1783 at Fraunces Tavern in New York City between fugitive slaves who sought to be included in The Book of Negroes by exercising mobility rights claims as autonomous subjects and those who sought to reclaim these fugitives as their property. In her discussion of 'narrative acts' and the moments of narration through which racialized subjects 'are brought into being', (2009, p. 625) Hazel Carby suggests that we must 'be alert to the occasions when racialized subjects not only step into the recognitions given to them by others but provide intuitions of a future in which relations of subjugation will (could) be transformed' (p. 627). I am suggesting that The Book of Negroes is one of those occasions that Carby alerts us to. At Fraunces Tavern, the pub turned courtroom, mobility rights were sought through de-commodificatory narrative acts, disputing the claims made on the self as goods to be returned. I conclude this article by turning to a different narrative act, Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes: A Novel* (2007), as it extends the racial surveillance practices discussed in this article through its creative remembering of the brutalities of slavery. I begin and end this article with representations of black escape to argue that, in different ways, they allow for a rethinking of the archive of the technologies of slavery and surveillance, in that they disclose how this archive continues to inform our historically present tenets of emancipation.

The Book of Negroes lists passengers on board 219 ships that set sail from New York between 23 April 1783 and 30 November 1783. Ships, as Paul Gilroy tells us, 'were the livings means by which the points within the Atlantic

world were joined' (1993, p. 16). Following this, *The Book of Negroes* is not only a record of escape on board 219 ships, but it can also be thought of as a record of how the surveillance of black Atlantic mobilities was integral to the formation of the Canada–US border. If we are to take transatlantic slavery as the antecedent of contemporary surveillance technologies and practices as they concern inventories of ships' cargo and the making of 'scaled inequalities' in the *Brookes* slave ship schematic (Spillers 1987, p. 72), biometric identification by branding the body with hot irons (Browne 2010), slave markets and auction blocks as exercises of synoptic power where the many watched the few, slave passes and patrols, black codes and fugitive slave notices, it is to the archives, slave narratives and often to black expressive practices and creative texts that we can look to for moments of refusal and critique. What I am arguing here is that with certain acts of cultural production we can find performances of freedom and suggestions of alternatives to ways of living under a routinized surveillance that was terrifying in its effects.

The making of *The Book of Negroes*

With its crude inscriptions such as 'scar in his forehead' and 'stout with 3 scars in each cheek', *The Book of Negroes* is an early imprint of how the body, and skin in particular, comes to be understood as a means of identification and tracking by the state. In this section I outline how *The Book of Negroes* became the first large-scale public record of black presence in North America. This handwritten and leather bound British military ledger lists 3,000 black passengers who embarked on mainly British ships during the British evacuation of New York in 1783. Bound for Canada, England and Germany at the end of American Revolutionary War, passengers listed in *The Book of Negroes* travelled as indentured labourers to white United Empire Loyalists or as free people described in this ledger as 'on her own bottom'. Around the same time others left New York enslaved to white Loyalists. While some travelled to Germany, most likely as the property of German Hessian soldiers, captured from rebel states as spoils of war. The travellers listed in *The Book of Negroes* would later be recognized by many as United Empire Loyalists, or more specifically Black Loyalists, for their efforts as soldiers, support staff and waged workers (cooks, blacksmiths, laundresses, nurses, spies and other labourers) with the British forces during the War of Independence. The naming of those listed as Loyalists, or specifically Black Loyalists, is not without controversy as many entered into the bargain with the British for freedom and not necessarily out of some loyalty to the Crown. What follows is a discussion of the proclamations and the provisional treaty that eventually led to *The Book of Negroes*. This is done through the stories of black escape in and around the time of the evacuation of New York that are found in the archive: runaway

notices, official correspondence, a memoir, an early passport. With these texts we can understand how the tracking of blackness, rooted in the violence of slavery, was instituted through printed text. I argue that the body made legible with the modern passport system has a history in the technologies of tracking blackness.

