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Under Pressure: Reading Material Textuality in the Recovery of Early African American Print Work

> Reconsidering received assumptions about what constitutes African American print culture may revise our stories of origins and developments, of contributors and of purposes.
>
> Frances Smith Foster

IN 2006, BROWN UNIVERSITY'S COMMITTEE ON SLAVERY AND Justice issued a study of the university's "historical entanglement with slavery and the slave trade" and a reflection "on the meaning of this history in the present, on the complex historical, political, legal, and moral questions posed by any present day confrontation with past injustice" (4).[1] The report outlined the university's physical and financial connections to slavery and its development within the context of the Rhode Island slave trade. It highlighted the use of enslaved labor to construct an early and iconic building on campus and reported the number of early benefactors whose wealth derived from the trade. A result of the study has been sustained conversation about the institutional legacies of slavery and questions about how to trace, acknowledge, and make reparations for the known and unknown enslaved people whose thoughts, bodies, and labor are constitutive of today's educational institutions.[2]

Early-American print may be overdue for similar considerations. Print, print culture, and "the archive" are not finite institutions in the same way that a university is. Print is, however, no less entangled with slavery and the slave trade. Enslaved people were made to work on presses doing a range of tasks that facilitated the production of print. Though unfree, there they set, cleaned, and organized type, pulled impressions on hand presses, and cut engravings. Enslaved African

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Americans made print just as they made buildings, pottery, and sugar. Some of their names have been obscured on purpose or by custom. Some, but not all, of an American university owes its existence to enslaved people, and the same is true of the printed serials, books, and broadsides in its archives. Decades of African Americanist scholarship and Black activism have opened a moment for open acknowledgement to eclipse silence. In this essay, I propose a methodological shift toward reading practices capable of making the revenants of Black art and labor visible in the archives of print. For though this labor was not free it took the skill, time, and energy of specific people to create, and given the contingencies of history and craft, we would not, today's archives of print would not be possible without them.

This approach to reading will privilege the legibility of the most material aspects of material texts. Scholarly readers are trained to interpret the meaning of words and images, temporarily suspending this urge is necessary to see what other traces material texts bear. In studies of the built environment, for example, Joseph McGill, founder of The Slave Dwelling Project, has documented how fingerprints of enslaved brickmakers appear within the bricks of plantation and other buildings constructed by enslaved people: "One of the most indisputable telltale signs of what the enslaved contributed to the built environment . . . are the fingerprints that were left in sundried bricks when they were handled too early," he writes on the project's blog. McGill describes these fingerprints as able to "reach" across time between the enslaved craftsperson and those who lay their hands on the same brick. For McGill, the materiality of the medium carries traces of people and anchors their presence within today's built environment. These fingerprints are neither the architect's, nor are they the building owner's. But they are traces of the labor that is sine qua non for the building's existence.

A recovery project like this one will mean tracing the lives and work of people whose stories can be brought fully into the record, but it will also, perhaps primarily, entail finding ways to read the gaps, absences and strategic elisions of Black people from the history of early American print culture. In this, I follow Carla L. Peterson's urging that early African Americanists take a scholarly "approach that encourages speculation and resists closure," since "given a lack of documentation, speculation becomes the only alternative to silence, secrecy, and invisibility" (116, 114).[3] This stance is aimed at dislodging familiar frames

of analysis long enough to consider new distributions of the possible. Enslaved printers created vast amounts of documentation when they literally created documents at the press. Yet the presence of these people remains largely illegible because dominant ways of reading print privilege its alphabetic content. That is, readers tend to read for the work of writers and editors, not printers. As a result, one common view of the archive of eighteenth-century print is that it largely represents white men. Joanna Brooks has written that the precarity of Black lives in the eighteenth century also affects the "life chances" of early Black-authored books and print. The survival of books and print in present-day archives "correlates positively with the race of the author," Brooks writes, and with the author's life chances. The mattering of a life can indicate the likelihood of print matter's posterity (42). Yet, some of these privileged archives of white print culture were physically created by African Americans, and therefore represent new areas for studying the complexity of early African American involvement in the history of print. If early Black-authored print is scarce, early white-authored but Black-made print is much less so.

Black print and periodical studies focusing on the work of Black writers and editors is a rich and complex area of study, and introducing the question of Black printing of white-authored texts is meant to query and stretch at its edges, not eclipse it. The field has been advanced in the last thirty years by Frances Smith Foster, Carla L. Peterson, P. Gabrielle Foreman, Elizabeth McHenry, Joycelyn Moody, Eric Gardner, Derrick Spires, and Ben Fagan, who focus mainly on the nineteenth-century Black press via the recovery of African American writers and editors. I draw attention to the eighteenth-century when there was not yet a traditionally-defined "Black press," but there were Black people operating presses.[4] Taking what is known about individual enslaved printers, the operation of presses, and the material evidence in the archives of print they created presents the opportunity to recalibrate what, and who, is legible in the archive.

I took Brown University as a touchstone at the outset because its example raises the difficult question of sorting out and accounting for the legacy of slavery within large and diverse institutions, an example which may prove useful in rethinking the archive of print. Despite Brown's history of racist exclusion, it is worth remembering, with significant effect, that the institution has had foundational African American

involvement since its construction. Likewise, the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, founded as the first paper in that state in 1756, is not a Black newspaper. But, from its first issue in October 1756 until the late 1780s or early 1790s, the paper was printed by an enslaved African American man, Primus Fowle.

