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The Unnamed Fugitive and the Unknown Maroon: Anonymity and the Limits of Repair in Black Atlantic Historical Recovery

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the ethics and pedagogical implications of unnaming for the political project of historical recovery. Digital humanities projects on slavery often proffer the reparative promise of serving as public-facing works that seek to recover enslaved people's lives from archival erasure. I contend that by entwining the immaterial digital commemoration of The Unnamed Fugitive with the material monument to Le Marron Inconnu, my students' interpretive choices illuminate the ways that deliberate unnaming can enact a shift away from anonymity and erasure and, in turn, a move towards productive engagement with the limits of knowledge and recovery in slavery's archive.

"I thought I could put my troubled mind to rest if I knew just one of their names."

– Celia Naylor, *Unsilencing Slavery: Telling Truths About Rose Hall Plantation*, Jamaica, pp. 159

In the summer of 1837, an incident in international waters set off an exchange of urgent letters between the French Consul in Denmark, the French Naval Ministry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris [Molé 1837, 1]. An enslaved man had been found aboard the *Neptune*, a ship traveling from Martinique to the port of Le Havre. Presumably discovered as the vessel neared or reached Helsingør, a coastal town north of Copenhagen, the fugitive now appeared to be held on board by the captain as the vessel continued en route to Le Havre. What was to be done with the stowaway? Did his case for manumission come under Danish jurisdiction or rather fall under French law? Did he even have a case for manumission, having fled Martinique without his enslaver's accord? As the French Minister of the Navy explained to his colleagues, various legislative measures, including the law of March 4, 1831, and the Royal Ordinance of April 29, 1836, laid out the conditions by which an enslaved person could travel from the colonies to the metropole. The ability to claim freedom upon arrival in France, he wrote, was only applicable if the enslaved person had been sent to France lawfully by his enslaver [Duperré 1837, 1]. On his part, the *Neptune*'s captain was adamant that he would return the fugitive to his enslaver at the first opportunity on his next voyage to Martinique [Duperré 1837, 1]. If by stowing away on the ship, the fugitive had hoped to avail himself of the promise of liberty espoused by the Freedom Principle, that hope now seemed illusory as the *Neptune* sailed onward to France.[1] The *Neptune*'s fugitive presented a legal conundrum for authorities in the 19th century. When undergraduate students at the University of Michigan encountered records of the fugitive's flight in the fall of 2021, they faced a different kind of conundrum, namely how to identify the fugitive and piece together his story. As students soon discovered, throughout the letters exchanged about the fugitive, he was never once named. 1

My students came to the scant paper trail of the fugitive's flight as part of their coursework for “Mapping the French Atlantic”. Housed in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, “Mapping the French Atlantic” was a French course supported by a 2018 Technology Services New Initiatives/New Instruction Grant in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. The grant aimed to foster inclusive teaching practices that made innovative use of technology and was awarded to fund two primary expenses required for “Mapping the French Atlantic”. The first was to engage the services of Agile Humanities Agency, a software, design, and consulting collective, to create a digital map of the movement of enslaved people in the Atlantic world. The second expense was travel to archives in Fort de-France, Port-au-Prince, Montreal, and New York City to digitize records about enslaved people that would serve as primary sources from which students would gather the information required to populate the digital map. 2

“Mapping the French Atlantic” sits somewhere at the intersection of digital humanities (DH), history, and literary studies. Its objective was to use digital mapping methods to retrace the movements of enslaved people throughout the Atlantic world as they navigated slavery, freedom, and citizenship in the 18th and 19th centuries. In so doing, the course aimed to guide students in a critical reflection on how maps shape our understanding of the world and on what mapping movement might reveal about the relationship between mobility and power.[2] Course readings ranged from novels to theoretical texts to primary sources that allowed students to engage with these questions. Sue Peabody's *There are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (1996) and *Madeleine's Children: Family, Freedom, Secrets, and Lies in France's Indian Ocean Colonies* (2017) provided important social and legal context needed to understand the terms of Black people's mobility in the French Atlantic. These texts showed how laws such as the 1777 *Police des noirs* and the later laws evoked by the Minister of the Navy in his correspondence about the *Neptune*'s fugitive constrained movement and in the process made Blackness synonymous with enslavement. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1991) and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière…noire de Salem* (1981) offered rich material for thinking about how to tell other kinds of stories about enslaved people in ways that are cognizant of archival lacunae and that nonetheless work to recover narratives of their lives. Finally, articles by Caroline Séveno and Camille Lefebvre and Isabelle Surun laid out the politics of maps and their use in colonial conquest in Africa, while writings by Britt Rusert and Lauren F. Klein explored the ethics and stakes of digitally rendering Black lives [Séveno 2008] [Lefebvre and Surun 2015] [Rusert 2017] [Klein 2013]. The goal of our discussions of these readings over two-thirds of the semester was to lay the intellectual groundwork for students' final projects. 3

The final project itself consisted of only a few lines that amount to barely a paragraph. This length constraint, necessitated by the small size of the tooltip that accompanies each geographic point on the digital map, required my students to work with an economy of words. And so, in the final third of the semester, students were assigned to small groups of three or four. Each group was allocated a dossier pertaining to an enslaved person that contained all the records I could find about that person's life in my travels to archives in the Caribbean, the United States, and France. Working in their small groups, students extracted all the geographical data they could find and used it to plot the person's trajectory on the digital map. But, as many scholars have shown, data extraction on its own can hardly tell a true, complete, or just story about the lives of people who were often reduced to numbers in ledgers or criminals in court records.[3] Students were therefore also required to sit with these documents and work out for themselves — with guidance from our course texts — how they might tell the person's story otherwise. The result, for each group, was a short biographical narrative that introduces and contextualizes each person's trajectory on the map. 4

Ultimately, the course “Mapping the French Atlantic” and the resulting digital visualization, *Mapping Marronage*, were projects in recovery. Their aim was to recover what fragments we could of enslaved people's lives, piece them together into a narrative — biographies that for many of the people we studied would never be written otherwise — and in the process, learn something about how people who were enslaved or lived in proximity to slavery articulated ideas about freedom and belonging through movement. In the first iteration of the course in 2018, students huddled in small groups around screens in the computer lab as they entered their data into the map, and we watched in collective amazement and pride as *Mapping Marronage* (www.mappingmarronage.com) went live with the stories and movements of the first six people whose journeys were charted on the map: Armelle Conan, the enslaved woman who bore the children of royal botanist Jean-Baptiste-Christophe Fusée-Aublet; Edouard Calabar, who like the *Neptune*'s stowaway was enslaved in Martinique, but unlike the fugitive, managed to lay claim to freedom in France via the Ordinance of April 29, 1836; Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, who was born to an enslaved woman and whose classical music prowess has gained increasing recognition in recent decades; Marie-Joseph Angélique, who was tried and executed for an alleged act of arson that set Montreal ablaze; Charles-Pierre Lambert and his descendants, whose musical talents reverberated across New Orleans, France, Brazil, and Portugal; and Pierre Toussaint, who began life in slavery in Saint Domingue and later became hairdresser to New York City's elite in the 19th century. 5

In the second iteration of the course in 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic made huddling around a shared computer screen a veritable health hazard, and with protests after the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd lending a new sense of urgency to our discussions, students found community and solidarity by collaborating online to tell the stories of a new group of enslaved people. One of these was the stowaway discovered aboard the *Neptune*.[4] Yet, as students worked to salvage biographical details to visually present the story of the enslaved man's origins, capture, flight, and discovery on the digital map, they found that for all they would never know about their subject, his anonymity proved to be the most fundamental obstacle of all. 6