Linking identity to bodily markers and infirmities, such as scarring from small pox, 'blind right eye' or 'lame of the left arm', The Book of Negroes lists the names of each passenger falling under the Philipsburg Proclamation on board the 219 ships that left New York in 1783. Each entry details the passenger's physical description, age, places of birth and enslavement and includes a section for comments or details of when and how each passenger came to fall under the Philipsburg Proclamation. Issued by British Commander-in-Chief Sir Henry Clinton on 30 June 1779 this proclamation promised 'to every negroe Who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper' (*Royal Gazette* 28 July, 1779).⁴ Whether those who had voluntarily left their Patriot masters and found themselves with the British felt assured that by 'full security' it was meant that they would be secure in the mutual recognition of their personhood or that they were fighting for what would ultimately lead to their emancipation is questionable, however numerous slaves owned by Patriots deserted these slave owners and fled to the British holdings. Those enslaved by white Loyalists, whether owned previously or confiscated during raids on Patriot estates, were not a part of this arrangement of service in exchange for freedom. Also detailed in The Book of Negroes were the names of the passengers' claimants, if any, as a caveat set out by Article Seven of the Provisional Peace Treaty reached on 30 November 1782 between Britain and the Congress of Confederation stated that the British withdrawal be executed without 'carrying away any Negroes, or other Property of the American Inhabitants' (Provisional Articles to Treaty, 1782). A Board of Inquiry consisting of American and British delegates was established to adjudicate Patriot claims of loss of human property. When the Treaty of Paris was signed on 3 September of the following year, this stipulation regarding 'carrying away any Negroes' was included (Treaty of Paris, 1783). If it was found that the British did indeed abscond with their property, Patriot owners could be duly compensated.

At the time of the British evacuation the circulation of printed text allowed for a certain 'simultaneous consumption' (Anderson 1991, p. 35) of newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves by an assumed white public; consuming at once the black subject imagined unfree and producing the reader as part of the apparatus of surveillance, the eyes and ears of face-to-face watching, observing and regulating. Through their detailing of physical descriptions, the surveillance technology of the fugitive slave advertisement was put to use to make the already hypervisible black subject legible as, what Thelma Wills Foote terms, 'objectified corporeality' (2004, p. 190). Beyond

its primary function in the visual culture of surveillance, that being serving public notice of runaways by announcing 'property as out of place' (Hall 2006, p. 70), the subjective descriptions employed by subscribers in runaway notices often reveal the subversive potential of being 'out of place'. 'Out of place' gestures to the Caribbean vernacular usage of the term, along with 'facetty' and 'boldface', – all of which were and continue to be used to name subversive acts of looking and talking back. The refusal to stay in spaces of dispossession, disposability and lived objecthood can be observed in a 14 June 1783 runaway notice in the *Royal Gazette* that offered 'twenty dollars reward' for 16-year-old Sam. Sam is described by the subscriber as 'five feet high, slim made' and 'remarkable in turning up the white of his eyes when spoke to'. Sam's refusals, or his 'facetiness', are agential acts, at first ocular, looking back – to at once return and dismiss the gaze with the gesture of the eye roll – and then to steal himself and make his own place. As slave owners could make claims to their human property, this made for many start-ups in slave-catching, the Mantrackers of the time. Some owners came to New York or sent representatives and slave catchers in their place to make claims seeking the return of the black women, men and children who they considered their property, making New York at once a space of terror and a site of freedom for those who came under one British proclamation or another. In his memoirs, Boston King recounts the terror that spread at this time:

For a report prevailed at New York, that all slaves, in number 2,000, were to be delivered up to their masters, although some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our masters coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New York, or even dragging them out of their beds.

(King 1798)

It was not only Patriots who seized upon their slaves. British Loyalists also contributed to this atmosphere, however many black men, women and children outwitted this terror. Slaver Valentine Nutter placed a notice in the 12 May 1783 edition of the *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* offering an award of five guineas for 'a negro man named Jack' described as around 23 years of age. Notably, this ad drew detailed attention to Jack's skin as a means of identification, describing him as having 'scars on his left arm and a small scar on his nose'. Perhaps Jack evaded capture as the following September Nutter left for Port Roseway, Nova Scotia aboard the ship *L'Abondance* with 'Silvia', a woman described in *The Book of Negroes* as a 30-year-old 'stout wench' and 'Sam', a 'tall' and 'stout fellow' recorded as 22 years old, as his property.

Though the Treaty of Paris stipulated that the British were not to 'carry away any Negroes', for General Guy Carleton, Commander-in-Chief of all

British Forces in North America, it did not require the British to readily facilitate the delivery of those deemed property. In a pre-emptive move the British began to issue Birch Certificates by order of Brigadier General Birch as defacto passports. These Birch Certificates served as status documents that identified the holder and confirmed the holder's right to cross an international border. Birch Certificates would become breeder documents for The Book of Negroes. These early passports were a guarantee that the legitimate holder had resided voluntarily with the British before 30 November 1782, the date of the signing of the Provisional Peace Treaty, as only those who resided within British lines for 12 months or longer were deemed eligible for embarkation on British ships. Birch Certificates, such as the one issued to Cato Ramsey, read as follows:

New York, 21st April 1783

This is to certify to whomever it may concern, that the bearer hereof Cato Ramsay a Negro, reported to the British Lines, in consequence of the Proclamations of Sir William Howe, and Sir Henry Clinton, late Commanders in Chief in America; and that the said Negro has hereby his Excellency Sir Guy Carleton's Permission to go to Nova Scotia, or wherever else he may think proper.