THE INVISIBILITIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN INFORMATION WORK

A full account of African American contributions to and presences within American print cultures requires understanding the intersection of two processes of erasure: of "information work" in general, and of early African American print labor specifically. By information work, I mean the various forms of labor that constitute knowledge production and circulation. An example is printing, a form of hidden labor situated at the nexus of artistry and craft. In addition to being mindful about the tendency of labor to disappear within information networks like newspapers, further elisions created by the legal and cultural oppressions of race-based slavery must also be accounted for.

Labor that produces information, including print, is particularly susceptible to going unnoticed. In the introduction to *Between Craft and Science: Technical Work in US Settings*, Stephen R. Barley and Julian E. Orr describe how technical workers mediate between "technology and society in a structural sense" because "they link us to technologies that are nearly transparent when they work and troublesomely opaque when they do not" (12–14). Print, in the form of newspapers, broadsides, and books, is one of these usually transparent forms. Printers, typesetters, and engravers are among the many workers who facilitate circulation of information in early-American print networks. They "negotiat[e] a boundary between the virtual and the physical," working to create a material text that, unlike a troublesome computer or poorly made book, makes itself appear secondary to the information it conveys (Downey 229). In many ways, book history and print culture studies, as fields, directly attend to various forms of work that make up the unseen labors behind individual acts that Robert Darnton called the "communications circuit" (67). In his foundational essay "What is the History of Books?," Darnton charted a vast network of labors and institutions between writer and reader, making apparent the work of papermakers, engravers, printers, binders, warehouse workers, and booksellers. Greg Downey calls work like this the "hidden labor" of

information networks, and book history's foundational instantiation in Darnton's circuit can be understood as an "un-hiding" of information labor within the circuit/network (209).

If book history profitably looks past the alphabetic information conveyed by print in order to pay attention to the various labors represented within a book, then it would seem like an ideal methodology for studying enslaved laborers via the print they produced. As D.F. McKenzie concludes in "The Book as an Expressive Form," "bibliography . . . can, in short, show the human presence in any recorded text" (29). Elsewhere in his work, McKenzie shows how studying changes in a text's typographical composition, such as differing measures between lines of print, provides evidence of print shop working conditions like the presence of more than one compositor working concurrently ("Printers of the Mind" 23–24). In a similar vein, Fredson Bowers studied changes in running titles and spelling within printed books to determine how many skeleton forms were employed in the composition of a single edition, and therefore how many typesetters must have worked on it (179). As book history and print culture studies developed out of analytical bibliography, it retained this important insight about material texts. Material texts are always expressions of the "human presence" behind their creation. Book history, then, should be an ideal field through which to study the erasure of Black labor and craft.

Even as book history brought the producers behind communication technologies into view, however, the field tended to privilege white craft labor as its subject of study. McKenzie's labor history of the Cambridge University Press, for example, relies on records of wages in order to reconstruct an accurate picture of how much typesetting and impression pulling really happened. "Wages, and therefore output, since the men were on piece-rates, varied considerably," from one worker to another, McKenzie found, and therefore he cautioned against trying to generalize about production norms. If only we look to the "wealth of primary and documentary material" available in such institutional records, he argued, we can put aside "ruling assumptions" in favor of facts ("Printers of the Mind" 7–8). Of course, this method is predicated on economic subjects who work in order to receive wages, not enslaved people who are counted as chattel.

The presumption of free labor occurs in American book history as well. In William S. Pretzer's essay in the agenda-setting first book of the American Antiquarian Society's (AAS) Society's Program in the

History of the Book in American Culture, "Labor and Technology in the Book Trades," the model for studying the labor of print production is white craft, rather than Black enslaved labor ("Quest" 13–14). Pretzer makes a compelling case for attention to information labor in the burgeoning field of American book and print culture studies, stating that "printing is not merely a method of communication; it is a form of production." "Our attention to labor and technology must ultimately raise questions about the sources and impact of the changing work experiences of men and women in printing offices," he continues, further noting that those work experiences are defined by the "contrasting pursuits of autonomy and discipline, [and] freedom and order" (14). Here, slavery does not enter into the conception of early American labor and capitalism even though explorations of such things as freedom and discipline should have necessitated a discussion enslaved labor. This work was published in the late 1980s as the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture was launched at the AAS. Decades later, Pretzer, who is now the Senior Curator for History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, acknowledged the fact of African American print workers in his contribution to volume two of *The History of the Book in America*. "The occasional African American, enslaved or free, who toiled in a printing office, was rare enough in the eighteenth century to merit special notice by observers of the trade," he writes, signaling the need for further research in this area ("Journeyman Printers" 167). In the work of Black historians, however, Black print labor is not characterized as a rarity. Amistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson write in their *History of the Black Press* that "Black printers were not unknown in early colonial America. The practice among slave masters of apprenticing slave boys to the trades was conducive to developing skilled workmen" (18). More recently, John Garcia has turned up more evidence of both enslaved (or possibly indentured) and free people of color "in the vicinity of" the early book trades. The critical gesture toward the larger "vicinity" of the trades is an important one because it signals the necessity of looking beyond privileged categories of labor and craft, and also of acknowledging where the trail of positive evidence ends, or never existed.

In *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942), Lorenzo Green discussed the enslaved eighteenth-century print shop labor of Primus Fowle and of an otherwise unnamed "Negro of John Campbell" (114).

