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“An Essay on Slavery”

An Unpublished Poem by Jupiter Hammon

A previously unknown poem written by Jupiter Hammon of Long Island is one of the most important discoveries related to this eighteenth-century poet and slave in nearly a century.¹ The poem, entitled “An Essay on Slavery, with Submission to Divine Providence, Knowing That God Rules over All Things,” directly addresses questions concerning slavery and is by far the most outspoken antislavery statement by this often-neglected eighteenth-century writer.

Jupiter Hammon was owned by the Lloyd family of Lloyd’s Neck, Long Island. The Lloyds were wealthy and influential merchants and agriculturalists with commercial and religious ties throughout New England and Great Britain. Jupiter Hammon was born into slavery on October 17, 1711, at the newly constructed Lloyd Manor House, which had just been completed a month prior (Scott and Klaffky 9,12). Hammon would live a long life, serving three generations of the Lloyd family, including his first master Henry Lloyd (1685–1763); Henry’s son Joseph Lloyd (1716–80); and finally John Lloyd II (1745–92), Joseph’s nephew, to whom Hammon was bequeathed after Joseph’s suicide in 1780. John Lloyd’s sister was Sarah Lloyd, who married James Hillhouse on January 1, 1779.

James Hillhouse was a New Haven, Connecticut, lawyer and real estate developer who served as an officer during the Revolutionary War and soon after became one of the new nations’s most successful and powerful politicians. He served three terms in the US Congress and then served in the US Senate from May 1796 to June 1810, when he resigned. Afterward he spent the last ten years of his life as treasurer of Yale College (Van Slyck 52). It is through the marriage of Sarah Lloyd to James Hillhouse that the Lloyd family of Long Island becomes strongly connected to the Hillhouse family of New Haven. Sarah, James Hillhouse’s new bride, however, died from medical complications suffered during the delivery of their first child (who also died soon after birth) in November of the same year they were mar-

ried (Barck 886–87). James Hillhouse, nevertheless, remained in constant contact with the Lloyd family and later married Sarah's cousin, Rebecca Woolsey, in 1782. Rebecca Woolsey was the daughter of Rebecca Lloyd and Melancthon Taylor Woolsey (Bowen xii–xiii). The strong friendships and familial ties can be easily traced throughout the correspondences between the Lloyd, Woolsey, and Hillhouse families beginning most prominently after the marriage of John Lloyd to Sara Woolsey in 1741.

It is clear from numerous letters spanning the course of many years, from 1775 into the 1790s, that Jupiter Hammon spent significant amounts of time in Connecticut, very likely spending much of that time at the Hillhouse home in New Haven, especially during the years of the American Revolution when British forces occupied Long Island. Numerous brief mentions of "Jupiter" and "faithful Jupiter" appear in the letters of the Hillhouse Family Papers (Stark et al.), written by various members of the Hillhouse, Woolsey, and Lloyd families. Most of these mentions can be found within the "Miscellaneous Papers" of the collection, which spans the years 1762–1931.

The new poem was discovered among the Hillhouse Family Papers at Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library. Prior to the discovery of this new poem, the last piece of writing by Jupiter Hammon to be found was a broadside entitled "An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries," uncovered in 1915 by Oscar Wegelin among the holdings of the New York Historical Society. The Wegelin discovery appears to be Hammon's first published work, its initial appearance in print dated December 25, 1760. That poem focuses on Hammon's religious convictions concerning Christian salvation, a topic that fits the majority of his writings.² However, this most recent discovery appears to be among Hammon's last compositions before his death and takes as its subject the *morality* of slavery, a much more focused and politically charged topic that appears to have expanded in interest for Hammon as he grew older.