By the Order of Brigadier General Birch

Those who made use of such certification to embark on the ships to Canada as well as England and Germany, had their names listed in the inventory that is The Book of Negroes. After General Birch departed New York in 1783, similar certification was issued by General Thomas Musgrave to close to 300 blacks who were eligible for evacuation.

The ledger, in its accounting for humans as commodity in the enterprise of racial slavery, according to Saidiya Hartman, 'introduces another death through its shorthand' (2008, p. 5). The Book of Negroes is no exception. With each entry, quick assessments are made on the subject's being and then jotted down in point form. Identifying each passenger by way of corporeal descriptors, race or national origins or sometimes referencing some specific labour that they performed: 'worn out', 'stout healthy negro', 'young woman', 'blind of one eye', 'ordinary fellow with a wooden leg', 'healthy negress', 'better half Indian', 'stout labourer', 'nearly worn out', 'stout wench with a mulatto child 7 months old', 'M, between an Indian & Span.', 'thin wench, black', 'squat wench', 'he is Cook on board the ship', 'stout man marked with small pox', 'ordinary fellow', 'passable', 'thick set man', 'stout, flat, square wench', 'Mulatto from Madagascar', 'ditto', 'came from Jamaica, can't understand him'.⁵ But in the 15 pages that precede the ledger we are afforded, by way of a crude transcript, a means to understand the Board of

Inquiry hearings as moments of contestation for mobility rights where black subjects were often repossessed by claimants, but importantly they used legal channels and testimony to repossess themselves through assertions of their right to freedom and autonomy. Often this was done with the aid of counterfeit identities, identity documents and the telling of necessary counter-narratives that challenged a claimant's stated timeline. I take up this transcript in the third section. Two interlocking questions emerge: first, how are we to read the historical record of these hearings given the context in which they were written, where one human owned another? Second, how do we grapple with the textual meaning itself, given that the archive is comprised not of verbatim transcripts but of records of proceedings and decisions rendered almost non-eventful in their brevity, and are only partial accounts meant to be put to later use in the service of Patriots for claims of injury, losses of property and compensation? By situating the Board of Inquiry hearings at Fraunces Tavern as moments of repossession what I am arguing for here is a mapping of Fraunces Tavern as a space where black women and black men challenged *un*-visibility through contestations for freedom and mobility that were simultaneously demands for recognition not as property, but as full subjects, as humans. In the section that follows, I take up eighteenth century lantern laws to question how black luminosity as a means of regulating mobility was legislated and also contested.

Torches, torture and Totau

'Moment by moment' is the experience of surveillance in urban life, as David Lyon observes, where the city dweller expects to be 'constantly illuminated' (2001, p. 51–53). It is how the city dweller contends with this expectation that is instructive. To examine closely the performance of freedom, a performative practice that I suggest that those named fugitive in the Board of Inquiry arbitration hearings made use of, I borrow Richard Iton's 'visual surplus' and its b-side 'performative sensibility' (2009, p. 105). What Iton suggests is that we come to internalize an expectation of the potential of being watched and with this emerges a certain 'performative sensibility'. Coupled with this awareness of an overseeing surveillance apparatus was 'the conscious effort to always give one's best performance and encourage others to do the same, and indeed to perform even when one is not sure of one's audience (or whether there is in fact an audience)' (p. 105). Iton employs the term visual surplus to think about the visual media of black popular culture (graffiti, music videos) made increasingly available to the public through the rise of hip-hop in the five boroughs of New York City in the 1970s and the uses of new technologies (cellular phones, handheld cameras, the Internet, DVDs) to record and distribute performances. Applied to a different temporal location,

Iton's analyses of visual surplus and performative sensibility are useful for how we think about fugitive acts, black expressive practices and the regulation of black mobilities in colonial New York City 200 years earlier. What I am suggesting here is that for the fugitive in eighteenth century New York such a sensibility would encourage one to perform – in this case perform freedom – even when one was not sure of one's audience. Put differently, these performances of freedom were refusals of dispossession, constituting the black subject not as slave or fugitive, nor commodity but as human. For the black subject, the potentiality of being under watch was a cumulative effect of the large scale surveillance apparatus in colonial New York City and beyond stemming from transatlantic slavery, specifically fugitive slave posters and print news advertisements, blackbirders and other freelancers who kidnapped free blacks to transport them to other sites to be enslaved, slave catching and through the passing of repressive black codes, such as those in response to the slave insurrection of 1712.

