"Prince Jenckes a Black invalid Soldier": A Unique Case of Disability, Race and Poverty in the Early United States

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9/3/2022
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Introduction

"To the good Mrs. F----, whose condition supplies the means, and whose heart the disposition, to enjoy and bestow---- poor *Prince Jenckes* health and long life. I am poor, Madam---- so miserably poor, that all my possessions are about two thirds of a human body, containing, however, a grateful heart. There is not left me even to choose between working and begging. I have not limbs enough by two or three for the one---- and your ladyships' goodness had almost deprived me of the other. To him who has nothing any thing will be acceptable, and ever so little will be valuable…"[1] Mrs. F[2] received this letter written in 1799, and published by John Carter in the *Providence Gazette.*[3] At the top of the page one reads this description: "Copy of a letter from Prince Jenckes, a black man, to Mrs. F—. written during the year 1799." At the bottom of the letter is "Prince Jenckes" typed out as a signature as if Prince himself wrote it. In addition, the fact that it is a letter copy further obscures efforts to determine the original letter's authorship and origins. It is not known whether the original letter still exists.

The letter copy raises several important questions for scholars of the late eighteenth century Anglo-Atlantic world in which Prince lived. Foremost, though it would have been unusual for Mrs. F to receive a letter copy from a black man disabled by leg injuries, he had conceived the letter within the context of a broader Black literary tradition dating to at least thirty years before. This Black literary tradition was defined, in part, by Black peoples' freedom petitions in New England, documents sometimes authored directly and at others dictated to allies

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[1] For Prince's letter, see Providence Gazette, April 4, 1807.

[2] Mrs. F's identity is yet to be found out. Therefore, more research is needed to determine who she was and her relation to Prince.

[3] John Carter Brown Woods, *John Carter of Providence, Rhode Island July 21, 1745- August 19, 1814 and His Descendents: A Brief Narrative by his Great-great Grandson* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society Collections, 1918): 1. Accessed online: https://www.seekingmyroots.com/members/files/G001286.pdf

who sought to aid freedom struggles. Secondly, that the letter Mrs. F received from Prince is a copy of the original raises important questions about the more immediate context of the letter's authorship. Was Prince himself literate and thus the author of his own letter? Or did he dictate his wishes to a third party who transcribed the original letter, and perhaps, in turn, the letter copy that Mrs. F received?

Other than the original letter addressed to Mrs. F, there seems to be no further documentation written by Prince himself. Thus his story must be gleaned from the documents in which he appears in glimpses: payment receipts, enlistment records, pension petitions, and Rhode Island General Assembly proceedings pertaining to his life. Though Prince Jenckes's signature is typed in the letter copy, it is hard to know more about the circumstances that compelled Prince to write the plea for help the letter articulates due to the problem of *archival silence*. Human actors in recent time periods determine the circumstances by which certain historical documents get acquired by and preserved in institutions' archives. While archivists today increasingly acknowledge the need to acquire, preserve, and make available a more diverse range of primary source materials, the archive also reflects biases of the past. People oppressed throughout history may show up only in marginalized positions in the archive, if they show up at all. This prevents them from being seen as historical actors or may make it seem like they lack autonomy.

Archival bias deeply influences how history is and has been told, and Prince's copied letter provides a good initial example. A paucity of archival sources has prevented historians from marshaling the sort of empirical evidence traditionally considered necessary to render Prince's voice as sustained in the historical record. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, a host of actors recorded Prince's presence in his own time in muster rolls, pension records,

assembly records and workhouse records, though Prince's own words are not recorded in them. Indeed, many aspects of Prince Jenckes's life are shrouded in archival silence: his time as a slave (until early 1777);[4] his time as a soldier in the Revolutionary War (February 1777 to June 1783); his time in the Providence workhouse.[5]

Resulting from the lack of extant sources, it is difficult to narrate important moments in Prince's personal story and undocumented blocks of time in his war service and later life. Indeed, his birth and death dates are unknown as are other parts of his life, such as whether he had any family. Sources on his life during the period of his enslavement are scarce if they exist at all. Prince's story lacks continuity due to archival silence. However, in his post-war life, his poverty and lack of status is exactly what enabled historians to tell his story through workhouse and pension records. Without his time in the Providence workhouse or without his need of a pension, his post-war life could not be studied. Though historians, including Marisa Fuentes, have made the point that being Black and poor leads to archival silence, being poor is exactly what facilitated the creation of the extant documents in which Prince appears.[6] To manage the challenges of archival silence a methodology of *critical fabulation,* as conceived by literary scholar Sadiya Hartman, will frame this thesis, producing a recombinant narrative using those speculations to grapple with the archival silences that shroud Prince's story.[7]

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[4] It is not yet known how long Prince was enslaved to John or if he had any previous enslavers before John. Therefore, how long he was a slave is still unknown.