"An Essay on Slavery" is dated November 10, 1786, which means that it was likely composed around the same time as his most famous piece of writing, the essay *An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York*, which was presented to New York's African Society along with a letter dated September 24, 1786, and published in New York in early 1787.³ Though there is no surviving working copy of the essay known today, it is highly likely Hammon intended the poem "An Essay on Slavery" to be published along

with *An Address to the Negroes* as a combined work in the same way that his essays *A Winter Piece* and *An Evening's Improvement* were each concluded respectively by the poems "A Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death" and "A Dialougue, Intitled, The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant."⁴

"An Essay on Slavery" is a valuable and astonishing artifact for literary and cultural studies. It is the first instance of what appears to be a working draft of a piece of writing by Jupiter Hammon. The poem is written on a large, full sheet of laid paper, characteristic of the type of paper that was produced widely in Europe during the eighteenth century (fig. 1). The distinctive "chain lines" of the "laid" papermaking process can be readily discerned crisscrossing both horizontally and vertically through the page.⁵ The page is folded in half creating two leaves that make a folio of four pages on which the twenty-four stanza poem is written. The paper also has watermarks centering each of the two halves of the unfolded document. The left side of the page has a large Maid of Dort form of the Pro Patria watermark in its center, while the right side of the page contains a Georgius Rex countermark. These marks indicate that Hammon was writing on paper that was imported from the Netherlands for the British market (Gravell and Miller 542). Several of the letters and other writings in the Hillhouse collection written by Hillhouse family members during the middle to late eighteenth century have the same Pro Patria and Georgius Rex watermarks on them, though the large sheets of laid paper were usually torn into quarters before being used. The paper is in excellent condition, given its age, as if the document was preserved without being opened or used often. The text of the poem was written using iron gall ink that has since faded from its original dark purple or black hue to a characteristic light brown color.⁶

There are numerous corrections, mark outs, erasures, and other indicators of Jupiter Hammon's writing process that allow us to study not only his style but also his methods for composing. One particularly interesting aspect of the poem is the handwriting itself; it is comparatively quite good, even better than the handwriting of many of the members of the Lloyd and Hillhouse households, which indicates that Hammon was a very practiced writer who must have spent a considerable amount of time developing his handwriting. Perhaps there are other, unattributed pieces of nonliterary writing, such as lists, labels, or other random jottings in Hammon's hand that he used to practice his penmanship.

Another interesting feature of the poem concerns his spelling, which

An Essay on Slavery with Submission to Divine
 Providence, knowing that God Rules over all things
 Written by Jupiter Hammon

our forefathers came from Africa
 tost over the raging main
 to a Christian Shore there for to stay
 and not return again.

Dark and dismal was the Day
 When slavery began
 All humble thoughts were put away
 Then slaves were made by Man.

When God doth please for to permit
 That Slavery should be
 It is our Duty to submit
 Till Christ shall make us free

Come let us join with one consent
 With humble hearts and say
 For every sin we must repent
 And walk in wisdoms way.

If we are free we'll pray to God
 If we are Slaves the same
 It's firmly fixt in his holy word
 ye shall not pray in vain.

Come blessed Jesus in thy Love
 And hear thy Children cry
 And send them smiles now from above
 And Grant them Liberty.

Thou alone can make us free
 We are thy subjects true
 Pray give us grace to bond & free
 The time we stay below.

Thou unto thee we look for all
 Thou art our only King
 Thou hast the power to save the soul
 And bring us flocking in.

FIGURE 1. "An Essay on Slavery" was discovered in the Yale University archives among the Hillhouse Family Papers. A careful examination of the document reveals it to be a working draft written at about the same time as Hammon's most popular essay, An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York, and it was likely meant by Hammon for publication with that work.

