Introduction

In roughly 1770, John Marrant rose from the dead. As he explained in his autobiographical narrative of 1785, he returned to his family in Charleston, South Carolina, following a nearly two-year absence in which he joined and evangelized several Native American communities in the Georgia and South Carolina low country. Several years before the earliest Black congregations—Silver Bluff Baptist (1775) in South Carolina and First African Baptist (1777) in Savannah—were organized by George Leile and George Galphin, respectively, Marrant's vision for his ministry was coming into clearer view. Like Moses, who returned from the wilderness of Midian to lead Israel to freedom after a forty-year absence, he quickly organized a small congregation of enslaved people on the Jenkins plantation in Combahee, South Carolina, and led them to the wilderness for religious instruction. His account of his brush arbor Bible study is one of the earliest depictions of what Albert Raboteau called the "invisible institution" in American literature.[1]

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, Marrant stood at the helm of one of the earliest postslavery Black Christian communities in American history. Prior to the formation of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (1794) in Philadelphia by Richard Allen, Marrant pastored Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia in the Huntingdon Connexion, a Calvinist branch of Methodism founded by Selina Hastings outside London. Marrant's account of his ministry in Nova Scotia reveals important details about the early formation of Black autonomous Christian communities. *The Gospel of John Marrant* studies the life and writings of North America's first Black ordained minister and the religious worlds he reflected and created through his texts.[2]

Given his widespread travels and fascinating career as an author and minister, it is surprising that John Marrant has not been more widely studied by

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

scholars of American religion. The religious texts he produced allow scholars to see the multiple and diverse religious cultures that contributed to the formation of African American Christianity in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Born in New York in 1755, Marrant encountered multiple religious communities throughout the North American Atlantic Seaboard. At age four, he moved to St. Augustine, Florida, where he lived within the sphere of Afro-Catholic religious influence. Years later in Savannah, he observed an influx of Africana religious cultures, as the Georgia colony saw unprecedented growth in slave importations during the years of Marrant's residency. As an adolescent in Charleston, he witnessed the preaching of renowned Methodist minister George Whitefield and took part in the rituals of American revivalism. Later, he resided with a community of Cherokee for two years in Georgia and returned to Carolina as an exhorter to enslaved persons in Charleston and surrounding plantations. At the siege of Charleston during the American War of Independence, he was impressed into British military service and remained at sea seven years before his discharge. Following the war, he was ordained in the Huntingdon Methodist Connexion, in Bath, England. That same year he journeyed to Nova Scotia as an itinerant preacher to a community of Black Loyalists in Birchtown. After three years there, he went to Boston, where he was quickly acquainted with the prominent abolitionist and Masonic leader Prince Hall. Hall installed Marrant as chaplain of the African Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in Boston, making him the first person appointed to that position. He returned to London in 1790 and, after a short illness, died the following year. The story of his brief but adventurous life enables readers to witness the transformation of African American Christianity from the backwoods religion of enslaved people in South Carolina to the institutional face of the abolitionist movement in the years of the early republic.

Marrant's Texts

Marrant's gospel message is announced in his two autobiographical texts, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (Now Going to Preach the Gospel in Nova Scotia)*, an account of his early life before the War of Independence, and *A Journal of the Rev. John Marrant from August the 18th, 1785, to the 16th of March, 1790*, a travel book that recounts his ministry to Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. The *Journal* also includes *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789*, which Marrant delivered in Boston at the Masonic festival of Saint John the Baptist.[3] *The Gospel of John Marrant: Conjuring Christianity in the Black Atlantic* closely analyzes Marrant's texts to

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

demonstrate how West and West Central African religious and cultural themes, symbols, and cosmologies informed biblical interpretation, ritual culture, and communal formation in early Black North American Christian communities. My analysis of Marrant's use of biblical narrative forms alongside African, African diaspora, and Native American beliefs and practices offers new perspectives on eighteenth-century Black religious sensibilities in transatlantic worlds of encounter and transformation. Marrant's texts illuminate the multiplicity of spiritual sensibilities, identities, and cultural sources inhabiting the ritual and social worlds of African diaspora peoples in the colonial period.