It is rare to find scholarly work on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery that does not include the now-familiar lament about gaps and silences in the archives. Scant documents, partial records, and deliberate distortions attest to the far-reaching violence that the institution of slavery unleashed on those in bondage and continues to enact on their descendants.[5] Despite embarking on the 7

Mapping Marronage project with this anticipation of archival lacunae, the absence of the *Neptune* fugitive's name was more debilitating for our work than we expected. From the very inception of *Mapping Marronage*, it was clear that we could not design a website that would require two mandatory name fields for data entry, as the practice of slavery in the Americas often involved denying enslaved people a surname in order to transform them more completely into property, to sever them from community, and to render genealogy and lineage impossible.[6] On a technical and practical level, the fugitive's anonymity meant that we had no data to enter into the mandatory name field that the software required to create an entry on the digital map. Without at least one name to identify the man, we could not move forward. My students and I considered several acts of substitution to fill in this gap presented by the documented disregard for the enslaved fugitive. As we brainstormed offering up an African name or naming him Neptune, after the ship on which he made his escape from Martinique, it became clear that the quandary presented by the fugitive's anonymity went beyond the technical problem of data entry. Would these alternatives suffice for our project? What exactly was our project?

In trying to heed Jessica Marie Johnson's call to “infuse [our] work with a methodology and praxis that centers the descendants of the enslaved, grapples with the uncomfortable, messy, and unquantifiable”, I remain uncertain that *Mapping Marronage* is able to “refuse disposability” [Johnson 2018, 71]. For this reason, and somewhat against the grain of argumentation and thesis, this article reaches for the modest goal of simply documenting a process: the attempt to write a biography of an anonymous person. I interweave my documentation with a survey of digital projects that use the language of recovery in their engagement with slavery in order to think through the stakes of *Mapping Marronage*. Drawing on Aisha Finch, I use recovery in this context to designate an ethos, “a capacious range of ideas, practices, and embodiments that collectively” seek to redress or restore the loss wrought by chattel slavery, if not of human lives then, at least of our knowledge about those lives now [Finch 2024, 73]. In this non-exhaustive assemblage of digital projects, recovery names various things from filling in archival lacunae to telling stories that deliberately run counter to the official record, from restitution to restoration to repair. 8

Helton et al. note that historical recovery is an urgent political imperative as “recovering the histories of Africans in the Americas originally emerged as an abolitionist tool in the nineteenth century and would remain inextricable from black freedom struggles well into the twentieth century”. They argue too that “the violence of Atlantic slavery was so great, and the limits of its archive so absolute, that no amount of historical recovery could properly describe it, let alone begin to undo its damage” [Helton et al. 2015, 2]. Were we then to acquiesce to the anonymity to which the historical records had consigned the *Neptune*'s clandestine passenger? At the same time, what can be recovered of and for someone who cannot even be named? The fugitive's namelessness complicated our ideas about recovery as a straightforward act of writing back into archival gaps and silences, “a consoling filling in of blank spaces, a giving voice to the long-muted subjects of history” [Christiansë 2013, 35]. By locating my students' attempt to tell the story of the anonymous stowaway at the site of a generative tension between the imperative of recovery and its impossibility, this reflection examines how anonymity brings us to the limits of historical recovery, as well as how those limits might suggest other ways of unmapping enslaved people's mobility. 9

Recovery

Mapping Marronage is an interactive visualization of the transatlantic networks that enslaved people created in the 18th and 19th centuries. Marronage, as conceptualized in this project, takes as its point of departure the core definition of the word in Black Atlantic history to mean the process of removing oneself from slavery.[7] *Mapping Marronage* considers this removal expansively beyond flight from plantations to mountains or swamps, treating as marronage any act by which enslaved people sought to move themselves beyond the reach of enslavers' power. As Kaiama Glover poignantly asks, “What is *marronage* . . . if not the expression of selves imagined otherwise than within the limits of identities crafted by white supremacy?” [Glover 2020, 198] Working from this expansive understanding, *Mapping Marronage* visualizes fugitivity not as discrete events but as an on-going process, a relationship to space and power that is in flux and constantly negotiated in slaveholding societies. The digital visualization therefore traces the geographic reach, crossings, and intersections of letters, testimonies, and financial exchanges by people of African descent who were either enslaved or lived in proximity to slavery as, for example, the freeborn children of enslaved parents. Enslaved women, men, and children sought to move — with varying degrees of success — beyond the reach of slavery's oppression. At the same time, the far-reaching power of slavery meant that mobility in and of itself did not automatically constitute resistance or marronage. Rather, various forms of what Carole Boyce Davies and Babacar M'Bow term coerced, voluntary, and induced movement characterized the circulation of Black people living in or in proximity to slavery in the Atlantic world, thus showing conditions and experiences of bondage that widen our field of vision beyond the plantation [Davies and M'Bow 2007]. To the extent, then, that these different forms of mobility recorded in advertisements for runaways, correspondence, financial remittances, and court documents constituted enslaved people's self-articulations, these instances of mobility form the core data for the digital map. 10

In its invitation to users to visualize flight in all its forms, *Mapping Marronage* undertakes the work of historical recovery. The map positions itself as an alternate archive, one that, in gathering and digitizing primary sources, is generally more accessible than the institutional repositories across Europe and the Americas from which I first obtained those records. Behind the scenes, the two cohorts of “Mapping the French Atlantic” students who have contributed to the map for their final class projects were charged with the mandate to “tell the life story of an enslaved person that has never been told before”. In this regard, *Mapping Marronage* is like many other digital humanities projects that center on slavery with the goal of restoring to the annals of history those who have been excised from it. 11

This project of historical recovery is at the heart of many DH projects about slavery. The *Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Britain* project, for example, is a database of advertisements for fugitives that aims to draw attention to those about whom “we know relatively little…because so few have left any records of their existence” [Runaway Slaves in Britain n.d.]. The *Legacy of Slavery in Maryland* project has nearly identical goals for a different region of the Atlantic world, “to discover unknown ‘heroes’ of slave flight and resistance” [The Maryland State Archives n.d.]. Recovery serves a specific purpose, to reconstitute historical fragments into a more complete story. In David Eltis' discussion of the methodology used to produce the updated version of the *Slave Voyages Database* the project's inclusion of the names of enslaved people “provide(s) an extraordinary source for historical reconstruction of the history of the African peoples in America” [Elis 2018]. For the *Documenting Africans in Trans-Atlantic Slavery* (*DATAS/IASET*) project team, their tool for analyzing ethnonyms allows for a more effective method of “reconstructing the emergence of the African diaspora” [DATAS/IASET n.d.]. And it is through recovery that the *Colored Conventions Project* can “affirm Black women's centrality to nineteenth-century Black organizing even as official records erase and anonymize the very contributions, labor and infrastructure” [Colored Convention Project 2020]. Perhaps most direct in its articulation is *10 Million Names* with its goal to “Recover. Restore. Remember” [10 Million Names n.d.]. 12