April 1712 saw an armed insurrection in New York City where over two dozen black slaves gathered in the densely populated East Ward of the city to set fire to a building, killing at least nine whites and wounding others. In the end over 70 were arrested, with many coerced into admissions of guilt. Of those, 25 were sentenced to death and 23 of these death sentences were carried out. Burned at the stake, hanged, beheaded and their corpses publicly displayed and left to decompose, such spectacular corporal punishment served as a warning for the city's slave population and beyond. With these events and the so-called slave conspiracy to burn the city in 1741, the black code governing black city life consolidated previously enacted laws that were enforced in a rather discretionary fashion.⁶ Some of these laws spoke explicitly to the notion of a visual surplus and the regulation of mobility by way of the candle lantern. On 14 March 1713, the Common Council of New York City passed a 'Law for Regulating Negro or Indian Slaves in the Nighttime' that saw to it that 'no Negro or Indian Slave above the age of fourteen years do presume to be or appear in any of the streets' of New York City 'on the south side of the fresh water one hour after sunset without a lantern or a lit candle' (New York Common Council, Volume III). 'Fresh water' here referring to the Fresh Water Pond found in lower Manhattan, slightly adjacent to the Negroes Burial Ground and that supplied the city with drinking water at the time. Again, this law regulating mobility and autonomy through the use of the technology of the candle lantern was amended on 18 November 1731 where 'no negro, mulatto or Indian slave above the age of fourteen years' unless in the company of some white person 'or white servant belonging to the family whose slave he or she is, or in whose service he or she there are' was to be without a light that could be plainly seen or it was then 'lawful for any of his Majesty's Subjects within the said City to apprehend such slave or slaves' and 'carry him, her or them before the Mayor or Recorder or any of the Aldermen of the said City who are hereby authorized upon proof of offense to commit such slave or slaves to the

Common Gaol' (New York Common Council, Volume IV). Any slave convicted of being unlit after dark was sentenced to a public whipping of no more than 40 lashes, at the discretion of the master or owner before being discharged. Later this punishment was reduced to no more than 15 lashes. Such discretionary violence made for an imprecise mathematics of torture.

Mostly, punishment for such transgression was taken into the hands of the slave owner. In 1734 a male slave of John van Zandt was found dead in his bed. The dead man was said to have 'absented himself' from van Zandt's dwelling in the night-time (*New York Weekly Journal* CXIII, 5 January 1735). Although it was first reported that the slave was horsewhipped to death by Van Zandt for being caught on the streets after dark by watchmen, a coroner's jury found Van Zandt not negligent in this death, finding instead that 'the correction given by the Master was not the cause of death, but that it was by the visitation of God' (*New York Weekly Journal* CXIII, 5 January 1735). Other laws put into place around light and black mobilities in New York City stipulated that at least one lantern must be carried per three negroes after sunset, more tightly regulated curfews and in 1722 the Common Council relegated burials by free and enslaved blacks to the daytime hours with attendance of no more than 12, plus the necessary pallbearers and gravediggers, as a means to reduce opportunities for assembly and to prevent conspiracy hatching. In recounting physician Alexander Hamilton's narrative about his travels through New York City in July of 1744, Andy Doolen details that one outcome of the alleged conspiracy of 1741 was the ruining, according to Hamilton, of the traditional English cup of tea (2005). It was thought by Hamilton that:

they have very bad water in the city, most of it being hard and brackish. Ever since the negroe conspiracy, certain people have been appointed to sell water in the streets, which they carry on a sledge in great casks and bring it from the best springs about the city, for it was when the negroes went for tea water that they held their caballs and consultations, and therefor they have a law now that no negroe shall be seen upon the streets without a lanthorn after dark.

(Hamilton 1948, p. 88)

We can think of the lantern as a prosthesis made mandatory after dark, a technology that made it possible for the black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable and contained within the city. The black body, technologically enhanced by way of a simple device made for a visual surplus where technology met surveillance, made the business of tea a white enterprise and encoded white supremacy, as well as black luminosity, in law. Of course, unsupervised leisure, labour, travel, assembly and other forms of social networking past sunset by free and enslaved black New Yorkers continued regardless of the enforcement of codes meant to curtail such things.