That Green talks about a person known to us only as "the Negro of John Campbell" also points to the archival absences that shape scholarship in the history of slavery and the history of the book. This lack of information stems from the vagaries of early record keeping in general, habits of record keeping (or non-record keeping) specific to enslaved people, and oversights resulting from racist assumptions. Annette Gordon-Reed's work reconstructing the lives of the Hemings family is exemplary for its consideration of these issues and their effects on historiography. "While it is true that the lives of the vast majority of people who lived during the time of American slavery are lost to history," she writes, "the anonymity of American slaves is even more pronounced" (22). Thus, the documentation of white labor led book history and print culture studies to a flourishing body of scholarship on white printers, while the opposite has been true of Black printers, especially those held enslaved.

This lack of documentation is, of course, not news to early African Americanists who have who been innovative and rigorous in working to overcome and get around it, but it is crucially important for the predominantly white field of book history to catch up—especially since early African American book history and print culture studies continue to pose many of the field's more interesting questions.[5] As a field that frequently prides itself on its objective, at times scientific, approach to cultural texts, book history risks repeating the elisions and silences of the past. Where early African Americanist work has been rigorous and creative in bibliographical and archival practice in response to the silences imposed by slavery and white supremacy, the dominant tradition of white book history has proceeded as if one must remain silent about fire when all one sees is smoke. And further, as if, lacking direct sight of fire, one must also overlook the smoke.

One of these elisions, Primus Fowle, appears only to quickly disappear within the field's foundational texts and institutions. Records pertaining to Primus Fowle do exist, but are often tantalizingly obscure, or they are placed at the margin of knowledge proper, as indices of his absented presence. The AAS's "Printers' File," for example, consists of a twenty-five-drawer card catalog containing "information for some 8,000–10,000 people in the book trades" detailing "the work of printers, publishers, editors, binders, and others involved in the book [and newspaper] trades up to 1820."[6] The information was gathered from biographies, bibliographies, and reference works, and builds upon

AAS founder Isaiah Thomas' own chronicle of early American printers. Information including names, vital dates, occupations, firms, and associations are recorded and alphabetized by last name on individual orange catalog cards across twenty-five drawers. This is true except for four beige cards that are placed between "Ayrault, Daniel" and "Babcock, Charles." These four cards are labeled "Black Printers" and they list twenty-nine names. They are the only four cards that group people together rather than present them individually. They are the only cards that indicate their subjects' race. Unlike all the other cards, they do not list what cities, presses, or papers these Black printers were associated with. A few have birth and/or death dates. They are not integrated alphabetically by last name into the rest of the file, but are placed between A and B, and on differently colored cards that stand out from the rest.[7] The "Black Printers" are excluded even as they are included. They do not exist within the internal organizing principles of the catalog, but float just outside "B."

Most of the people listed on the "Black Printers" cards fall outside the chronological scope of the Printers' File, which cuts off at 1820, except for one, "Fowle, Prince (18th century)."[8] Like other entries in the file, Primus Fowle is identified and described in one of the primary sources for all data in the file, Isaiah Thomas' *The History of Printing in America*. In a long footnote, Thomas identifies Primus Fowle and describes his work as an enslaved printer: "This negro was named Primus. He was an African. I well remember him; he worked at press with or without an assistant; he continued to do press work until prevented by age. He went to Portsmouth with his master, and there died, being more than ninety years of age; about fifty of which he was a pressman" (128). Even in those rare cases when hard evidence of enslaved labor exists in authoritative sources, it exists as a footnote to official histories, and does not necessarily enter the record in the ordinary ways that free white labor does.

Information labor, as a general category, tends to disappear behind the information it transmits, and that one of book history and print culture studies' signal contributions has been to restore that labor and its meaning to view. The work of enslaved printers has been subject to a kind of double invisibility, against which I take up Annette Gordon-Reed's charge to "cast the net as widely as possible [in gathering information] if we want to see slavery," and to make enslaved people

more present in our scholarship and collective memory (*Hemingses* 23). Primus Fowle's newspaper presswork show how enslaved labor can be read through its material textual traces.

MARGINAL PRESENCE: PRIMUS FOWLE AND THE *NEW-HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE*

After its founding in 1756, the *New-Hampshire Gazette* was printed by an enslaved African American man, Primus Fowle. The initial page of the *Gazette*'s first issue features a prospectus from "The Printer to the PUBLIC." The printer writes, "I now publish the first Weekly Gazette, for the province of New-Hampshire . . . as this is the beginning of Printing in this Province." The printer who speaks, however, is not the same person as the printer who prints. The back page of each *Gazette* states that the paper was "Printed by *Daniel Fowle*." But we know from Isaiah Thomas that Primus Fowle ran Daniel Fowle's presses, and during their first eight years in New Hampshire likely did so by himself until the earliest of Daniel Fowle's white apprentices arrived. Daniel Fowle was the owner of the press, and he was also Primus Fowle's enslaver. As such, Daniel Fowle is, according to authoritative sources, the printer of the *Gazette*.[9] Some accounts go so far as to erase Primus Fowle from the room entirely, like Lawrence C. Wroth's *The Colonial Printer*, in which Wroth writes that, "save for an interval of ten years in which [Daniel] Fowle was assisted by his nephew . . . he continued his press alone until his death in 1787" (25). Wroth's erasure of Primus Fowle is in keeping with the pattern of non-acknowledgement through which laborers, especially the enslaved, are left off record. Gene Andrew Jarrett has explored the difference in scholarly modes adopted in approaches to the writer Paul Laurence Dunbar, who is a subject of intellectual history, versus those used to study his father, the formerly enslaved plasterer Joshua Dunbar, who tends to be the subject of social history. Jarrett argues that scholars tend to take the creators and objects enslaved artisanship as mere facts rather than as texts or expressions in their own right ("Father and Son"). In the space between "Printer" and printer of the *New-Hampshire Gazette* we find the need to look beyond privileged categories of print and intellectual subjectivity like author, editor, and publisher in order to recognize the presence of people like Primus Fowle.