The present study analyzes *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant*, Marrant's first autobiographical text. *Narrative* was first published in 1785 following Marrant's ordination at Spa Fields Chapel in Bath, England, and went through several editions of publication well into the nineteenth century, extending the span of its public life beyond that of its author. Marrant narrates his early childhood in New York and St. Augustine and his adolescence in Savannah and Charleston, his captivity among Creek Indians, and impressment in the British navy and subsequent discharge in England—all leading to his ordination in May 1785. *Narrative* not only recounts Marrant's early life but also provides important first-person commentary on Black social life in colonial America. It gives eyewitness accounts of early Black Christian ritual culture, Black and Native American cultural exchange, and the use of religion as a curative tool against racial violence.

This study examines the fourth edition of Marrant's *Narrative*, which he arranged, authorized, and published himself in August 1785. That edition includes a description of an enslaved community's violent confrontation with a slave owner and overseer and also places Native American plantation raids within the context of colonial displacement. None of the other versions of *Narrative* includes these mysterious passages, which are analyzed in detail in chapter 3. The fourth edition is reprinted in Joanna Brooks and John Saillant's *"Face Zion Forward"* (2002), the only complete collection of Marrant's works.[4] A physical copy of the text is located at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

This study also analyzes *A Journal of the Rev. John Marrant*, Marrant's second autobiographical text, which depicts his ministry in Nova Scotia and describes early formations of institutional Black Christianity. *Journal*, published by Marrant in 1790 on his return to London just one year before he died, is the most extensive account published by a Black minister prior to the Civil War. The original publication included a copy of Marrant's eulogy of Mr. John Lock, his friend and a fellow resident of Nova Scotia. The text was republished for the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

first time since its original printing in Brooks and Saillant's volume. A physical copy of *Journal* is held at Pennsylvania State University.

Conjuring Christianity

Marrant's autobiographical accounts also help uncover the role of conjure in the formation of early African American Christianity. In his seminal work *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (1994), the religious studies scholar Theophus Smith argues for the centrality of conjure in Black spirituality and culture. During the colonial period and the years of the early republic, Africana religious culture was vital to the social formation of early Black North Americans. Conjure, on the one hand, describes the Black folk magic tradition in which practitioners utilize complex invocations of powers and processes intended to heal and harm others. It is this feature, notes Smith, that distinguishes African American conjure traditions from European counterparts that tend to associate conjure more narrowly with witchcraft and occultism. In addition to folklore practices, conjure also encompasses ritual performance intended to transform material realities of history. I examine the religious writings of John Marrant to demonstrate how early Black Christians utilized the Bible as a conjure book. In the religious imagination of early Black Christians, the Bible prescribed "ritually patterned behaviors and performative uses of language and symbols" to convey "a pharmacopeic or healing/harming intent." Additionally, early Black Christians redeployed the narrative tropes of "biblical figures" to render "biblical configurations of cultural experience."[5] In many Black Christian communities, conjure was the operative framework through which practitioners related to the unseen powers of the spirit world. Marrant's writings demonstrate how conjuring Christian communities utilized the Bible as the source of ritual and oral prescriptions intended to transform and remedy systemic and interpersonal oppression produced by racial slavery and social proscription.

Conjure also helps to unlock hidden meanings embedded in Marrant's texts conveyed via allusions to biblical narratives, symbols, and scriptures. As Brooks and Saillant note in their introduction to their complete collection of his works, Marrant's texts are "more than a missionary's autobiography." "Behind the traditional genre," they note, "lurks a hidden transcript" encoded in "numerous biblical citations" throughout the texts. Marrant's allusion, rather than direct reference, to biblical texts aimed to "disguise the specifically black content of his preaching from the Huntingdon Connexion and other potentially hostile or dangerous readers."[6] The message revealed in the hidden transcript of his texts discloses a religious outlook that esteems social action integral

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

to religious devotion for Black communities of faith. Additionally, it uncovers the centrality of Africana ritual traditions in the religious repertoire of early Black North American Christian communities. My analysis utilizes conjure to decode the "hidden transcript" lurking beneath the surface of Marrant's texts and to analyze his use of conjure, or the "specifically black content" of his preaching, which he sought to disguise.