Oftentimes social networking by free and enslaved black New Yorkers took place right under the surveillant gazes of the white population, in markets and during Sabbath and holiday celebrations. In these spaces of sometimes interracial and cross-class commerce and socializing, black performative practices of drumming, dancing and chanting persisted. During celebrations of Pinkster marking the feast of Pentecost of the Dutch Reformed Church, amongst the rituals, free and enslaved blacks elected a governor who would serve as a symbolic leader resolving disputes and collecting tributes, making this holiday an event for white spectatorship of black cultural and political production, although for many such celebratory resistance made this 'a festival of misrule' (Harris 2003, p. 41). So much so that the Common Council of Albany, New York, banned Pinkster celebrations in 1811, for reasons including a resentment of the space that it opened up for unsettling exchanges between blacks and whites (Lott 1993; McAllister 2003; White 1989). The most controversial incorporation of black performativity into Pinkster was the Totau. On the Totau, McAllister writes:

a man and a woman shuffle back and forth inside a ring, dancing precariously close without touching and isolating most of their sensual movement in the hip and pelvic areas. Once the couple dances to exhaustion, a fresh pair from the ring of clapping dancers relieves them and the Totau continues.

(McAllister 2003, p. 112)

That such a performative sensibility was engaged by black subjects in colonial New York City approximately 200 years before the emergence of hip hop in the Bronx, New York City, is of much significance. The Totau, and later, the Catharine Market breakdown reverberate in the cypher of b-boys and b-girls. In Eric Lott's discussion of black performances he cites Thomas De Voe's eyewitness account of the Catharine Market breakdown in the early nineteenth century New York City. De Voe writes:

This board was usually about five to six feet long, of large width, with its particular spring in it, and to keep it in its place while dancing on it, it was held down by one on each end. Their music or time was usually given by one of their party, which was done by beating their hands on the sides of their legs and the noise of the heel. The favorite dancing place was a cleared spot on the east side of the fish market in front of Burnel Brown's Ship Chandlery.

(De Voe 1862, cited in Lott 1993, pp. 41–42)

In this instance, the breakdown is performed in a market, allowing for white spectatorship and patronage in a space that is already overdetermined as a site of commerce within the economy of slavery. Later, DeVoe recalls 'public

negro dances' at Catharine Market in an 1889 *New York Times* article where he is quoted as saying that the dancers 'would bring roots, berries, birds, fish, clams, oysters, flowers, and anything else they could gather and sell in the market to supply themselves with pocket money' (28 April 1889). Sylvia Wynter's 'provision ground ideology' is instructive here for an understanding of solidarity, survival and the role of folk-culture as resistance to the 'dehumanization of Man and Nature' (1970, p. 36). Out of the provision grounds came the cultivation of ceremonial practices, including dance, that were, as Wynter tells us, 'the cultural guerilla resistance against the Market economy' (1970, p. 36).⁷ The remains of the Catharine Market breakdown can be found in the cardboard and turntables of the breakdancing cypher. Then and now cultural production and expressive practices offer moments of living with, refusals and alternatives to routinized surveillance within a visual surplus. In so being, they allow for us to think differently about the predicaments, policies and performances constituting surveillance. Colonial New York City was a space of both terror and promise for black life. Lantern laws, fugitive slave notices, public whippings and the discretionary uses of violence by 'his Majesty's subjects' rendered the black subject as always already unfree yet acts, like the breakdown, that were constitutive of black freedom persisted. It is under this context where certain humans came to be understood by many as unfree and the property of others while at the same time creating practices that maintained their humanity by challenging the routinization of surveillance, that we should read the 1783 Board of Inquiry hearings at Fraunces Tavern.

Of property and passports

What began as a meeting between Generals Carleton and Washington on the point of Article Seven in the Provisional Peace Treaty ended with an exchange of letters between the two, with Washington reiterating his concern regarding the embarkation of escaped slaves. Carleton responded, in kind, with a letter dated 12 May 1783. On what he called Washington's 'surprise' about the evacuation and Washington's accusation that such action 'was a measure totally different from the letter and spirit of the treaty', Carleton reminded Washington that the British set up a register 'to serve as a record of the name of the original proprietor of the negro, and as a rule by which to judge of his value. By this open method of conducting business, I hoped to prevent all fraud' (Carleton 1783). Further, alluding to both self-repossession and tracking by way of identity document, Carleton suggested that 'had these negroes been denied permission to embark they would, in spite of every means to prevent it, have found various methods of quitting this place, so that the former owner would no longer have been able to trace them, and of course would have lost,

in every way, all chance of compensation' (1783). On the notion of black subjects as property, Carleton put it this way, 'every negroe's name is registered and the master he formerly belonged to, with such other circumstances as served to denote his value, that it may be adjusted by compensation, if that was really the intention and meaning of the treaty' (1783). Given this, American and British commissioners charged with receiving and settling claims were appointed to inspect all embarkations to prevent evasion of Article Seven. And with this came the setting up of the arbitration hearings that took place at Fraunces Tavern. At the corner of Pearl and Broad Streets in lower Manhattan, Fraunces Tavern served as the centre of arbitration, where almost every Wednesday at ten in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon from May 1783 through November of that same year the formerly enslaved came to argue for their inclusion in The Book of Negroes by asserting their right to leave New York as free people.⁸