Primus Fowle was not an obscure figure who left few traces of his work; rather, he was quite prolific. He worked for fifty years as a printer

creating thousands of copies of newspapers, books, broadsides, and other materials that remain in archives and special collections libraries. This is especially true during the eight years of the *Gazette*'s existence when it was a two-man operation, with Daniel Fowle composing type and Primus Fowle running the press.[10] Primus Fowle's work is, in a way, voluminous and materially present to us. Yet the person himself remains obscure. One way around this problem is to pay attention to the very materiality of the print, temporarily suspending initial desires to read the semantic information it conveys. If Primus Fowle was a prolific creator of material texts, then it is precisely in the most material aspects of his productions he will become visible.

One of the precious few certainties that can be gleaned from the conventional historical record about Primus Fowle the historical person is that he was disfigured by the repetitive act of pulling impressions on the hand press. The four very brief eighteenth- and nineteenth-century written sources documenting Primus Fowle's life suggest that pulling the handle on the press left him permanently bent forward at a forty-five degree angle.[11] Charles Brewster, in his 1859 *Rambles in Portsmouth*, recounts that "through long service in bending over the press he was bent to an angle of about forty five degrees" (210). Primus Fowle becoming permanently bent at the waist as a result of repetitive pulling of impressions is consistent with the widespread phenomenon called "printer's arm," the strengthening of muscles on only one side of the body/spine from repetitive motion, and also with an account of Primus Fowle immediately following his death in 1791.[12] A verse epitaph, published in the *Gazette* on May 19, 1791, states that "Primus, a Negro, late the property of Daniel Fowle . . . [is] deceased," and that "He was a hearty friend, / And did possess a grateful mind / Though oft borne down with pain." The pressure that Primus Fowle applied on the press created marks both on his body and on the sheets of paper that became the *Gazette* as he pulled. As an artifact, then, the *Gazette* indexes one half of a process that also produced Primus Fowle's body, "borne down with pain."[13] For every impression of letter and image into a page of the *Gazette*, there was an equal impression made in Primus Fowle's body: an archive of newspapers and a painfully disfigured spine resulted from the same forceful pull.

The tendency to privilege the ideas expressed in writing on a printed page means we overlook non-semantic marks on a material

text, but those marks are the best indices of Primus Fowle's forceful pulling. Primus Fowle did not write for the *Gazette*, but his impression clearly left marks on the newspaper—and in places beyond the printing of white men's words. Marcy Dinius has argued that visual and material elements of David Walker's "Appeal" communicate sonic dimensions of fiery oral delivery through "typographic radicalism." Dinius demonstrates the materiality of African American print indexes presences beyond the alphabetic content of the text (55–56). In the case of Primus Fowle, who is not the author or intended speaker of the words he printed, the type indexes his presence as creator of the material text. His impressive force on the page becomes visible through its visible traces in the paper's margins and its masthead. That impressive force is an index of him and his enslavement at the same time that it also brings the *Gazette* into being. Both are legible on the surface of the page.

The *New-Hampshire Gazette*'s original masthead featured a woodcut depicting the fable of the crow and the fox, which was restruck from "an abridgement of Croxall's Esop" (Thomas 335).[14] It was part of the masthead for the first forty-three issues, between October 7, 1756 and July 29, 1757. At first, the cut depicting the scene of the fox flattering the crow in a tree is entirely surrounded by a solid border. By January 7, 1757, pieces of the once solid border begin to break off. Pieces of the woodcut continue to break off throughout the first half of 1757, until late July when the tree, the crow, and the framing line break away completely (See Fig. 1). The August 5, 1757 masthead is reconfigured without a woodcut illustration, and later, on October 8, 1757, a wood engraving depicting another fable takes the place of the original.

Isaiah Thomas reports the cut's breakage, but attributes no meaning to it: "This cut was, in a short time, broken by some accident" (335). But that "accident" is an instance where Primus Fowle's presence becomes especially conspicuous. The breakage is either directly resultant from, or quickly worsened by, the force of Primus Fowle's pull. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an accident can also be that which is "present but not necessarily so," a material remainder beyond what is considered the essence of a thing (n. I). Primus Fowle is, likewise, present but not necessarily so, accidental to the production of the *Gazette*'s information. But "accidents" are also historical contingencies, and like Primus Fowle's pulling of the press, happened in a particular place and time, and created a particular material record. Accidents are, as Roland

Friday, July 29. 1757. NUMB. 43.

The *New-Hampſhire* GAZETTE,

With the Freſheſt Advices *Foreign and Domeſtick.*

Friday, January 7. 1757. NUMB. 14.

THE *New-Hampſhire* GAZETTE,

With the Freſheſt Advices *Foreign and Domeſtick.*

Saml. Penhallow

Thurſday, October 7: 1756. THE NUMB. 1.

New-Hampſhire GAZETTE,

With the Freſheſt Advices *Foreign and Domeſtick.*

The Printer to the PUBLIC.

Figure 1: Mastheads of the New-Hampshire Gazette showing the gradual breakage of the engraving at center. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Barthes observes, invitations to memory and interpretation. Barthes develops the concept of the punctum, the wound detail in a photograph that anchors a personal relationship and is an incitement to interpretation. The punctum, “rises from the scene, shouts out of it like an arrow, and pierces.” It is, he writes, the “accident which pricks me” (26–27).