The centrality of conjure in Marrant's texts is most observable in the West and West Central African oral cultures that precede the formation of African American literature. The oral legacies of African cosmology narratives and African American folktales are the narrative precursors to the Black Atlantic literary tradition founded and developed by Marrant and his contemporaries. Both oral and literary traditions of Black storytelling evince spiritual strategies and methods that resist injustice and counter racism. The Black storytelling tradition is a repository of spirituality that offers unique insight into not only the virtues of Black collective consciousness but also the vices of the dominant culture's social world. Oral legacy is indispensable to understanding Black literature.[7] In Black oral traditions, spirituality is embodied within the structures, symbols, and forms that determine the rules for interpretation.

Although the Bible was the primary source on which Marrant's autobiographical texts were based, his redeployment of biblical symbols and structures evinces an Africana cultural strategy for communicating religious meaning. Like many early Black American spiritual narratives, his texts maintain a fundamental plot structure based on stories from the Bible. Within this mythic narrative pattern, an idyllic beginning is disrupted by tragedy; protagonists undergo spiritual transformation (often in a wilderness setting); this is followed by divine intervention and deliverance to a land of promise that completes the arc of tranquility from the story's beginning. This pattern, along with corresponding symbols that signal spiritual transformation, is consistently observed throughout the Old and New Testaments, as well as in early Black American literature. John Marrant relies on this same narrative pattern and includes many of the symbols that signify the various stages of development in the biblical saga in his own self-portrayal. However, his understanding of the Bible's stories draws on the interpretive principles of African storytelling rather than the doctrines of Euro-American Protestantism.

Black narrators like Marrant mimicked the Bible's storytelling structures in their narratives and adapted details like settings and characters to their own historical contexts. In the nineteenth-century genre of slave narratives, mythological patterns were realized in four chronological phases. In the first phase, the enslaved protagonist experiences a "descent from perfection" that brings the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

realization of "what it means to be a slave." In the second phase, the protagonist learns and considers alternatives to enslavement and ultimately formulates the resolve to be free. "The resolution to quit slavery," notes the literary scholar Frances Smith Foster, "is, in effect, a climax to a conversion experience." In the third phase, the protagonist narrates their escape—allegorizing the struggle to overcome evil. Though the journey may be encumbered with perils and dangers, "the outcome is never in doubt," since "the narrative, after all, was written by a freeman." In the fourth phase, freedom is attained, signifying a new beginning and "the jubilation period of ancient ritual."[8]

The imitation of the Bible's narrative patterns and symbols in early Black narratives demonstrates the mimetic principle of conjure within Black Atlantic religious consciousness. Within the cultural framework of West African conjure, mimesis played an integral role in the efficacy of ritual performance. Mimesis consists in first discerning and then performing a series of patterned operations based on an inferred relationship between one or more things. Perceived similarities based on appearance, function, or prior experience determined how practitioners devised "effective means of turning to human advantage the perceived similarity or habitual proximity of the two objects."[9] The mimetic performance of the Bible's narrative structures and symbols helped early Black Christians establish Africana rituals and practices that enabled the development of collective identities and cohesive communities. While early Black American authors utilized biblical imagery and symbolism, the rules that governed the meanings assigned to biblical tropes reflected West and West Central African epistemologies. Early Black Christians perceived similarities between the Bible's stories, symbols, and narrative structures and broad, expansive notions of Africana religion that were critical to the formation of Black racial identity. Consequently, the meanings assigned to the Bible's stories—and, by extension, to Black Christianity—diverge sharply from those of Euro-American Christians. I argue that Africana religious rituals and cosmologies, more than the doctrines of mainstream American Protestantism, gave rise to the development of Black Christianity during the early republic. Conjuring Christianity refers to a process by which early Black Christians utilized biblical storytelling to establish (and in many cases disguise) rituals, practices, and meanings associated with and derived from traditional Africana religious cultures.