On 2 August 1783, merchant Jonathan Eilbeck questioned the legitimacy of a woman named Jenny Jackson's embarkation to Nova Scotia and he brought his claim before The Board of Inquiry. Jackson was brought to shore to be examined and she produced for The Board a Birch Certificate issued on 5 June 1783 which stated, 'That a Negro named Jenny Jackson formerly the property of John Mclean of Norfolk in the Province of Virginia came within the British Lines under the Sanction and claims the Privilege of the Proclamation respecting Negroes theretofore issued for their Security and Protection'. Eilbeck, a Loyalist, produced a bill of sale for a Judith Jackson from John Maclean dated 16 July 1782. Jackson admitted to The Board that she was indeed Judith Jackson and formerly enslaved by Maclean and clarified that when Maclean departed for England and left her behind she went with the British army to Charlestown and then New York. More detail on Jenny 'Judith' Jackson's narrative of falling within the Proclamation can be found in the 6 May 1773 edition of the *Virginia Gazette*. Between ads for the sale of slaves, tracts of land and a 'fashionable' chariot, and notices for a lost watch and for strayed and stolen livestock, a runaway announcement for a 'Negro woman named Judith' was placed by John Maclean of Norfolk. Offering a reward of up to six dollars, Maclean's notice describes Judith as 'tall and slender, not very black, appears to be between thirty and thirty-five years of age'. In the notice, Maclean made note that Jackson departed with her infant daughter and was perhaps pregnant. Although Jackson had laboured with the British for eight years in Charlestown, South Carolina and New York, and was issued a Birch Certificate attesting to her right to depart, the Board did not make a ruling in the dispute, perhaps because Eilbeck was a Loyalist and they were charged only with adjudicating Patriot claims of loss of property. The Board forwarded the case to General Carleton. Two women named Judith Jackson are recorded in The Book of Negroes. One woman departed from New York City before the aforementioned case was heard. The other Judith

Jackson left on the ship *Ranger* for Port Mattoon, Nova Scotia on 30 November 1783. This Judith Jackson remained in New York until the final day that ships departed as she petitioned Carleton for her passage to Canada and for the return of her two children who were given to Eilbeck. She left for Canada without her children. She is described in *The Book of Negroes* as an 'ordinary wench' of 53-years of age, and formerly the property of 'John Clain' of Norfolk, Virginia, from whom she is recorded as leaving 'early 1779'. Eilbeck also makes an appearance in *The Book of Negroes* in the ledger entry for 'Samuel Ives'. This unusually long entry states, 'Sold to Captain Grayson by Jonathan Eilbeck of New York who it does not appear had any right to sell him as he was the property of Capt. Talbot of Virginia from whence he was brought by the troops 5 years ago and had a pass from Lt. Clinton which Mr. Eilbeck destroyed'. With this entry, Eilbeck's questionable means of claiming possession of others is revealed.

Not all who attempted to embark by altering their recollection of the time of their arrival within the British lines met the same fate. On 2 August 1783, Thomas Smith took issue with a woman named Betty's pending embarkation to Nova Scotia. Betty produced a Birch Certificate issued to Elizabeth Truant detailing that she was formerly the property of Smith but 'that she came within the British Lines under the Sanction and claims the Privilege of the Proclamation respecting Negroes therefore issued for their Security and Protection'. Smith insisted that 'the Wench is his property' and that she only arrived in New York City from his estate in Acquackanonk Township, New Jersey, on 20 April 1783. Perhaps out of terror and with the hope of reducing the punishment she might have imagined on the inevitability of her return, Betty relented and acknowledged that she escaped Smith the previous April, making her ineligible for the Proclamation. The Board ruled for the claimant and directed Betty to be 'disposed of' by Smith 'at his pleasure.' On 30 May the Board heard the case of Violet Taulbert. In an ad placed by David Campbell of Greenwich in the 24 May 1783 *Royal Gazette*, Taulbert is said to have escaped with her two boys. A reward of five guineas was posted for their return. No decision was made by The Board in this case as theirs was only to decide on cases regarding those ready to embark. In another case heard on 17 July 1783, Dinah Archer produced before The Board a Birch Certificate issued to her on 2 May 1783. Archer had been brought for examination before The Board through a claim by William Farrer. During the hearing Archer testified 'that she was formerly the Property of John Baines of Crane Island Norfolk County Virginia' and that she was sold by Baines to Farrer and lived and laboured in Farrer's household for about three years until he left for England, leaving her behind. Archer told The Board that she was later informed by Baines that he never issued a bill of sale to Farrer, and Baines 'compelled her to return to him'. Archer remained in Baines' possession until she escaped to the