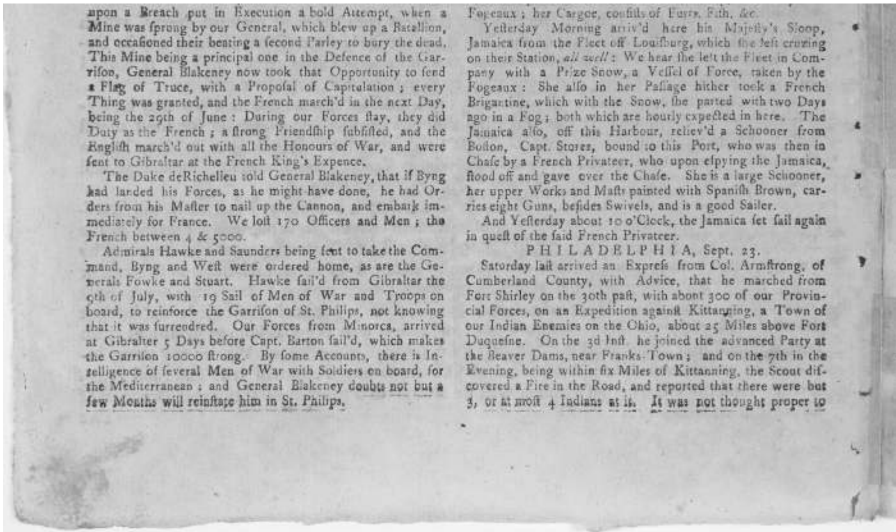
The richness of the accidents of print is most evident where they reach out and prick. The thin line of wood or metal at the point where the breakage begins is structurally the weakest part of the cut. At that part of the cut, there is no supporting material stabilizing the piece that prints the line. Slowly, over the course of the first year of the *Gazette*, pieces break away from the down and outward force of the platen. The breakage can be attributed to the force of Primus Fowle’s presswork and is a place in the material text where we can tangibly locate his presence in the production of the *Gazette*. Here is the excessive force of Primus Fowle’s presswork pushing down to create the image, but also flowing

outward and breaking the cut. Refusing to regard the results of Primus Fowle's presence as insignificant inky accidents takes part in what Lois Brown has called, in a related context, "the purposeful reclamation of the ordinary" in African Americanist recovery work. Ordinary sources, those that might escape notice when looking for more traditional evidence, "give voice to the subtle, accidental . . . connections" that can help bring submerged African American histories to light (132).

At this early moment in the *Gazette*'s production history, Primus Fowle was pulling the press and slowly, over time, breaking the masthead engraving. There is no reason to believe he did it purposefully, and it does not matter. He need not have intentionally broken the engraving in order to inscribe a message or to leave a subtle sign of his subversion of Daniel Fowle. The breakage is a visible record of the simple fact that Primus Fowle applied force to a press and made the inky impressions we read and touch today in encountering the *Gazette*. Primus Fowle left no record of his voice or his words. But he did leave everyday ordinary marks all over the print he produced, marks that were not intended to be put there by writer or editor. Accidental or not, they are Primus Fowle's marks, created by him.

Primus Fowle also left impressions of his work in the margins of the *New-Hampshire Gazette*. Early issues of the *Gazette* make frequent use of the margins to include information that would not fit within the regular columnar frame, making it necessary to turn the paper and read up and down the margins. Even more frequently, throughout the first several years of the paper, there is a readily observable underlining effect along the bottom edge of its sheets (See Fig. 2). As Primus Fowle inked the type before making each impression, he also deposited ink on the "shoulder" of the type, the part of the type body that is lower than the letterform, and therefore not meant to print. As Primus Fowle pulled the lever on the press, he did so with enough force that the paper regularly pressed into the shoulder of the type standing at the bottom of each page. The effect is not uncommon within the pages of the *Gazette*; it is observable in nearly every issue of the paper's first year when Primus Fowle was operating the press.

These lines in the margins, are, on the one hand, mere accidents of crude printing with very worn type in an early American outpost. They are also legible as marks of a racial symbolic: black marks in the white margin. To borrow an idea from Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, they



upon a Breach put in Execution a bold Attempt, when a Mine was ſprung by our General, which blew up a Batallion, and occaſioned their beating a ſecond Parley to bury the dead. This Mine being a principal one in the Defence of the Garriſon, General Blakeney now took that Opportunity to ſend a Flag of Truce, with a Propoſal of Capitulation; every Thing was granted, and the French march'd in the next Day, being the 29th of June: During our Forces ſtay, they did Duty as the French; a ſtrong Friendſhip ſubſiſted, and the Engliſh march'd out with all the Honours of War, and were ſent to Gibraltar at the French King's Expence.

The Duke deRichelieu told General Blakeney, that if Byng had landed his Forces, as he might have done, he had Orders from his Maſter to nail up the Cannon, and embark immediately for France. We loſt 170 Officers and Men; the French between 4 & 5000.

Admirals Hawke and Saunders being ſent to take the Command, Byng and Weſt were ordered home, as are the Generals Fowke and Stuart. Hawke ſail'd from Gibraltar the 9th of July, with 19 Sail of Men of War and Troops on board, to reinforce the Garriſon of St. Philips, not knowing that it was ſurrendred. Our Forces from Minorca, arrived at Gibralter 5 Days before Capt. Barton ſail'd, which makes the Garriſon 10000 ſtrong. By ſome Accounts, there is Intelligence of ſeveral Men of War with Soldiers on board, for the Mediterranean; and General Blakeney doubts not but a few Months will reinſtate him in St. Philips.