[5] Because we do not have Prince's workhouse admission records, we do not know when he entered the workhouse or left. However, as I speculate later on, he may have entered the workhouse in December of 1787. When (or if) he left the workhouse is still questionable.

[6] For more on archival silence of Black people and reading against the archival grain, see Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.

[7] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

Prince is a unique subject to study not only as an example of the research challenges posed by archival silences, but also because he was both Black and disabled. In this way, Prince's story provides fruitful ground for new scholarship in slavery and disability studies. Historians Laurel Daen and Daniel Blackie have some of the most important works published about Revolutionary War veterans who ended up disabled. However, both focus on white male soldiers. Blackie exclusively looked at white male soldiers, choosing to not focus on women, Black people or Natives. Daen calls for further study on disability in print culture and in Native communities: "historians know more about how incapacity informed colonial law and governance and figured into structures and ideologies of slavery, but what of disability in early American religion, in changing economies, in an emerging print culture, and in indigenous and frontier communities?"[8] Jenifer Barclay agrees that historians of disability do not address slavery, and historians of slavery do not properly address disability.[9]

The study of disability in eighteenth and nineteenth century America has become more progressive with Blackie focusing on white disabled male soldiers, Daen calling for focus on Native communities and Barclay focusing on disabled enslaved people in the Antebellum era. A case study of Prince world highlights the utility of researching disabled enslaved soldiers of color and disabled enslaved people. Thus, this case study of the life and experiences of Prince Jenckes, who served as a private and drummer in the Rhode Island (RI) First Regiment from February 1777 until the end of the war in summer 1783, can illuminate further the intersection of race,

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[8] Laurel Daen, "Beyond Impairment: Recent histories of early American disability," *History Compass* 17:e12528 (2019): 6.

[9] See Laurel Daen, "Revolutionary War Invalid Pensions and the Bureaucratic Language of Disability in the Early Republic," *Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017): 141-167 and Daniel Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans and the Construction of Disability in the Early United States, c. 1776–1840" (PhD Diss., University of Helsinki, 2010); Jenifer Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery: Disability, Race, and Gender in Antebellum America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021): 4.

slavery, and disability.[10] While there are histories of Black soldiers in the Rhode Island First Regiment, there are not that many looking at the intersectional experience of being both Black and disabled. Therefore, this thesis will start with an analysis of that intersection.[11] Chapter one discusses the history and historiography of disability and to establish the connections between disability, Blackness, slavery and poverty. In addition, the chapter analyzes how interpretation of disability by white, able-bodied men has changed over time, particularly during the Revolution and early United States. It attempts new ways of thinking about these entwined histories, through the perspective of disability.

Chapter two discusses contradictions that define the challenges of archival research to document Prince's life in part due to archival silence. In the face of these challenges, the chapter examines likely interpretations of the paperwork and Assembly records involving his enslaver, John Jenckes. The chapter features as a watershed the 1778 law by which Rhode Island recruited additional Black soldiers. Prince's war time experience is described using evidence obtained from a white fellow soldier that provides the plausible speculation by which Prince's wartime experiences emerge from the scant primary record. Chapter three discusses the history of Rhode

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[10] For Prince's war records, I am using service records from the National Archives. There are two for Prince that both refer to him, so throughout I have used them together: "Prince Jencks," National Archives, Waltham, MA. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/141497880 and "Prince Jenckes," National Archives, Waltham, MA. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/141497941. Both records will be cited together as "Prince's War Records, National Archives." For further information on Prince's service, see also Daniel Popek, *"They "...fought bravely, but were unfortunate": The True Story of Rhode Island's "Black Regiment" and the Failure of Segregation in Rhode Island's Continental Line, 1777-1783* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015) and Bruce C. MacGunningle, *Regimental Book: Rhode Island Regiment for 1781 &c.* (East Greenwich: Rhode Island Society for the Sons of the American Revolution, 2011).

[11] While there are not that many monographs focusing exclusively on the regiment, the regiment is included briefly in books on Revolution, including Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (London: Penguin Books, 2005). It is also included briefly in historiography relating to slavery in Rhode Island, such as Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

Island's poor laws and how they influenced welfare in the colonies and the early United States. The chapter also tells the story of how Prince may have been treated by the welfare system. The invalid pension laws, Prince's amputation and the peculiarity of his pension will also be discussed. The thesis conclusion features preliminary research on Prince's life after the workhouse, providing a foundation for further study in the effort to render more fully Prince's life story. Adding a disability perspective and a microhistory to the histories of slavery and Revolutionary War may very well be new: the history of slavery before the antebellum era leaves out disability; disability and Revolutionary War history are mostly systemic narratives of the United States' origin story that leave out soldiers of color.