The recurring terms “recovery” and “reconstitution” that appear across this range of digital humanities projects about slavery and its immediate aftermath surveyed above are sometimes entwined with the language of repair. To be sure, the task of coaxing fragments from unyielding archives and reconstituting them into a cohesive account of the lives and experiences of the enslaved is one that is fraught with peril. Régine Jean-Charles asks, “what and whom does the remembrance and reanimation of the slave past serve?” [Jean-Charles 2016, 99] For several digital projects that examine the history of slavery in institutions such as universities and the church, the work of recovery offers a direct path to some form of reparations. Users of the interactive map *Enslaved by the Church, Sold for the Republic* can toggle between historical documents that reveal the identities of those enslaved on parish plantations in Réunion, and news about descendants' present-day advocacy for “recognition and redress” from the Jesuits and the Catholic church. *The Georgetown Slavery Archive* is a direct offshoot of the Georgetown University Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation whose website outlines the university's recent commitment to a form of institutional reparations by considering applicants' status as descendants of people enslaved by the Maryland Province of Jesuits as a factor in admission. Other institutions of higher education have considered modes of repair beyond college admissions. *Honoring the Enslaved* by St. Mary's College of Maryland is a digital archive of the college's steps toward “re-making our world anew” by erecting a monument at the site of enslaved people's living quarters on campus [St Mary's College of Maryland n.d.]. In grappling with its involvement in slavery, Villanova University's *The Rooted Project* aims to write “a new history… to give all students, prospective students, and alumni at Villanova a sense of place and belonging” [Villanova University n.d.]. 13

Other ideas about psychic repair through acknowledgement of historical crimes, or by suturing severed genealogical lines, also emerge in projects that are not directly tied to institutional and financial reparations. The *Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade* project frames its work as one of “reparative scholarship” [Enslaved n.d.]. *Last Road to Freedom* is a digital repository of records about African Americans during the Civil War that is premised on the hope that “for their descendants, paths to freedom include interpreting information (documents) the once enslaved left behind... a final path or road to the ancestors' freedom and ours” [Last Road to Freedom n.d.]. *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*, a database of newspaper advertisements placed by formerly enslaved people hoping to reunite with family after emancipation, solicits testimonies from users today who have been successful in finding their ancestors through the site's records [Last Seen n.d.]. Perhaps the most explicitly stated work of repair is the *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, a collaborative work of performance art by artists Dread Scott and John Akomfrah, whose companion website archives snippets of a 2019 reenactment of the German Coast Uprising of 1811. Rather than relive the violent suppression of the largest slave revolt in the U.S. South, the reenactment ends on a jubilant note with a celebration in New Orleans' Congo Square. 14

I gather these quotes from a broad range of digital projects because juxtaposing their stated aims not only reveals the close entwinement of the language of historical recovery with ideas about repair, but also shows the myriad ways in which repair is understood, even when it is not explicitly defined.[8] Across these projects, financial reparations, political acknowledgement, symbolic commemoration, the reconnection of severed family bonds, and the production of new historical accounts that undo violence and erasure all come together to offer some form of redress for the losses of the past. The common language of repair that undergirds all the aforementioned projects shows that when reconstituting enslaved people's histories, our desire for recovery is often a desire for healing [Hartman 2008]. We recuperate the lives of the enslaved by carefully reassembling the scant pieces of information strewn about the archival record. That such work, invested as it is in “repair, redemption, and recuperation” [Jean-Charles 2016, 88], is risky and largely impossible has been amply explored in scholarship [Best 2012]. Metaphors abound for the inevitable losses, absences, and silences that mark the stories salvaged from slavery's archive. For Saidiya Hartman, the corpus of texts about slavery in the United States constitutes an “amputated body”, which in 15

its dismemberment “holds out the possibility of restitution” [Hartman 1997, 74]. Derek Walcott imagines the fragments of Antillean history as pieces of a broken vase, the act of restoration through artistic and cultural production as an act of care. Walcott's metaphor suggests a linear temporality that moves from “recovery” of the fragments of the broken vase, to “reconstitution” of the parts into a whole that then becomes the “repaired” object [Walcott 1993].

The fragmentation in the archive therefore shapes the stories that can and cannot be told about the enslaved person's past. It determines the recuperative possibilities of work undertaken by artists and historians.[9] We read “along the bias grain” in order to “subvert archival intent” and disrupt the representational power of the enslaver's record [Fuentes 2016, 7, 44]. We search for ghosts, the shadowy presences that haunt the archives [Gordon 2008]. Through the sieve of collective memory, we sift pieces of the past, “allowing the smaller matter to go through and leaving only the larger material behind” [Jean-Charles 2016, 86]. We engage in “critical fabulation” to attempt the impossible, a “collective biography of dead subjects” that aims to “paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible” [Hartman 2008, 3, 11]. Taken together, these “carefully devised modes of counter-reading the archive”, both despite and because of the impossibility of doing so, show the ever-present but also generative tension between the reality of fragmentation and our reaching for wholeness [Helton et al. 2015, 2]. The attempt to recover something of enslaved people's stories holds out the redemptive and reparative promise of locating, even if only fleetingly, their interior lives, their obscured, denied subjectivity. 16

When the anonymous fugitive stole away onto the *Neptune* in the summer of 1837, he perhaps hoped that his flight would put him beyond the reach, if not of the institution of slavery, at the very least of the enslaver who kept him in bondage in Martinique. When my students and I worked in the fall of 2021 to piece together the fragments of his life story as it unfolded across government correspondence, we hoped to honor his marronage — thwarted as it had been by his discovery onboard the ship — by wresting his narrative from the anonymizing correspondence between French and Danish officials and telling his story otherwise. Like the digital humanities projects that enact an alternative end to a crushed slave uprising, or that invite contemporary users to piece together severed kinship bonds by completing the search for family members begun by their ancestors newly emancipated from slavery, or else that ask us to not only acknowledge fugitives but to “imagine ourselves running with them, tracing routes of refuge and pathways to freedom within a tragic world of captivity and coercion” [Brown 2008], *Mapping Marronage* too sought to move between the fugitive's time and our own, and in so doing, restore to him the autonomous mobility that he may have reached for through his escape from Martinique. What my students and I were up against, then, was not solely a lack of data to enter into the software but a challenge to our hopes for repair. His anonymity brought us to the limits of our reparative project by raising a series of questions: Is historical recovery required for repair? How do gaps and silences in slavery's archive — such as the fugitive's anonymity — complicate the very idea of the reparative that underlines digital projects seeking to bring past and present into closer relation? 17

Alongside Black Atlantic historical projects animated by the question of whether we *can* recover the histories, lives, and voices of enslaved people is a current of scholarship that questions whether we *should*. As the authors of “The Question of Recovery: An Introduction” note, if recovery does not have “a political purpose beyond documenting black presence”, then it becomes “merely a plea for inclusion within the foundational promises of liberal modernity” [Helton et al. 2015, 11]. Stephen Best, in turn, explores what might be productive about the refusal of recovery. He contends that the impetus behind the “recovery imperative” is the idea that “recovery from the slave past rests on a recovery of it” [Best 2018, 13]. Best is particularly critical of what he terms “melancholy historicism”, which “provides for the view that history consists in the *taking possession* of such grievous experience and archival loss” [Best 2018, 15]. In contradistinction to mourning's acceptance of loss and divestment from the lost object, melancholia maintains a steadfast attachment to and identification with that which is lost [Best 2018, 68]. The alternative to melancholy historicism that Best offers “is certainly not history writing as we know it but a writing in full awareness of the negativity that labors to undo any historical project” [Best 2018, 25]. 18