British and arrived in New York City under Sir George Collier and General Matthews' 'Expedition up the Chesepeake'. The Board decided that they were 'not authorized to determine the Question between the Claimant and the Negroe woman' and referred the case to the Commandant of New York City. Recorded in the Book of Negroes as a 42-year-old 'one eyed' 'stout wench', Dinah Archer travelled on the ship *Grand Duchess of Russia* to Port Roseway on 22 September 1783. She travelled to Canada indentured to a Mrs. Savage. Although Archer had perjured herself to gain a passport, her narrative of coming behind the British lines before the signing of the Provisional Peace Treaty allowed the British to deny William Ferrer's claim on her as his property.

In total The Board of Inquiry heard 14 cases. Of those fourteen, five were children, two men and seven women. The five children were all returned to their claimants, the two men were allowed to embark and of the seven women, three were allowed to leave New York. In all 1,336 men, 914 women and 750 children are listed in The Book of Negroes. Once in Canada they would find there enslaved black people, other Black Loyalists who were evacuated from Boston in 1777, and largely untenable land. Many laboured on public works projects, feared slave catchers and faced possible re-enslavement. After some time, many left to establish what is now Sierra Leone (Pybus 2006; Schama 2007).

Conclusion: Aminata Diallo

In discussing the archive of Atlantic slavery, Hartman asks, 'how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive? To imagine what could have been?' (2008, p. 7). I close this article by considering *The Book of Negroes: A Novel* to ask if this creative text can offer an alternative imagining of the events surrounding the archive that could not be fully realized with the historical documents examined here. The novel traces protagonist Aminata Diallo's life from her capture in West Africa, her enslavement in South Carolina, her journey to Manhattan and her eventual escape from her slave master to become bookkeeper at Fraunces Tavern, to her work with British under the proclamations, her emigration to Nova Scotia and on to London and her return to Africa. Through Diallo we are offered a remembering of Fraunces Tavern and those archived in The Book of Negroes as she is tasked by the British to interview, inspect and register the names in the ledger: 'I wanted to write more about them, but the ledger was cramped' (Hill 2007, p. 294). When a claim is made on Diallo's person as property, she is taken in front of The Board at Fraunces Tavern, 'wrists tied and legs

shackled' (p. 306). In this claims court, promises of freedom were broken, despite the pleas and testimony. Diallo narrates:

At the back of the room, I heard claims against two other Negroes who, like me, had been pulled off ships in the harbour. Both – one man, and one woman – were given over to men who said they owned them. I despised the Americans for taking these Negroes, but my greatest contempt was for the British. They had used us in every way in their war. Cooks. Whores. Midwives. Soldiers. We had given them our food, our beds, our blood and our lives. And when slave owners showed up with their stories and their paperwork, the British turned their backs and allowed us to be seized like chattel. Our humiliation meant nothing to them, nor did our lives.

(p. 307)

Diallo voices a story of life, surveillance and the making of *The Book of Negroes* other than one of acts of British compassion. By approaching surveillance technologies through stories of black escape – Al and Garfield's televisual escape, Sam's facetiness in 'turning up the white of his eyes', Aminata Diallo's narrative acts – the brutalities of slavery are not subject to erasure, rather such a re-narration makes known the stakes of emancipation.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Katherine McKittrick, and to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. I am grateful for the generous support of the John L. Warfield Centre for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin that enabled me to visit the National Archives in London, the National Archives in Washington, DC, as well as Fraunces Tavern in New York City. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Ottawa in February 2010 and the University of California at Santa Barbara in October 2010. I would like to thank those audiences for their questions and comments. This paper was work-shopped at the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University in October 2010. Thank you to all those in attendance for their fierce commentary and contributions: Cathy N. Davidson, Jennifer D. Brody, Sharon P. Holland, Mark Anthony Neal, Mark Olson, and Maurice O. Wallace. All shortcomings, however, are mine.