is much more accurate and in general accordance with conventions of the period than expected, especially for a manuscript that appears to be a draft.⁷ The punctuation that appears in this working draft also gives us insight into the degree to which publishers and editors altered his work prior to his manuscripts going to print. These features stand out as important considerations for Hammon's work because we have a contemporary commentary on Hammon's writing from one set of printers. The printers of *An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York* indicate in their attestation of authenticity (which prefaces the essay) that Hammon's spelling was significantly bad, commenting, "We have made no material alterations in it, except in the spelling, which we found needed considerable correction" (iv). However, "An Essay on Slavery," written within the same few months as *An Address*, contains only three misspellings, one of which is a consistent misspelling in which Hammon writes "two" where its homophone "too" ought to appear. Perhaps the much longer *An Address* invited more opportunity for spelling errors, though "An Essay on Slavery" seems to belie that claim about spelling by Hammon's printers.⁸

The punctuation in the holograph also shows some differences from Hammon's published poems that shed light on issues of his writing process. Although "An Essay on Slavery" maintains his typical structure of four-line stanzas, it lacks regularized punctuation at the ends of lines (save for a period at the end of each stanza). There are only two commas in the entire piece: one in the title and one in stanza 11, line 3, which was added as a revision. There are only five apostrophes (used in contractions), four of which Hammon added as revisions. He does not use apostrophes to indicate possessive case for phrases like "wisdoms way" (stanza 4, line 4). This runs counter to "A Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death" (stanza 2, line 2) and "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" (stanza 3, line 1) which both make use of the apostrophe to indicate possessive case with "wisdom's." This feature possibly lends some credence to the publishers' comment on error and also implies that some of the punctuation in Hammon's published poems was likely added by the publishers as part of their house style, as much of the punctuation in the received texts does not appear in Hammon's original manuscripts. Nevertheless, his spelling, writing style, and lexicon as they appear in his earlier works help us to confirm the authenticity of the new poem.

There are numerous features within the new poem that help us to establish that it is, in fact, a literary work by Jupiter Hammon, written in his

hand. First, the Connecticut Historical Society Museum and Library possesses a copy of Hammon's essay *A Winter Piece* (1782), inscribed with a dedication to Reverend William Lockwood, minister of the congregational church in Orange, Connecticut, from March 17, 1784, to April 28, 1796 (*Historical Addresses* 52).⁹ The inscription on the cover of this copy of Hammon's essay is the only other known example of his handwriting, which reads, "For The Rev^d William Lockwood, from His friend & humble Servt The Author~." (1). The handwriting on the cover of this copy of the essay matches the handwriting in "An Essay on Slavery."

Second, there is a consistent use of words and phrases that constitute Jupiter Hammon's personal lexicon. In the first stanza of "An Essay on Slavery," line 2 clearly contains the same wording as line 14 of Hammon's 1778 poem "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley." Line 14 of "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" reads, "Tost o'er the raging main," while the 1786 "Essay on Slavery" also reads, "tost over the raging main" with only a slight variation in the spelling of the word "over" to adjust the meter of each poem. Here we see an obvious recycling of this line as a familiar stock phrase.

There are two other interesting repetitions in "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley." One is the phrase "hid beyond the sky," which appears in verse 14, line 2, of "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" as well as the new holograph, though the word "hid" is visibly struck out. Also, the line "And bring us flocking in" appears in both poems: stanza 8 of "Wheatley" as well as stanza 8 of "An Essay on Slavery."

We also see that Hammon uses the word "shore" multiple times in two of his four other known poems. The word "shore" appears in stanza 1, line 3, stanza 10, line 1, and stanza 11, line 1, of "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley," and in stanza 20, line 4, twice in "A Dialogue, intitled, The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant." We also find the word used four times in "An Essay on Slavery": first in stanza 1, line 3, and then in stanzas 17, 20, and 21 on the second line of each stanza. The similarities go well beyond the simple use of the word "shore" across poems; similarities also involve the way Hammon constructs each of the sentences and phrases in which it appears. Thus, the line containing the word "shore" in "Essay on Slavery" has a similar construction in each instance within the poem, which include "to a Christian shore," "Now on the christian shore," "on the christian shore," and "Echo the christian shore." When we compare these phrases to passages in "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" we find "from

the distant shore," "mov'd to distant shore," and "left the Heathen shore." There is also an instance of this construction in "The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant," which reads, "Extend from Shore to shore." Also, among the other similarities between the new holograph and Hammon's known poems is that all of his poems, with the exception of his first ("An Evening Thought") end with the word "Heaven." It is easy to observe that the constructions of lines using this word have consistent grammar, vocabulary, and meter as well as motif—all of which appear in works written within an eight-year period.