In considering how interdisciplinary methods might prove useful for nuancing ideas about recovery, I am particularly drawn to Lisa Lowe's exploration of the question of recovery as a paradox, “a divergence either between the affirmation of the recovered presence of enslaved people … or the refusal of the temptations of recovery” [Lowe 2015a, 85]. In response to this paradox, Lowe proposes “hesitation” as a stance that does not move “immediately toward recovery” [Lowe 2015b, 40]. Rather than naming the anonymous fugitive and then moving on to write the rest of his recovered biography, hesitation allows us to tarry with what might be productive about his anonymity. In this way, we might think of hesitation not in opposition to or as an alternative to recovery, but rather as an interruption in the putatively linear progression from recovery to repair. 19

My students in “Mapping the French Atlantic” encountered hesitation in their own way. Because the course was taught in French, a second language for nearly all the students in the class, we were obliged to tarry not only in the face of recorded facts and glaring omissions, but also in the presence of language. With historical dictionaries in hand and Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* uppermost in our minds, we had to consider not only what the records say happened to the *Neptune*'s clandestine passenger, but also the *how* of their narration. What do we learn about how the language of the law determined the possibilities of freedom for the enslaved man in flight? What might we glimpse when we focus on the anonymity of the *Neptune*'s stowaway that we would otherwise not see if we moved immediately towards trying to repair the injurious loss of his name wrought by his anonymity in French government correspondence? Let us linger here, with the unknown. 20

Hesitation

Beyond his act of maritime marronage — what Hilary Beckles defines as “the rebellious activities of those slaves who took to the sea in flight attempting to escape fully the geographical confines of their plantation bondage” — we know very little about the enslaved person who stole onto the France-bound vessel that left Martinique in the summer of 1837. If, like the Danish and French authorities who used a network of correspondence to try to solve their legal conundrum, the fugitive too made use of his own “submerged networks” — the webbed exchange of information and services that made marronage for some a collective endeavor — the letters about him do not say [Eddins 2022, 172]. The narrative that we do have is marked by several acts of “unnaming”, that is, moments when language undoes meaning. Of his life the official record yields the following: 21

> que le noir en question ne serait pas né à la Martinique, mais y aurait été introduit frauduleusement par un navire qui l'avait pris au Sénégal; que son départ de la Martinique aurait été [illisible] d'une désertion, et qu'enfin l'intention du capitaine du *Neptune* serait, lors de son premier voyage à la Martinique, de rendre ce noir à l'habitant dont il était lesclave
>
> that the black in question was not born in Martinique but was brought there fraudulently by a vessel that had taken him in Senegal; that his departure from Martinique would have been [illegible] of a desertion, and finally that the intention of the *Neptune*'s captain, on his first voyage to Martinique, would be to return this black to the planter whose slave he was [Duperré 1837, 1][10]

There is some indication too that the runaway was young, as one letter describes him as “le jeune noir fugitif de la Martinique” (“the young Black fugitive from Martinique”) [Duperré 1837, 1]. Although, as Habiba Ibrahim compellingly demonstrates in *Black Age*, what this attribution of youth means may be less a matter of biological age and more a question of the fictions that white observers and narrators project onto Black captives' bodies.

Dwelling on the fugitive's anonymity makes us attuned to other forms of unnaming in this official account. First, the euphemism “taken in Senegal” unnames the precise conditions of his bondage. Kidnapping, capture, sale, the various terrible transactions that may have moved the fugitive by force from Senegal to Martinique, are politely smoothed over by the verb “taken”, at once simple and capacious in its potential meanings.[11] Second, the language of illegality unnames his flight as an act of self-liberation. Because his capture in Senegal was “fraudulent” and his escape from his enslaver in Martinique was an act of “desertion”, his marronage counters one form of unsanctioned, illegal movement with another. Ultimately, each instance of mobility puts him outside the already constrained juridical freedoms allowed to Black people in France, a country that both disavowed slavery on its soil and codified its practice in law. 22

In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods assert that “to begin a discussion of black geographies… we need to consider how the unknowable figures into the production of space” [McKittrick and Woods 2007, 4]. I read this as a form of hesitation, sitting with the unknowable and the unknown to better understand not just how Black people move through space but also how that movement produces space. These contemplations can in turn productively inform our understanding and rendering of space. For example, we might consider how the unnamed fugitive produced a space for his clandestine flight aboard the *Neptune*. He may have hidden in plain sight, boldly striding across the ship's deck in sailor's garb. As Julius Scott notes, “Even slaves without experience at sea could pick up some key nautical terms or perhaps a verse or two of a popular sea shanty and pass themselves off as free sailors” [Scott 2020, 109].[12] Although the letters that inaugurate his entry into slavery's archive begin with his capture on the *Neptune*, tarrying at the docks disrupts this imposed temporal origin by dwelling on the period before the ship when the fugitive may have engaged in the urban marronage that brought so many other runaways to Caribbean port cities [Scott 2020, 21–22]. Alternatively, he may quite literally have produced space by fashioning a site of concealment somewhere on the ship, akin to the box that transported the fugitive Henry Box Brown as cargo to Philadelphia [Brown 2008], or the “loophole of retreat” that allowed Harriet Jacobs to both escape the clutches of her lascivious enslaver and remain close to her children [Jacobs 2014]. 23

It is not a stretch to stray from the geographic boundaries of the field of Caribbean Studies, or from the well-traveled colonial circuit between Senegal, Martinique, and France and bring the *Neptune*'s clandestine passenger into conceptual proximity with North American fugitives. As Justin Dunnavant reminds us, “popular abolitionists such as Henry Box Brown, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs can be read as maritime maroons in the literal sense that their flight was mediated, at least in part, by marinescapes” [Dunnavant 2020, 891]. Nor is it a stretch, for the purposes of *Mapping Marronage*, to expand the maroon's geography by untethering our mapped coordinates for his flight from the archival record. Already in the official correspondence there were indications that his geography would always exceed the named territories of Senegal, Martinique, Denmark, and France, for even as government officials tried to identify the correct jurisdiction for his 24

manumission case and thereby fix the geographic coordinates of his legal status, they also acknowledged that at the time of their correspondence, the maroon was somewhere in the North Sea en route to Le Havre. It is there in the North Sea that we lose his archival trail, unmoored from land, from the “free soil” that was supposed to grant him his liberty in France. Elena Schneider writes of similar cases of maritime marronage to Cuba: “uplifting narratives of escape could devolve into ongoing, labyrinthine struggles for autonomy, property, and protection, proving Neil Roberts's thesis that Black ‘freedom’ is an ongoing state of marronage” [Schneider 2021, 497]. Between his enslavement in Martinique and the freedom the *Neptune* fugitive reached for as he sought out French soil was a world of experience, knowledge, strategy, desire, and chance, a world reached for but not yet attained as the cold paper trail obliges us to leave him there, floating in the North Sea. Following Elise Mitchell's approach that “challenges the primacy of origins and destinations and emphasizes the itinerant crossings and small places between them, where the enslaved stalled, were abandoned”, why not untether him even further from the confinement of the official record's limited geography and consider other connections to other “small places between” [Mitchell 2022, 209]?