Fogeaux; her Cargoe, conſiſts of Furrs, Fiſh, &c.

Yeſterday Morning arriv'd here his Majeſty's Sloop, Jamaica from the Fleet off Louiſburg, which ſhe left cruzing on their Station, *all well*: We hear ſhe left the Fleet in Company with a Prize Snow, a Veſſel of Force, taken by the Fogeaux: She alſo in her Paſſage hither took a French Brigantine, which with the Snow, ſhe parted with two Days ago in a Fog; both which are hourly expected in here. The Jamaica alſo, off this Harbour, reliev'd a Schooner from Boſton, Capt. Stores, bound to this Port, who was then in Chaſe by a French Privateer, who upon eſpying the Jamaica, ſtood off and gave over the Chaſe. She is a large Schooner, her upper Works and Maſts painted with Spaniſh Brown, carries eight Guns, beſides Swivels, and is a good Sailer.

And Yeſterday about 10 o'Clock, the Jamaica ſet ſail again in queſt of the ſaid French Privateer.

PHILADELPHIA, Sept. 23.

Saturday laſt arrived an Expreſs from Col. Armſtrong, of Cumberland County, with Advice, that he marched from Fort Shirley on the 30th paſt, with about 300 of our Provincial Forces, on an Expedition againſt Kittanning, a Town of our Indian Enemies on the Ohio, about 25 Miles above Fort Duqueſne. On the 3d Inſt. he joined the advanced Party at the Beaver Dams, near Franks-Town; and on the 7th in the Evening, being within ſix Miles of Kittanning, the Scout diſcovered a Fire in the Road, and reported that there were but 3, or at moſt 4 Indians at it. It was not thought proper to

Figure 2: Marginal printing from the shoulder of the type block, representative of a common occurrence in early issues of The New-Hampshire Gazette. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

can be said to inscribe the "Africanist presence" always at the margin of American culture. Primus Fowle likely did not mean to create a symbolic margin, but these marks are nonetheless reminders of the racist conditions through which the newspaper was created, and also of their potential invisibility to readers who encounter that paper today. The Morrisonian call not to let the "Black presence central to any understanding of national literature . . . hover at the margins of the literary imagination" implicitly points to present absences like Primus Fowle (5). Here is an opportunity to think about literal margins, and how they are created, becoming visible or not, by Primus Fowle's presence.

Once Primus Fowle and his marks become visible, a new kind of reading is possible. These marks and traces become the very sites from which we can critique the common sensibility that writes Primus Fowle and the Africanist presence out of legibility. In other words, the marginal printing and other non-alphabetic material texts provide a way of making visible what lies outside common political and aesthetic frames, in both eighteenth-century print culture and our contemporary

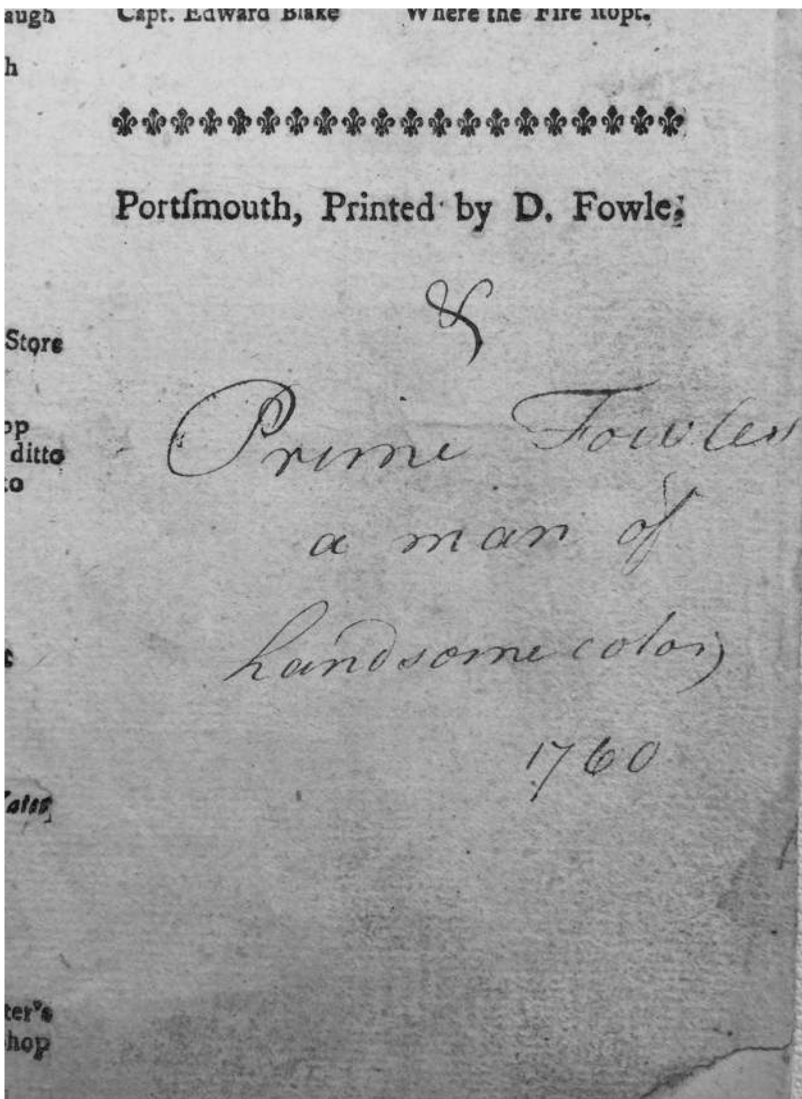
encounters with its archive. Primus Fowle and his labor typically lay outside what Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," outside the politically constructed common sensibility of "what is seen and what can be said about it" (13). The Rancièrean notion is useful because it provokes the exploration of the political lines of inclusion and exclusion determining what is legible, and to whom, in aesthetic objects. In terms of eighteenth-century print culture and the *Gazette*, the force of Primus Fowle's impressions creates alphabetic and representational information. At the same time, it creates excesses that, like Primus Fowle himself, are not meant to be seen. Without decades of Primus Fowle's energy and craft, pressed into his own musculature and the newspaper coevally, the *Gazette* would not have existed in the way it does.