In addition to the similarities of words and phrases between "An Essay on Slavery" and Hammon's other poems, the holograph also bears similarities in tone and topic to *An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York*, which helps both to confirm the poem's authenticity as well as our contention that the two were intended to be published together. In stanzas 2 and 4 of "An Essay on Slavery" Hammon writes that "slaves were made by Man" and that "When God doth please for to permit / That slavery should be / It is our duty to submit / Till Christ shall make us free." These lines echo what Hammon writes in *An Address*, particularly how slavery "is permitted thus to be, by that God who governs all things" and "Now whether it is right, and lawful, in the sight of God, for them to make slaves of us or not, I am certain that while we are slaves, it is our duty to obey our masters" (*An Address* 5, 7). Furthermore, stanza 13, lines 3–4, echo the epigraph in *An Address*: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every Nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." The argument Hammon makes in "An Essay on Slavery" bears a strong resemblance to the argument he makes in *An Address*. However, "An Essay on Slavery," which was most likely composed after *An Address*, displays a more concentrated focus on the morality of slavery. This intensification results in several lines and stanzas (particularly stanzas 2, 17, and 21) that might have proved too inflammatory or radical for the Lloyd family to allow the poem to be published alongside *An Address*.

Some of Hammon's revisions to "An Essay on Slavery" work not only to better fit the rhyme and meter of the poem, but also subtly alter its meaning. For example, in stanza 2, line 4, and stanza 16, line 2, Hammon changes from "to Man" to "by Man." This change in prepositions works to reinforce Hammon's argument that humans bear the responsibility for the existence of slavery. In stanza 3, line 4, Hammon changes the line from "Till Christ

shall come again” to “Till Christ shall make us free.” The revised line implies a more ambiguous time frame for when slavery will end, and the implications of this might mean a much greater antislavery attitude on Hammon’s part than has often been attributed to him.

It is also important to note that Hammon’s “An Essay on Slavery” opens with a direct reference to the Middle Passage, a topic he does not address in any of his other known works. This important feature of the poem, along with other intertextual features his poem shares with Phillis Wheatley’s “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” indicate the long-standing influence of Phillis Wheatley’s own writings on Hammon’s sensibilities as a poet and thinker attempting to address the topic of slavery and freedom on the American continent. Eight years after writing “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley,” Hammon chooses, once again, to appropriate the theme and sentiments of his literary colleague, but infuse it with his own, seemingly more outspoken, statement on the sinful nature of the institution of slavery.

Further analysis of this poem in relation to Jupiter Hammon’s other known works promises to reveal much more about his thoughts regarding the politics and morality of slavery. The discovery of this holograph, written from the perspective of an eighteenth-century American slave, is a great contribution to the historical record that we hope will shed new light on the personal thoughts and attitudes of Jupiter Hammon.

*An Essay on Slavery, with submission to Divine
providence, knowing that God Rules over all things —
Written by Jupiter Hammon —*

1

Our forefathers came from africa
tost over the raging main
to a Christian shore there for to stay
and not return again.

2

Dark and dismal was the Day
When slavery began

All humble thoughts were put away
Then slaves were made *by Man. *[to]

3
When God doth please for to permit
That slavery should be
It is our duty to submit
Till Christ shall [*make us free] *[come again]

4
Come let us join with one consent
With humble hearts *and say *[to]
For every sin we must repent
And walk in wisdoms way.