25 Given the repeated illegality of his mobility, always operating outside the law as either the victim of nefarious kidnappers flouting European legal interdictions of the slave trade (abolished by Denmark in 1803 and by France in 1817 and again in 1831) or as a stowaway, the imagined possibilities for appropriating and producing space to create sites of marronage serve as more than a reach for the speculative to fill in gaps and silences. They illustrate the process of turning a “geography of containment” into a “rival geography”. Rival geography has proven to be a mobile concept. Stephanie Camp explains that it was first “coined by Edward Said and has been used by geographers to describe resistance to colonial occupation” [Camp 2004, 7]. From Camp's adaptation of the term to refer to “alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planters' ideals and demands”, the notion of rival geography finds its way here to describe how an African man, forcibly taken from Senegal and enslaved in Martinique, briefly turned an instrument of captivity into a vessel for freedom. The enslaved man crossed the ocean at least twice, first as cargo and then as fugitive, and while the *Neptune* was not a slave ship in 1837, we already know to expect that if the creaking of its rigging or the groaning of its wood reminded its clandestine passenger of another journey on another ship, those who wrote about him probably did not know and likely would not have cared. The correspondence about him does not — cannot — speak about haunting, but Laurent Dubois aptly describes the dual meaning that vessels on Atlantic waters carried, what may have felt like haunting for a Black person on a ship:

> All ships in the Atlantic World were, in a sense, haunted by the slave ship, which in some ways was the defining vessel of the entire system. … And yet ships were also a space of movement and represented the possibility of freedom…. They were a space where there was a potential for individual freedom, for being on the sea was a way to escape geographies of empire and juridical systems that locked people in particular kinds of status and possibility. [Dubois 2020, 919]

If we imagine this *Neptune* as haunted by the other *Neptune*s that, between 1730 and 1750, left Nantes, La Rochelle, and Le Havre (where the fugitive was now headed), to ferry African captives from Ouidah and Aného (formerly Little Popo) to Martinique and Saint Domingue, then, for a fleeting moment, the fugitive's act of maritime marronage transforms the *Neptune* he traveled on from a space haunted by a history of containment to an instrument of liberation.[13] Lest we read this as a triumphant story of resistance, a letter addressed from “The North Sea” reminds us of the conditions of entry into the archival record. With the runaway's seizure by the captain, the *Neptune* is transformed again into a site of captivity.

26 But there is still more to be done in this moment of hesitation with the fragment of a story about flight stalled in the North Sea, when an enslaved man's production of space temporarily turned a ship into something other than what its captain would accept. “Maritime maroons”, Kevin Dawson reminds us, “were humanity in fluid motion, daring to paddle and swim across slave ships' wake to rechart their destinies and redefine the ocean according to African valuations” [Dawson 2021, 443]. If we return to the possibility that the *Neptune*'s maroon created a space of concealment on the ship not unlike well-known North American fugitives, then untethering his geography from a strictly Caribbean or francophone circuit through this conceptual proximity to a seemingly unrelated place, brings us closer to honoring the spirit of his flight, if not through historical accuracy, then through a deliberately “unruly geography” [Dunnavant, Wernke, and Kohut 2023, 885]. This practice of counter-hegemonic cartography that charts space and movement against the current of imperial circuits, is akin to what Dunnavant et. al describe in their method of using geospatial modeling to the rival ends of “counter-mapping maroon cartographies” [Dunnavant, Wernke, and Kohut 2023, 1294–1319].[14]

27 It was through this act of counter-mapping by connecting the *Neptune* fugitive to places unnamed and unmentioned in official correspondence that my students and I settled on a way to identify the fugitive on the digital map. We chose to model his name on that of a Haitian monument to liberty, “Le marron inconnu de Saint Domingue” (“The Unknown Maroon of Saint Domingue”). The *Neptune*'s unwanted passenger therefore entered our *Mapping Marronage* database as “First name: Unnamed, Last name: Fugitive” (see Figure 1 and 2). Like Sasha Turner, who insists in her writing about “the nameless and the forgotten” that “the work of maternal grief in slavery affirms the invisible suffering of the enslaved”, we tried to reach for an appellation that makes present what cannot be seen but must have been there. *He must have had a name.* We hoped that by referring to him as “Unnamed Fugitive”, instead of recovering that lost name, we would honor his desire not to be apprehended, all the while affirming that he had once been called something other than property. We imagined “Unnamed Fugitive” as a choice that refuses anonymity but — in the event that the maroon declined to give his name to authorities in an act of self-preservation — still “let[s] fugitives remain at large” [Childs 2015].

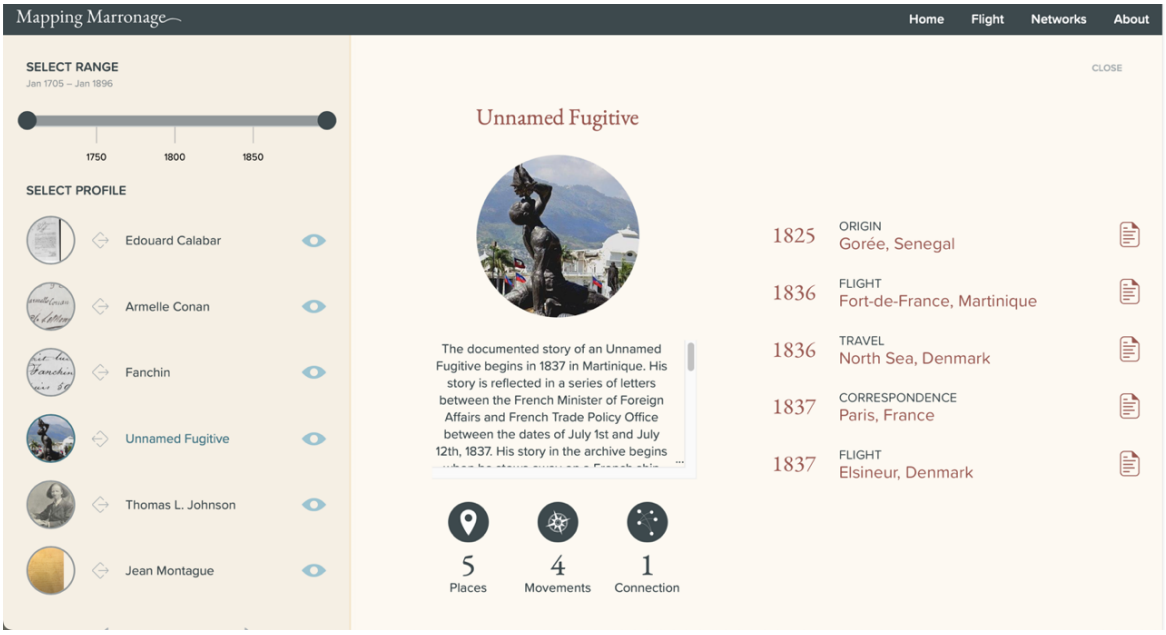

Figure 1. Biographical narrative for the Unnamed Fugitive of *Mapping Marronage*.

Figure 2. Flight map for the Unnamed Fugitive on *Mapping Marronage*.