The autobiographical narratives published by Marrant and his contemporaries also reveal moral and ethical norms that enabled the formation of Black Christian communities. Within the Africana oral cultures that preceded eighteenth-century African American formal literature, storytelling was a didactic

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

tool that safeguarded rituals and customs of the African past in the collective memory of Black New World communities. Historical memory was preserved in folklore and family legends passed on from one generation to the next. For early Black North Americans, these family narratives often recalled days on the African continent, stories of capture and transport across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, and stories of the American Revolutionary War. Increasingly, however, the focus of their stories reflected less of their previous lives in Africa and more of their New World circumstances. The embellished anecdotes shared among enslaved and free Blacks recounted the realities of their lived experience: religious meetings and festive celebrations, whippings and punishments, and stories of those who resisted by escaping or directly confronting the limitations of enslavement.[10]

Additionally, the stories included codes for moral behavior. Some espoused overtly religious virtues such as humility and Sabbath observance. The majority, however, focused on everyday human relationships. The importance of family ties, children's responsibility to parents, obligations to friendship, courting and marriage, and the necessity of parental love and care were frequently touched on in the oral narratives that early Black Americans exchanged with one another. Collectively, these stories helped to solidify kinship groups, fortify communal identities, and preserve cultural memories in the collective consciousness of African diaspora religious communities, all important to sustaining the inner resolve necessary to resist myths of Black inferiority.[11] I analyze how John Marrant conjures biblical narrative forms to depict the centrality of Africana communal values such as intergenerational wellness and the relationship between social and bodily illness.

Conjure also renders ritual aspects of Masonic oratory within African American Freemasonry more intelligible. As Theophus Smith explains, three variants of the Greek word *pharmakon* form the theoretical basis for understanding conjure rituals in Black religion. The first variant, *pharmakos*, refers to the conjure client or victim; the second variant, *pharmakon*, refers to curative and toxic conjure prescriptions; and the third variant, *pharmakeus*, refers to the conjure practitioner. Smith notes that variants are not always distinct and can coincide in the same person or object. "It is notable, in this regard," writes Smith, "that the pharmakos (victim) and pharmakeus (practitioner) may coincide in the same person in those cases where the practitioner is also a target of malign phenomena requiring conjurational transformation. Notable as well is the coincidence of the pharmakos (victim) as an embodied pharmakon (tonic/toxin)."[12] John Marrant's *Sermon* exhibits how the three variants of Black conjurational

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

performance are deployed as rituals of race. As one of the earliest public orators in the history of African American Freemasonry, Marrant conjures a vision for a new social order as a practitioner (*pharmakeus*) of Masonic rhetorical ritual. Because he is a member of a victimized social group, he is also a client (*pharmakos*) seeking the transformation brought about by conjurational performance. *Sermon* itself prescribes the foundational principles and teachings of the Craft as the tonic (*pharmakon*) that cures American society by revising the perception of Black humanity. Marrant's Masonic oratory is a ritual of race that demonstrates how conjurational performance is operative in the religious consciousness of early African American Freemasons.