5
If we are free *we'll pray to God *[we will]
If we are slaves the same
*It's firmly fixt in [**his] word. *[It is] **[his holy]^a
Ye shall not pray in vain.

6
Come blessed Jesus in thy Love
And hear thy Children cry
And send them smiles now from above
And grant them Liberty.

7
Tis thou alone can make us free
We are thy subjects two^b
Pray give us grace to bend a knee
The time we stay below.

8
This unto thee we look for all
Thou art our only King
Thou hast the power to save the soul
And bring us flocking in.

9

We come as sinners *unto thee *[up to]
 We know thou hast the word
 Come blessed Jesus make us free
 And bring us to our God.

[*10]^c 10

Although we are in slavery^d
 We will pray unto our God
 He hath mercy *hid beyond the sky^e *
 Tis in his holy word.

11

Come unto me ye humble souls
 Although you live in strife
 I keep alive, *I save the soul *[and]
 And give eternal life.^f

12

To all that do repent of sin
 [*Be they] ~~there~~ bond or free. [*Whether]^g
 I am their savior and their king
 They must come unto me.

13

Hear the words *now of the Lord *[of]
 The call is loud and certain
 We must be judged by his word
 Without respect of person.

14

Come let us seek his precepts now
 And love his holy word
 With humble soul we'll surely^h bow
 And wait the *great reward.ⁱ *

15

Although we came from africa
We look unto our God
To help with our hearts to sigh and pray
And Love his holy word.

16

Although we are in slavery
Bound *by the yoke of Man *[to]
We must always have a single Eye
And do the best we can.

17

Come let us join with humble voice
Now on the christian shore
If we will have our only choice
Tis Slavery no more.

18

Now [~~shurely~~] let us not repine
And say his wheels are slow
He can fill our hearts with things divine
And give us freedom two.

19

He hath the power all in his hand
And all he doth is right
And if we are tide to [~~the~~] yoke of man
We'll pray with all our might. [*We must pray through day and night.]^k

20

This the State of thousands now
Who are on the christian shore
Forget the Lord to whom we bow
And think of him no more.

21

When shall we hear the joyfull sound
Echo the christian shore
Each humble [voice with songs resound]¹
That Slavery is no more.

22

Then shall we rejoice and sing
Loud praises to our God
Come sweet Jesus heavenly king
Thou art the son [*Our Lord]. [*of God]

23

We are thy children blessed Lord
Tho still in Slavery
*We'll seek thy precepts Love thy word * [We]
Untill the day we Die.

24

Come blessed Jesus hear us now
And teach our hearts^m to pray
And seek the Lord to whom we Bow
Before tribunal day.

25

Now Glory be unto our God
All praise be justly given
Come seek his precepts Love his works
That is the way to Heaven. —

_____n

Composed By Jupiter Hammon
A Negro Man belonging to Mr John Lloyd
Queens-Village on Long Island —
November 10th 1786