The statue of the Unknown Maroon, located across from the Palais National in Port-au-Prince and in proximity to monuments to Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Petion, and Henri Christophe has served as a malleable symbol of Haitian national identity for several decades. Dimitri Bechaq argues that different political entities have imbued the monument with various meanings over time. For the Black nationalist *noiriste* ideology of François Duvalier, under whose brutal regime the monument was constructed between 1967 and 1968, the Unknown Maroon was conscripted to symbolize an unbroken line from Black fugitives in the period of slavery to Haiti's Black (as opposed to mixed-race) political leadership in the 20th century. For UNESCO, during the commemoration of the abolition of slavery in 2004, the monument signaled Haiti's place as the cornerstone of freedom and independence in the Caribbean. The Unknown Maroon stands in for the many who absconded. Naming the *Neptune*'s fugitive after this symbol of multiple flights in turn asks those many nameless maroons to stand in for the one.[15] Our choice to bring the Unnamed Fugitive into the orbit of Haitian marronage by modeling his name after the Unknown Maroon also functions much like the reading of his hiding spaces alongside those of Brown and Jacobs. It allows us, if not to entirely untether him from the geographies inscribed in and circumscribed by official correspondence (Senegal-Martinique-Denmark- France), to at least expand that geography beyond the archive's limits. 28

Is this expanded geography an act of repair? Or, given some of the troubling ways that the historical figure of the Unknown Maroon has been recuperated for contemporary political ends, “are reclamation, preservation, and remembrance merely a question of re-enacting hegemony?” [McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5]. McKittrick and Woods again offer us a way forward when they note that “inserting black geographies into our worldview” can trouble “dominant modes of geographic thought” and allow us to “consider alternative ways of imagining the world” [McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5]. We might go further, then, to imagine how unmooring the fugitive from the Danish site of his discovery — the site at which he was most visible to the law — and bringing him into proximity with other maroons in the Americas might allow us to render space differently, to recreate the map entirely rather than simply inserting him into existing coordinates. The Unnamed Fugitive poses a problem for mapping marronage, not because he is anonymous, but because we sought to place him within the bounds of a map that cannot sufficiently account for Black fugitive geographies. Rather than counter-mapping the terraqueous geography of his flight, perhaps then his unnaming can only be accounted for by unmapping his marronage. 29

Unmapping

It has been three years since I last taught “Mapping the French Atlantic” and in that time I have had occasions to reflect not only on what I hope my students took away from the course, but also on what I learned from them and their struggles to tell an “impossible story” [Hartman 2008, 10]. Because the Unnamed Fugitive's story brought us to the limits of recovery and repair — he remains, after all, anonymous, and I remain ambivalent about what this appellation does and undoes — the lesson I have come away with casts the future of *Mapping Marronage* in doubt. Bold lines slashing out across the ocean from one landmass to another cannot render all the ways Black people moved furtively, guided by knowledge their pursuers could not access, impelled by desires their captors would not know to recognize. A database is not a memorial. A map is not a commemoration. Cartography cannot represent Black geographies of fugitivity unless it disrupts far more than spatial coordinates. In his unraveling of our medium, then, the Unnamed Fugitive nudges us to consider what it would look like to instead unmap enslaved people's mobility. In this, I am guided by two digital humanities projects invested in the work of undoing. 30

(*Un)Silencing Slavery: Remembering the Enslaved at Rose Hall Plantation, Jamaica* is a companion website to Celia Naylor's book *Unsilencing Slavery: Telling Truths About Rose Hall Plantation, Jamaica*. The website's objective “is to respectfully and lovingly remember and hold space for the enslaved Africans and their enslaved African-born and Caribbean-born descendants who lived and labored at Rose Hall Plantation in Jamaica” [Un(Silencing) Slavery n.d.]. Naylor's larger project of unearthing information about the people who were enslaved on the plantation grew out of her frustration that the narrative available to tourists who visited the site focuses on the plantation's owners and excludes the enslaved entirely. Naylor's point of departure was to undo the narrative of Rose Hall Plantation, both the fictional stories told about it and the silence around enslaved people that engenders yet another kind of fiction. As Naylor explains, her work is an exercise in “attending (and tending) to the erasure and recasting of slavery and Black suffering and survival in the contemporary tours at Rose Hall Great House” [Naylor 2022, 7]. Strikingly, over and over again in her book, the primary manifestation of this erasure is the anonymity of the enslaved, and the first step to redress, it seems, is to restore their names. Naylor affirms that to disrupt the official Rose Hall narrative “is to begin to name those enslaved who have been unremembered and unmemorialized; it is to begin to reconstruct stories buried and deemed unworthy of telling and retelling; it is to begin to reimagine the struggles, suffering, and sanctity of people enslaved (though not entirely dehumanized)” [Naylor 2022, 7]. In other words, “retelling, reconstruct[ing]”, but first, naming. 31

Given my own ambivalence about recovery and repair, what I find most productive about Naylor's companion website is how its form works against the notion of recovery as inserting lost information back into an extant historical record. In her book's opening chapters, Naylor walks readers carefully through a detailed description of the archive as a physical space and material object. She shows lists that enumerate names, births, deaths, economic value, and clothing allowances. In a particularly powerful and moving meditation elsewhere, Naylor has reflected on the experience of seeing her own name and variations thereof — Celia and Cecelia — on some of these lists [Taylor 2023]. Far from an abstraction, “the archive” is a room in which Naylor sits, yearning for fuller records, and where she is confronted instead with the epistemic violence of witnessing people — some called by her own name — be rendered as property through lists that we might understand today as early databases. 32

And yet despite, or perhaps because of this careful attention to enumeration in her book, lists themselves are not the organizing frame for the companion website. *(Un)silencing Slavery* does present the forgotten names of those enslaved at Rose Hall Plantation, but it does so in the form of flower petals. Selecting the name of each enslaved person in a list on the right-hand side of the screen illuminates a single petal of the larger yellow-, pink- and purple-hued flower, revealing a brief biography with what Naylor has gleaned about that person's life. Naylor's visualization began in analog mode as a series of concentric circles she drew on paper to imagine the enslaved people at Rose Hall as part of a community tree (see Figure 3). Tree rings are a historical record of the environment. They tell tales about age and time, about stressors looming deep in the soil and life teeming in branches above. They may be the thick etching of abundant rainfall, the blackened scar of a wildfire, or the telltale mark of how high deadly floodwaters rose. But we can only read those stories after the work of sharp blade against bark and xylem is done. The rings of Naylor's chopped-down tree on paper are carried over to the digital flower as a faint visual echo of black dots; a digital flower that in its evocative and terrible beauty, leans “towards life and growth” [Gil n.d.]. Naylor's flower is an acknowledgement of slavery's violence and a need to make visible the forms of care and kinship and community that existed among the enslaved at Rose Hall. This is a project of 33

undoing by unraveling form, refusing “the sharp edges of social scientific graphic conventions” and tending instead the fragile, rounded petals of a digital rose [Gil n.d.].