But the usual means of reading fail to register Primus Fowle. If we insist on basing scholarly claims only on "positive" traces of him and people like him, such as mentions in print or records of his work and life, then we are forced to ignore what we do know he produced: thousands of pages of material texts. This, then, is a call to change our very *sense* of print.

His existence provokes a reallocation of the distribution of the sensible, moving the line between legible and illegible far enough that Primus Fowle's marks are seeable as evidence of his work, craft, and presence within the archive of early American print. The work of other early Black artist-craftspeople, such as the potter David Drake (or Dave the Potter, or Dave), calls for radically reconsidering what counts as an expression worth studying. While enslaved in South Carolina in the mid-nineteenth century, David Drake produced monumental clay pots on which he incised poetic lines, signatures, and other non-alphabetic marks into the surface of still wet clay and glaze. In a series of essays on David Drake's pots, Michael A. Chaney develops a poetics of reading the relationship between materiality and inscription paying particularly close attention to how Dave the Potter's non-alphabetic make meaning through their "articulate material" ("Concatenate Poetics" 112). Chaney's analysis of Dave the Potter's "not counted" inscriptions, non-alphabetic marks on pots that exist in relation to his written alphabetic content, is especially useful for thinking about Primus Fowle's broken engravings or marginal overprinting on type shoulders ("Signifying Marks" 3).[15] Dave the Potter made both pots

for the market and poetic couplets upon them. They bore traces of his hand and eye, but they also spoke to his status as property both in commodity form and in the marks he wrote in them: "Dave belongs to Mr. Miles / wher the oven bakes & the pot biles ///" (qtd. In Chaney, Introduction 3). Chaney argues that these pots contain the complex "concatenation" of the contradictions between chattel slavery and personhood, of ideality and materiality, of letters and marks. Chaney's work orients readers toward the "uncounted" marks Dave the Potter made, such as "///" at the end of the "Dave belongs" couplet. These are analogous to the nonalphabetic marks impressed by Primus Fowle into the *Gazette*'s surface. Ultimately, Chaney argues, the uncounted, nonalphabetic marks in the surface of the slave-made commodity are places where, "during a time of ontological privation, the enslaved . . . artist inscribes marks to signify the pleasures and paradoxes of presence" ("Signifying Marks" 23). Enslaved artisans like Dave the Potter and Primus Fowle have, according to the tools of their crafts, inscribed their presence on the surfaces of pots and print.

One final example of Primus Fowle's print work, annotated by an unknown hand, demonstrates the import of reading material texts for the traces of the enslaved. In March of 1760, Daniel Fowle reprinted news of a fire from the *Boston News Letter* in the form of a broadside extra: "An Account of the Terrible Fire which happened in Boston." The type and ornaments match those of the *New-Hampshire Gazette*. In keeping with Primus Fowle's forceful impression pulling, there is excess printing in the bottom margin, this time providing an unintentional(?) underlining of the news that the dead included "2 Tenements [of] Free Negroes." One copy of the broadside, however, residing in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College, is annotated with an outright recognition of Primus Fowle's status as printer, as a creator of the material text. The annotation provides a supplement to the elision of Primus Fowle in the designation of Daniel Fowle as "printer," or owner of the press. After a line of fleur-des-lis ornaments, the same attribution that appears on the final page of the *Gazette* is printed: "Portsmouth, Printed by D. Fowle." This is immediately followed, however, in pen by the words "& Prime Fowle a man of handsome color, 1760" (See Fig. 3). This exceptionally rare attribution does the work of making both Primus Fowle's presence and his racial difference apparent on the surface that he produced; it speaks back to the structures of


Capt. Edward Blake Where the Fire stopt.

Portſmouth, Printed by D. Fowle;

&

Prime Fowler

a man of

handsome color

1760

Figure 3: An unknown hand adds Primus Fowle's name after Daniel Fowle is listed as printer. Courtesy of the Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

language and power that erase Primus Fowle because of his "handsome color." This same reading is available in the material texts themselves. This inked-in semantic supplement is rightly valued for the positive acknowledgement it provides of Primus Fowle, but the thousands of other inky traces Primus Fowle himself left in the print he created ought to be as well. The outcome of an expanded attentiveness to who is present in the material text and legible in its accidents could be a new accounting of who created our archives of early print. As a result of the recent discovery of this attribution, "Fowle, Primus, d. 1791" has been added as metadata to Dartmouth's catalogue entry for this broadside. Until recently, the imprint was attributed to Daniel Fowle, and Primus Fowle was brought into the information infrastructure surrounding this piece of his work under the heading of "alternate author" (Primus Fowle is now listed as the proper author) ("An Account").