Notes

- 1 Coined by Thomas Mathiesen (1997), the synopticon, in counterpoint to the panopticon (where the few watch the many) allows for the many to watch the

few, often by way of mass media in a viewer society, for example, reality television watching.

- 2 This quote is taken from the pair's application video in which contestant Al St. Louis states incredulously: 'two black men being chased by a white man on a horse?' While it could be said that St. Louis and Thompson are framed in this episode through a narrative of upliftment and self-making as redeemed, it could also be argued that a certain element of minstrelsy or 'hamming it up' for the camera are engaged by the two: losing the defective compass leaving Mantracker to find it, paying homage to another reality television programme that also makes use of surveillance footage of evasion and capture, *Cops*, by singing the lyrics to its theme song 'Bad Boys', or beat-boxing Negro spirituals.
- 3 A 'breeder' or foundation document is used to support one's identity claims in the application process for a more secure status document, such as a passport. In our contemporary moment, breeder documents, such as birth certificates and in some cases baptismal certificates, are said to be more easily forged and weak in terms of security (Salter 2003).
- 4 On 7 November 1775 John Murray, the fourth Lord of Dunmore and Governor of Virginia issued a proclamation that promised freedom for male slaves who voluntarily fought with British forces. After the defeat of his forces in Virginia, Murray arrived in New York City in the summer of 1776 to occupy the city, establishing its military headquarters there. With Dunmore's Proclamation, and later Howe's 1778 Proclamation and Clinton's Philipsburg Proclamation in 1779, this guarantee was extended to women and children, bringing about the 'largest black escape in the history of North American slavery' with fugitives estimated at 25,000–55,000 in the 'southern states alone' (Hodges 1996, p. xiv). Sir Henry Clinton served as Commander-in-Chief of all British Forces of North America from May 1778 until February 1782 when Sir Guy Carleton took up the post.
- 5 Now that The Book of Negroes is digitized and searchable on-line (<http://www.blackloyalist.info/>), it could be argued that this inventory bears some of the hallmarks of contemporary centralized traveller databases, complete with a 'no-sail' list. 'No-sail' list here is a play on post-September 11th 'no-fly' lists, the Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II) maintained by the US Transportation Security Administration, and Secondary Security Screening Selection (SSSS) that subjects 'selectees' to additional scrutiny at US and Canadian airports. For a detailed accounting of the inventory that is the Book of Negroes see Hodges (1996). Hodges' appendix includes tables, by colony and gender, of 'All Negroes Who Claimed to Be Born Free', 'All Negroes Who Claimed to Have Escaped', 'All Negroes Who Were Free By Proclamation', those who were indentured, enslaved and emancipated.

- 6 Here 'black city life' was intricately tied with 'Indian city life', as laws regulated the mobility of both Negro and Indian slaves. The descriptions in *The Book of Negroes* of those who left New York also gesture to the intimate relations within the black and Indigenous populations: 'born free, her mother an Indian'; 'better half Indian'. Many thanks to Sharon Holland for pointing out this connection. For detailed discussions of the events of 1712 and 1741 in New York City and their effects on the regulation of the city life of black subjects see Doolen (2005), Lepore (2005), Harris (2003), Burrows and Wallace (1999), Davis (1985). For seventeenth and early eighteenth century laws regulating free and enslaved blacks see Hodges (1999). That fire (candle lantern) was employed to deter fire (burning the city down) is not without irony.
- 7 Provision ground ideology names the slave's relationship to the Earth as one concerning sustenance through the growing of produce for survival, rather than that harvested for the profit of the plantation. Where the 'official ideology', that of the plantation, as Wynter explains, 'would develop as an ideology of *property*, and the rights of property, the provision ground ideology would remain based on a man's relation to the Earth, which linked man to his community' (Wynter 1970, p. 37). The idea of 'Earth' here is not one of property or of land, but of the formation of community through spatial practices 'concerned with the common good' (p. 37). For Wynter, dance is one form of ceremonial observance by which the black subject 'rehumanized Nature, and helped to save his own humanity against the constant onslaught of the plantation system by the creation of a folklore and a folk-culture' (p. 36). Here we see the centrality of folk practices, including dance, to the emancipatory breaching necessary for a liberatory remaking of humanness (Wynter 2009).
- 8 What was to become Fraunces Tavern was built by a member of the Delancey family in and around 1706. In 1762, Samuel Fraunces or 'Black Sam' took ownership of the building, opening a social club, tavern and inn and named it *The Queen's Head*. There is some disagreement surrounding Jamaican-born Fraunces' racial identity, which reveals the then and continued anxieties around race, and blackness in particular, in America.

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