This study of John Marrant's life and writings aims to complicate oversimplified understandings of Black religion and rhetoric in colonial America. It examines the underlying meanings of this public Christian performance by employing conjure theory to make salient the radical dimensions of Marrant's political rhetoric and organizing efforts. These aspects of Marrant's ministry stem from his reevaluation of Christian orthodoxy in light of the immediate needs of his Black fellows, his efforts to institutionalize Black culture in transnational religious organizations, and his recognition of African-descended people's divinely ordered, collective purpose and identity in the transatlantic world. Black evangelicalism, or the appropriation of Christian identity, was not simple acquiescence to the norms and values of the dominant society. Rather, Marrant and other Black evangelicals fashioned a religious outlook uniquely suited for their particular experience. The needs of the African American community, more so than the orthodox doctrines of European and American Protestantism, determined the practices of Marrant's Christian communities. Thus, Black evangelicalism in the eighteenth-century African diaspora was not mere Christianity; instead, it represented a pragmatic, multicultural and spiritually diverse endeavor primarily intended to reformulate Black humanity via religious institutions that functioned autonomously.[13] Marrant and other spokespersons within this tradition established distinct, authoritative perspectives on issues related to collective identity, religious liberty, and political sovereignty within expansive New World discourses. Throughout the Atlantic world, African-descended people employed Christian rhetoric and symbols to articulate a vision of collective identity and destiny, and a desire for self-determination that countered notions of Black inferiority.[14] In the process, spokespersons like Marrant helped shape a unique religious voice that challenged prevailing notions regarding the presumed irreconcilability of Christian identity and Black humanity.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 explores John Marrant's early childhood and reconstructs the religious and cultural worlds he encountered in New York, St. Augustine, and Savannah. I analyze the formation of brotherhood societies in colonial New York. Afro-Iberian fraternal societies fostered unity, collective identity, and aid to community members in need. The New York colonial cultural environment also included Pinkster celebrations, a spring religious festival that combined African and Dutch Protestant cultural elements. In St. Augustine, African, European, and Native American cultural sources existed within complex networks of exchange between Spanish settlers and African slaves that enabled the formation of new societies. Afro-Catholic communities such as Fort Mose, an all-Black settlement two miles north of St. Augustine, existed alongside maroon communities formed by escaped African slaves who joined with Seminole and other Native American groups. In Savannah, vibrant Africana religious culture could be attributed to an influx of enslaved laborers in Yamarcraw, a multiracial neighborhood on the west side of town and home to a substantial free Black community of market women, seamen, and fugitive slaves. In each locale, Africana ritual traditions and cultural norms enabled Black communities to establish New World collective identities. Marrant's formation in these contexts of vibrant Africana religious culture shaped his adoption of Christianity and the development of his ministry in his adolescent and adulthood years.

Chapter 2 analyzes Marrant's depiction of his call and initiation into prophetic ministry in *Narrative*. His portrayal of his call to ministry in the Georgia and South Carolina low country mimics phases of West African–based initiation rites that marked the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Phases of West and West Central African initiatory rituals—call, wilderness seclusion, instruction from tutors or guides, physical impression, and communal reintegration, or covenant—represent a general model of initiation and provide the organizational structure for Marrant's autobiographical tale.[15] Structural elements of Marrant's call story are also reproduced in the autobiographical narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, contemporary Black Atlantic writers whose texts help illuminate the religious and literary world of ideas in which Marrant's consciousness took shape. Gronniosaw's *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars* was published in 1772 just after slavery was legally ended in England. The publication of his story, which detailed his birth and early life in Africa before he was lured into transatlantic slavery, had been made

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

possible by the patronage of Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon. Her support enabled Black Atlantic authors like Phillis Wheatley and Marrant to find their voice in a British environment more receptive to Black writers than in North America. Hastings supported the publication of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* in 1789, and through her support, Equiano emerged as one of the leading voices in the Atlantic world's fledgling abolitionist movement at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Each of these Black Atlantic writers deploys religious vocabulary and biblical symbolism to catalyze social change for Black communities. Throughout Marrant's *Narrative*, he adapts the stories of numerous biblical figures to dramatize the process by which he comes to understand his prophetic identity. By narrating his call to ministry according to the pattern of African initiation, Marrant reveals that ritual and structural, rather than theological, modes of analysis informed his understanding of biblical Christianity.

Chapter 3 focuses on Marrant's depiction of his confrontation with slave owners on the Jenkins plantation described at the book's opening. Near the conclusion of *Narrative*, Marrant conjures the Exodus story to denounce American slavery. His redeployment of that story utilizes symbols—blood and wilderness—to depict a narrative pattern of retaliation. The retaliation narrative, which appears only in the fourth edition of *Narrative*, represents his most dramatic example of biblical conjure. This symbolic pattern of retaliation is also identified in the respective narratives of Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass. In each case, the author's use of the symbols of wilderness and blood signify ritualized prophetic initiation and subsequent direct confrontation with oppressive rulers. Taken together, these symbols, read within narrative structures derived from traditional Africana storytelling cultures, reveal retribution tales for injuries suffered at the hands of enslavers.