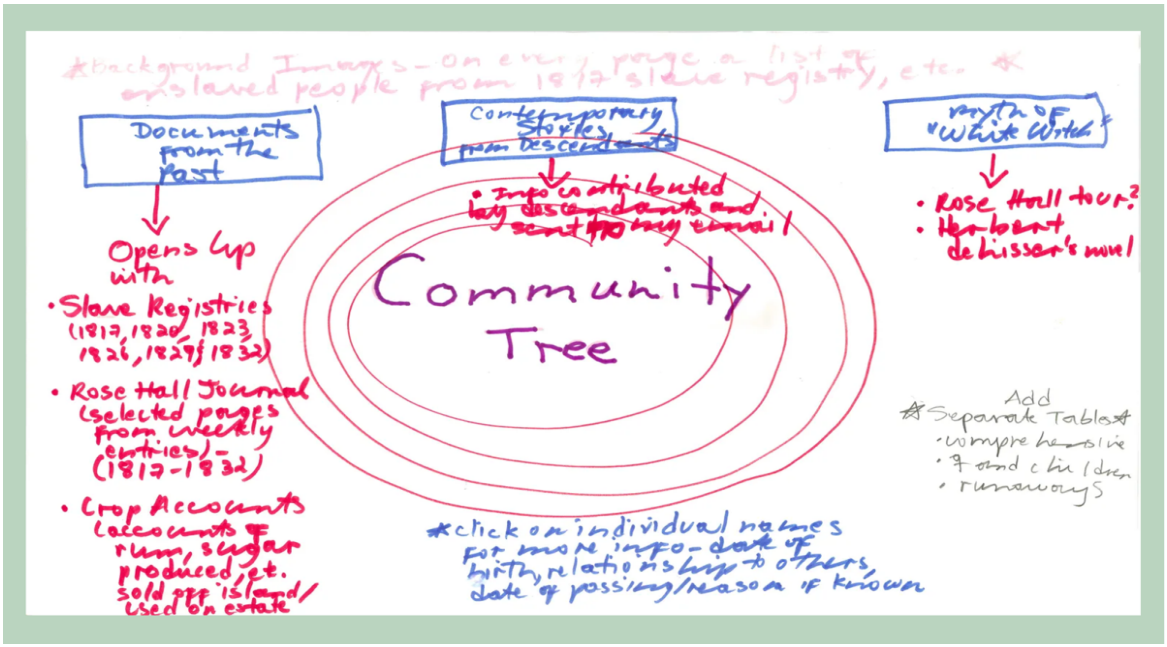

Figure 3. Naylor's community tree.

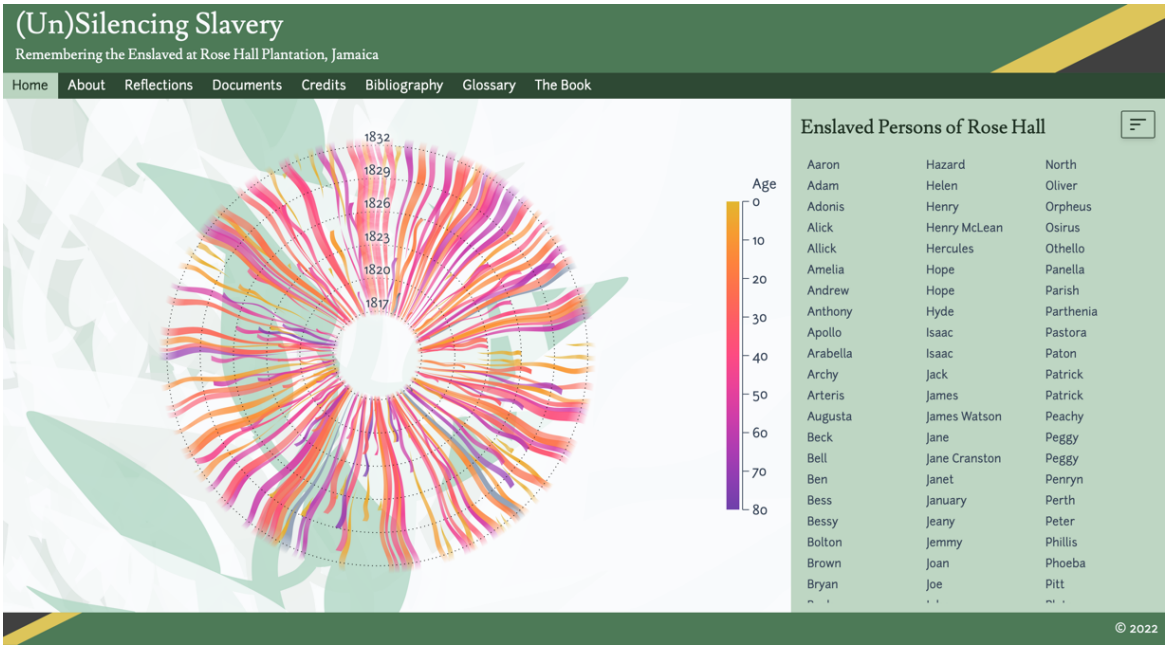

Figure 4. Naylor's digital rose.

Unlike Naylor's website, which is grounded in a research monograph, Tao Leigh Goffe's *Unmapping the Caribbean: Sanctuary and Sound* is a pedagogically situated project animated by a practice of “sonic un/mapping” [Goffe 2020, 2] (see Figure 5). Goffe writes that unmapping “as a digital praxis embraces the opacity of sensory disorientation. If mapping is about knowing and surveying, then unmapping is about unknowing and uncharting the territory” [Goffe 2020, 4]. In a course titled “Caribbean Writing, Reggae, and Routes” that teaches students to be attuned to the interpretive possibilities that sound opens up for rendering Caribbean space, Goffe tasks her students with creating story maps for Jamaica, New York, Surinam, Hispaniola, and Cuba.

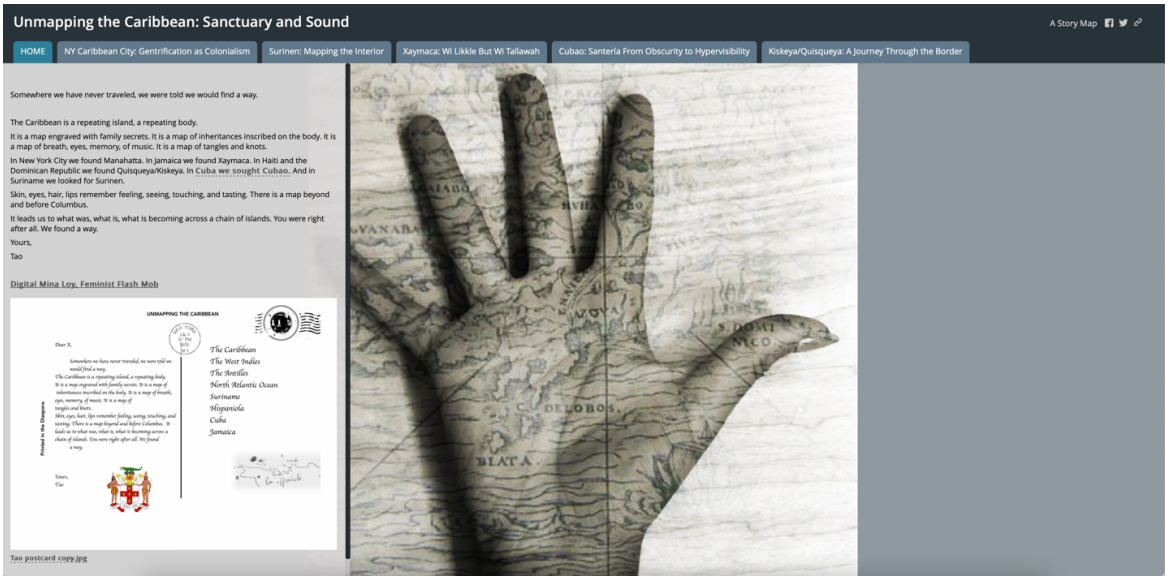

Figure 5. Landing page of *Unmapping the Caribbean*.