- * Indicates a word or passage that was changed by Jupiter Hammon as he corrected his manuscript. The word in brackets outside the line is the original word or phrase that was replaced by what appears clearly as the final version in this manuscript. There are several places in the original handwritten (holograph) manuscript where a word or phrase is rubbed out, leaving a faint impression, and then replaced. In most of these cases, the faint imprint left behind can still be read and allows us to know what Hammon's original wording was prior to correction.
- a. The word "holy" is struck through on this line.
 - b. Hammon misspells the adverb "too" throughout the poem.
 - c. Here Hammon rubs out the stanza number and repositions it slightly to the right so that it aligns beneath stanza number 9. He seems to be very careful to make sure these stanza numbers line up on every page, as indicated by this correction.
 - d. In his holograph, Hammon switches between the letter forms for the long and short *s* character. He seems to use the long form of the *s* at random. For instance, in stanza 6, line 1, he spells the name "Jesus" with the familiar round *s*, but in stanza 9, line 3, he uses the long *s* in the medial position of the word. This switching of *s* forms occurs throughout the poem and does not seem to have a pattern, although the usage of the long *s* is correct wherever it occurs (for instance, it never occurs at the end of a word).
 - e. Word struck out, is the word "hid."
 - f. Here in stanza 11, Hammon switches voices from the narrative voice of the poet to that of God. He continues in the voice of God throughout stanzas 11 and 12, returning to the narrator's original voice again in stanza 13. The sudden shifting of voice is a technique that Hammon uses in other poems, particularly in "The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant" and "An Address to Phillis Wheatley."
 - g. Much of this line before "bond or free" is erased or struck out and replaced by the legible text, "Be they." In this line, Hammon paraphrases Ephesians 6.8, which he directly quotes in *An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York*.
 - h. The word "surely" is rubbed out here and then rewritten.
 - i. Undecipherable word rubbed out beneath "great."
 - j. This word was rubbed out, but is still legible.
 - k. This line was changed significantly from "We must pray through day and night" to its final form, "We'll pray with all our might."
 - l. The words after "Each humble" on this line were erased and rewritten, but the wording of both the original text and the corrections are difficult to make out clearly. The phrase "voice with songs resound" seems the most likely final correction, but the underlying, partially erased text appears to say, "[illegible] shall [illegible] around."
 - m. There is a rubbed out word beneath "hearts" that is illegible.
 - n. The dashes that follow the last line of the poem were written as long wavy lines in the original holograph.

NOTES

We would like to thank the librarian at the New York Public Library who pointed us toward the Yale Library finding aid for the Hillhouse Family Papers, which listed an unnamed Jupiter Hammon poem, which turned out to be “An Essay on Slavery.” We thank the staff at Yale University’s Sterling Memorial Library for all of their kind assistance while we worked to examine and authenticate Jupiter Hammon’s holograph manuscript and read through large portions of the Hillhouse Family Papers. We also thank the anonymous readers who commented on and gave helpful advice for this article. In addition, we thank the University of Texas at Arlington for generously providing travel funding to assist us in our research of this important new find.

1. Julie McCown, graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington, discovered the location of the poem while doing research for a course assignment collecting copies of original manuscripts for the works of Jupiter Hammon in the fall of 2011.
2. See May 24–48; O’Neale 41–59; Ransom 11–19; and Vertanes 1–17 for more information about Jupiter Hammon’s religious background and themes.
3. The date of the letter gives us a clear indication of when the essay was completed. It was published by the printers Carroll and Patterson in February the next year.
4. The spelling and punctuation of the original publications is retained here.
5. In the “laid” papermaking process, a rectangular wire sieve was mounted onto a wooden frame and then dipped into a vat of linen pulp that was spread evenly across the surface of the screen. Once the water drained from the thin layer of pulp trapped and spread across the sieve, the material was shaken in order to lock the linen fibers together. Once the film of pulp dried, a single sheet of paper bearing the pattern of the wires on the sieve was produced (Gaskell 57–59).
6. See Stryker–Rodda 14–15 for more information about the types of ink used from the early American period to the early nineteenth century.
7. We retain the spelling and punctuation of the original holograph manuscript.
8. In addition to using “two” in place of “too,” Hammon also misspells “joyful” in stanza 21 and “Until” in stanza 23, adding an extra letter *l* to the end of each word. Sarah Woolsey Lloyd fairly consistently misspells these kinds of words (“until” and words that end in “ful”) by adding an extra *l* in her journal. The misspelled word “shurely” appears in the first line of stanza 18, but it is partially erased and clearly intended to be deleted. If one counts the proper names and titles that have been left in lower case, such as the word “Christian” and “Africa,” which are sometimes capitalized and sometimes left in lower case, then the possible number of misspellings would be five words.
9. William Lockwood graduated from Yale College in 1774, the year after James Hillhouse, making it very likely that they were acquainted.

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