While this study utilizes conjure to interpret Marrant's texts, it is important to note that Marrant likely would have eschewed conjure as a religious practice. Eurocentric associations of conjure solely with witchcraft led many Black Christians to distance themselves from any depiction as conjurors. Both Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass explicitly expressed their disdain and distrust for the practice of conjure. Turner notes that the influence he exerted over the minds of fellow slaves was owed to his possession of spiritual and intellectual gifts, and not "by conjuring and such like tricks," adding that he "always spoke of such things with contempt."[16] Similarly, Douglass reluctantly accepted a protective herb from Sandy Jenkins, an older adviser who insisted the root contained properties that could protect its carrier from racial violence. Despite both narrators' stated distrust of conjure, the autobiographical depictions utilize biblical

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

figures to allegorize supernatural retaliation according to the narrative patterns of Bible stories and African retaliation narratives.

Chapter 4 analyzes Marrant's ministry in Nova Scotia as an ordained minister of the Huntingdon Connexion, an offshoot branch of the Methodist Church founded by the Countess of Huntingdon, Selina Hastings. The Huntingdon Connexion emerged in the tumultuous eighteenth century amid the upheaval of religious institutions and ideologies, when doctrines regarding creation and the nature of God were hotly debated throughout England. Hastings had been persuaded to adopt George Whitefield's Calvinistic approach to Christianity, and in the latter half of the century, she began to build her society through networks of individual ministers and chapels that were dependent on her patronage. For many Black settlers in Nova Scotia, the formation of Christian congregations aided their quest for religious and political autonomy. Black Christian congregations led by the Methodist ministers Boston King and David Wilkerson, alongside the Baptist preacher David George, deployed Africana rituals to establish autonomy, combat hardship and material lack, and challenge racial hierarchies. In *Journal*, Marrant's appropriation of biblical symbols and narrative structures to his own autobiographical context discloses how Africana ritual cultures and ways of knowing enabled the formation of autonomous Black Christian communities.

Chapter 5 analyzes Marrant's generative impact on ritual oration and notions of Black social organization within African American Freemasonry. In Boston, Marrant was appointed to the chaplaincy at the African Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons by Prince Hall, the leading founder of the African Lodge. The chapter examines Marrant's generative role in the early history of African American Freemasonry and argues for a more expansive understanding of the temporal and geographic origins of the tradition. The expansive temporal and geographic reach of European Freemasonry throughout the Atlantic world underscores that multiple individual and cultural sources can be credited with generative contributions to the origins of African American Freemasonry. Ritual similarities and multiple points of correspondence—including extreme secrecy and ritual progressions by degrees—point to West African initiation societies as institutional predecessors to African American Freemasonry. I also analyze Marrant's *Sermon* at the Saint John the Baptist celebration in 1789, his most enduring contribution to the legacy of African American Freemasonry. *Sermon* was addended to Marrant's *Journal* and introduced Black Freemasonry to transatlantic print culture. In *Sermon*, Marrant conjures biblical genealogies to mythologize Black racial ethnogenesis and establishes the foundations of an enduring template for African American male identity formation. *Sermon*

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024

inaugurates a tradition of Masonic oration succeeded by grand masters and lodge leaders in subsequent years. In the chapter's final section, I provide an overview of the lives and contributions of Prince Hall, David Walker, and Lewis Hayden—important Masonic leaders who expanded oratorical and rhetorical foundations laid by Marrant.

John Marrant's navigation of transatlantic geographies, cultures, and institutions reflects the voluntary and forced movements that characterized the experience of many African-descended people in the eighteenth-century transatlantic world. The circulation of bodies and ideas throughout Africa, the Caribbean, South America, North America, and Europe necessitates the consideration of transnational phenomena for scholars of eighteenth-century Black religion. However, much of the religious studies scholarship isolates African-descended people in the British North American colonies from the broader Africana world. By employing a transnational lens to the study of John Marrant's life, *The Gospel of John Marrant* complicates simplistic portrayals of Black Atlantic religion by giving critical attention to the role of African-inspired religious cultures in the development of Black religion in North America. Additionally, the utilization of conjure to interpret Marrant's texts proposes to elucidate hitherto understudied dimensions of his religious consciousness. As a result, *The Gospel of John Marrant* yields new conceptual categories and interpretive possibilities for phenomena within Black Atlantic religious experience.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/2133953/9781478059424-001.pdf by guest on 05 December 2024