Where *Mapping Marronage* and *(Un)Silencing Slavery* work within the constraints of tooltips that require an economy of text, the StoryMaps tool allows for narrative-heavy spatial visualizations, and Goffe's students make apt use of this functionality to create a multisensory digital environment in *Unmapping the Caribbean*. They layer the sound of New York City's subway with that of ocean waves, and this original soundtrack is itself one of several layers that include photographs, videos, poems, and expository essays. Here, we are far from the turn-by-turn directions of Google Maps, from the surveilling, surveying rendering of traditional cartography. Unmapping, as Goffe's students show, is a playful provocation that tells stories, not only *about* the Caribbean, but *with* it, with its inhabitants, its culture, and its topography. 35

The Unnamed Fugitive's anonymity produced a crisis of form that reverberates long after our semester's encounter with him ended. Read in tandem, *(Un)Silencing Slavery* and *Unmapping the Caribbean* address the generative tensions at the heart of charting his flight: anonymity and mapping, respectively. They offer particularly compelling examples of how we might reimagine the forms through which we visually render Black lives in the Atlantic world beyond the genres that were used as tools of capture, subjection, and enumeration, “beyond the logic of the ledger” and the list [Sharpe 2016, 38]. In the early days of teaching “Mapping the French Atlantic”, I imagined that each semester's cohort would work with new primary sources, adding ever more names and itineraries to an increasingly populated map. But “a crisis of form” is perhaps another way of saying “a crisis of faith”, and I am no longer certain that such a project amounts to a “black digital practice [that] charts a path against the drive for data… [that] curates the mourning, dissembles against the plantation impulse, and, in the break, absconds” [Johnson 2018, 70]. *(Un)Silencing Slavery* and *Unmapping the Caribbean* inform new directions for my course's next iterations, but the future of *Mapping Marronage* looks like neither of these websites. If *Mapping Marronage* is to yield a map that is “engraved with the echo of runaway desire, of refusal”, then its future will have to return to the traces of texts and utterances and etchings and songs and moans by which maroons' fugitive dreams filter to us in the present — and to the reefs and sandbars and shoals and terraqueous formations that bear witness to other forms of liberation beyond “free soil” [Goffe 2020, 3].[16] 36

The lingering questions that haunt the scant record of the anonymous maroon's life have remained with me, popping up unbidden and with unpredictable frequency, leaving me wondering whether his was an iterative practice of marronage; whether he was returned to bondage in Martinique only to continue to study weather and terrain until he could launch himself once more into a world beyond his enslaver's grip; whether after the *Neptune* he touched earth and blended into the multihued human traffic of a bustling port city, leaving as the only trace of his fleeting presence the whistled melody of a rude seaman's shanty trailing on the air; whether there was an “after the *Neptune*” at all. I imagine other, more dire outcomes too, a reminder to cherish the moments when “black dissidents…get lost beyond recovery”, beyond enumeration [Childs 2015]. This serves as a reminder that when it comes to slavery's archives of death, often “what is not there is *living*” [McKittrick 2014, 23]. 37

I am working on a new syllabus for “Mapping the French Atlantic” that uses the same primary sources already represented on *Mapping Marronage*. My task for my students is no longer to tell untold stories but to “remix” stories already told, using forms that unravel cartography [Johnson 2018, 71]. I cannot yet say what those forms will be because they will have to emerge organically — like the natural, living matter of Naylor's vegetal inspiration — from a student-teacher collaboration that balances delicately between guidance and autonomy. Our work may very well yield a map to nowhere at all (*tant mieux!)*. I do know that rather than “improving” the existing digital map, I intend to have both iterations of the website — the current one that maps marronage and another that unmaps it — viewable in tandem, allowing users to see not just a finished product, but the process of unraveling and remaking. M. Jacqui Alexander writes that “crossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all” [Alexander 2005, 290]. It is my hope that by evolving into a site that is transparently iterative, *Mapping Marronage* will illustrate the fits and starts of maroon journeys, as well as the many stops along the way to freedom. 38

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I am grateful to the special issue's editors, Richard Roberts, Walter Hawthorne, Fatoumata Seck, and Rebecca Wall for their kind invitation to participate in the conversations that have culminated in this issue and for their patience and understanding through the process. I am also grateful to this article's peer reviewers for their guidance. Shout-out to Reviewer C for bibliographic suggestions offered with breathtaking generosity. 39

Notes

[1] The French Freedom Principle, that is, “the tenet that any slave who sets foot on French soil becomes free” [Peabody 1996, 145], has been examined in detail by [Koufinkana 1992], [Peabody 1996], and [Pluen 2021]. On the adoption and adaptation of free soil in Haiti, see for example [Ferrer 2012]. On French colonial regimes' distinction of metropolitan free soil from overseas colonial territory, see [Spieler 2009]. For an examination of the largely inconsistent application of the Freedom Principle in other Atlantic locales from the medieval period to the 19th century, see Peabody and Grinberg's 2011 special issue of *Slavery & Abolition* (32.2).

[2] On pedagogy and teaching the history of slavery in the French speaking world, see [De Suremain and Mesnard 2021].

[3] See, for example, [Johnson 2018], [Mitchell 2022], [Morgan 2016], and [Sutherland 2023].

[4] I am immensely grateful to my students Ellie Tabb, Chloe Wendlandt, and Kurt Wigent for their hard work in mapping the flight of the *Neptune*'s fugitive.

[5] See, for example, [Finch 2014], [Fuentes 2016], [Hartman 2008], [Hartman 2016], [Kazanjian 2016], and [Naylor 2022].

[6] On slavery, Black genealogy, and the “brick wall”, see [Hall 2020], [Miles 2021], [Morgan 2021], and [Robinson 2020].

[7] [Nevius 2020] surveys the wide-ranging scholarship that has considered marronage from various angles, including examining women's experiences of fugitivity and complicating the grand marronage/petit marronage binary. [Roberts 2015] in turn derives the theory “freedom as marronage” by paying close attention to enslaved people's flight, and in their co-authored article, [Hosbey and Roane 2021] examine Black placemaking past and present through histories of displacement in the U.S. South.

[8] For this survey of slavery-focused DH projects, I am indebted to the *Colored Conventions Project* for its crowdsourced compendium, *Black Digital Humanities Projects & Resources* [Colored Convention Project n.d.]. Another compilation, *A Directory of Caribbean Digital Scholarship*, would be an important resource for future surveys [The Caribbean Digital n.d.].

[9] For analyses of recuperative possibilities in Atlantic history and art, see [Putnam 2006] and [Sharpe 2020], respectively.

[10] “Planter” and “slave” are translations from the original French used in the letters. In the rest of this paper, I use “enslaver” and “enslaved”, respectively.

[11] Although it is likely that the slave trade had already been abolished by the unspecified time of the fugitive's capture in Senegal, whether his “taking” was legal or illegal is an immaterial distinction from an ethical standpoint.

[12] On maritime maroons impersonating free people of color, see [Dunnavant 2020]. For a discussion of enslaved mariners in the Atlantic world, see [Perl-Rosenthal 2015].

[13] For a record of ships named *Neptune* in the transatlantic slave trade, see www.slavevoyages.org.

[14] For a discussion of “chronocartography” as another example of this mapping beyond and against imperial logics and specifically in the French colonial context, see [Lambert 2021].

[15] On historical subjects as stand-ins for one another's stories, see [Turner 2017, 241].

[16] On offshore formations, see Disbro (2021) and King (2019).

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