On the title page of Garland Penn's *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, Penn takes his first epigraph from the eighteenth-century British bibliographer, Joseph Ames: "Souls dwell in printer's type." Attention to how traces of enslaved people are visible in the materiality of their work with type shows that they, through their work, dwell in nearly all our archives of early American print. The memorial "Epitaph on the death of PRIMUS" reads that "Under these clods, old *Primus* lies / At rest and free from noise, / No longer seen by mortal eyes." Primus Fowle's remains are likely still buried under Chesnut and Court Streets in Portsmouth. But we have his work, and do not need to bury it any longer.

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NOTES

1. I use Brown University as a touchstone not because of its exceptionality, for it is not an exception, but because of the example of its forthright self-examination. In the years since Brown's self-study, activist faculty and students have launched similar projects at Georgetown, Harvard, Columbia, among others. For the definitive history of urban slavery in Rhode Island, see Christy Clark-Pujara.

2. In the wake of reports like Brown's, it is increasingly impossible not to acknowledge that institutions with pre-Thirteenth Amendment interests in labor and finance are likely to have some material connection to slavery. See the "Traces of the Trade" project and Craig Steven Wilder.

3. Several recent books in African American studies take up speculation and the speculative as a subject and method in the field. These include andré carrington's

Speculative Blackness, Sami Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined*, and Michelle Commander's *Afro-Atlantic Flight*. While carrington and Schalk are primarily concerned with the specific genre of speculative fiction, Commander examines how speculative thought structures the imaginative space needed to gain insight into African and African American cultural production around and memory of slavery (in her book she studies narratives about literally taking flight away from enslavement).

4. I say "traditionally defined" to indicate that while most take 1827's publication of *Freedom's Journal* as the beginning of the Black press, Foster has pointed to the eighteenth-century origins of African American religious, mutual aid, and fraternal societies that created print (714–40).

5. I mean predominantly white in both the subjects the field takes up, and in the racial identity of scholars in the field, myself included. For a discussion of how African American book history's questions stand to challenge and advance the entire field of book history, see Leon Jackson.

6. Thank you to Molly Hardy, then the digital humanities curator at the AAS, for alerting me to the existence of the "Black Printers" cards. For a more extensive introduction to the Printer's File and the Black Printers cards, see Hardy.

7. These cards were created in 1975, five years after Avis Clarke completed her forty-three years of work on the Printers' File, which partially explains why they are so different from the rest. The list of names originated from the AAS's correspondence with James Abajian, librarian at the Kemble Collections on American Printing and Publishing, who was searching for names of African American printers and book tradespeople (Bauer).

8. Since no other known source refers to him as "Prince" this is very likely a mistaken copying of his name, perhaps because "Primus" means first, or firstborn.

9. See, for example, the entry on the *New-Hampshire Gazette* and the entry for Daniel Fowle in the "Index of Printers" in Brigham (471, 1414).

10. This claim is based on dates given for Daniel Fowle's apprentices in Thomas' *History of Printing in America* and in the AAS Printers' File. Daniel Fowle's earliest apprentice in Portsmouth seems to have been his nephew, Robert, beginning in 1764, eight years after Primus Fowle started operating the press in New Hampshire.

11. Primus Fowle is mentioned once in Isaiah Thomas' 1815 *History*, once in the pages of the *New-Hampshire Gazette* itself, announcing his death in 1791 with a brief poem, briefly in Nathaniel Adams' 1825 *Annals of Portsmouth*, and briefly in Charles Brewster's 1859 *Rambles About Portsmouth*. One might be tempted to revert to the habit of privileging the scant written sources about Primus Fowle rather than attending to the voluminous printed sources created by him. But I am arguing here that we ought to do otherwise: that we not assume that white-authored texts about Black subjects are ultimately more authoritative than materials made by African American people. Also, these texts refract Primus Fowle through racist eighteenth

and nineteenth-century tropes about African Americans. The epitaph on his death, for example, suggests that his death was a blessing because it relieved him of the "mirth" racist tormenters enjoyed at his expense. It seems more interesting to find innovative ways of reading the pieces of paper that we know Primus Fowle touched and created, rather than reading memories of him from as much as a half-century after his death that reveal that he, too, was subject to racist tropes.

12. For printer's arm, see Rollo G. Silver (10) and also Charles Fayette Taylor (83).

13. Therí Pickens, a leading theorist of Black disability studies, demonstrates the extent to which the Black lives and Black art have been shaped by disability, chronic pain, and trauma. She writes, "the current discourse about the aftermath of enslavement and its influence on the present moment attends to the nature of trauma alongside the physiological scars left by encounters with capitalism and the carceral system. If we call out our dead, how many of them in Black studies have had the end of their lives shaped by experiences with disability and chronic illness?" (95).

14. The Aesop figure was purported to be an Ethiopian slave, often described as having been "physically deformed," who used the form of the fable to speak across an unequal gap in power (see Patterson 16). The connections between Primus Fowle and the Aesop figure were very helpfully brought to my attention by Thomas Keymer after I presented this work in progress at the University of Toronto.

15. What Chaney eloquently analyzes as the "not counted" marks in Dave the Potter's pots resonates strongly with the ways José Esteban Muñoz theorized queer performance as ephemera that conservative or reactionary scholars refused to count as scholarly evidence. Muñoz argues that there "is a queer impulse," central to performance studies and the ephemerality of performance as evidence "that intends to discuss an object whose ontology, in its inability to 'count' as a proper 'proof,' is profoundly queer" (6). I take from Muñoz the important insight about how ephemeral traces, whether in performance or in nonalphabetic marks on paper or pots, are often disallowed as evidence—and what is erased in that refusal.

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