Chapter 1

The meaning of disability must be defined for this thesis, even if the definition is fluid. This thesis will use the social model of disability: the idea that ableism in society impairs one's ability to function in society, not the person's physical condition. As a result, it is the contradictions between what society expects the person to be able to do and what they can do that is disabling. The fluid definition of disability is also shaped by society's changing expectations for certain people.

As will be shown in this chapter, Prince is a good example to demonstrate the fluidity of what it meant to be disabled in the late eighteenth century, particularly due to the complications one reads in the varied expectations of him based on his race. Prince's disability status constantly changed during his life. He was disabled initially as an enslaved man but then was considered able-bodied enough to enlist in the military. After his military service, Prince was again considered disabled or an invalid due to injuries caused by frostbite and a subsequent amputation of one of his legs. In January 1777, John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, put out a recruitment notice for the Continental Army asking for "able-bodied men."[12] Though Prince was not exactly what they were looking for in a soldier, he passed muster. Therefore, he was one of the people moving in and out of the category of disability: being Black may have made him

[12] Robert C. Bray & Paul E. Bushnell, eds., Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775–1783: An Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978): 59.

disabled according to the social model,[13] but he was later seen as able-bodied when enlisting into the Continental Army.[14] Then, after his frostbite, he was considered disabled again, with the military and government using the term "invalid" when he was in the Providence workhouse and sought a pension.[15]

Historiography of Disability

Given the seemingly contradictory definitions of disability for white and Black people due to different expectations by society, it can be argued that the definition changed over time, usually to suit the needs of the abled, including the concepts of deformity and monstrosity. While studies of the history of disability in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States are expanding, studies of the historiography of disability in the eighteenth-century United States are much more scarce.[16] However, in recent years the work of Daniel Blackie, Laurel Daen, Ben Mutschler and others has certainly helped historians' understanding of disability and illness in early America and society's understanding of it. Blackie, Daen and Mutschler agree that the Invalid Pension laws in the Revolution and early United States were extremely important, as they provided some of the first precedent for welfare in the United States. Blackie and Daen focus more on the pension laws in the latter part of the eighteenth century, whereas Mutschler provides a more expansive view on illness and disability going back to the 1730s. Therefore, all give very

[13] The connection between disability and Blackness will be expanded on in a later section but for more on this connection, see For more on Blackness being considered a disability see Jenifer L. Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery: Disability, Race, and Gender in Antebellum America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).
[14] Bray & Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman*, 60.
[15] Prince's frostbite and the term "invalid" will be discussed in later chapters.
[16] Chris Mounsey, "Introduction," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Chris Mounsey (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014): 3.

good context to this discussion of the pension laws, and Mutschler, in particular, helps provide earlier eighteenth century interpretations of disability.[17]

To analyze a history of disability in the eighteenth century, one must look at how to use disability in historical analysis. In *A History of Disability,* Henry-Jacques Stiker argues that the disabled body should not be normalized or "assimilated" towards able-bodiedness.[18] In part, Stiker notes that society should reject the "normate" body and not look at the disabled body as something to be fixed or cured.[19] Building upon Stiker's work, disability scholar Chris Mounsey says that "Since Stiker, disability has been grouped with race, class, gender, and sexuality as a means for examining culture. Each analysis follows the poststructuralist methodology of bringing the excluded into the center of the debate, to demonstrate that white races define themselves negatively against the nonwhite…and the able-bodied define themselves negatively against the disabled."[20] Stiker and Mounsey are indicative of a certain direction the field of disability studies is taking: the field is encouraging scholars to look at the disabled body as a variance, not something "wrong." While disability historians such as Blackie and Daen discuss and agree with the social model, they do not discuss variance, while disability studies scholars such as Mounsey and Stiker do.[21]

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[17] Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans"; Daen, "Revolutionary War Invalid Pensions"; Ben Mutschler, "The Province of Affliction: Illness in New England, 1690-1820" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2000).
[18] Ibid, 1; Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability,* er. William Sayers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 18. As I found this quote by Stiker in Mounsey, "Introduction," I must tell the reader to see Mounsey, "Introduction," 24 for Mounsey's clarification on his use of Stiker's quote.
[19] For discussion of the "normate," see Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
[20] Mounsey, "Introduction," 2.
[21] For one of the foundational works of modern disability scholarship, see Paul Longmore and Laurie Umansky, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

Stiker established disability as a method of historical analysis, which historian Susan Burch clarified further. Mounsey notes that Burch gives two ways to analyze disability in history: "one with a focus on disability as a topic, and the other which explores the intersections between disability and other theoretical concerns."[22] Given Prince's race and enslaved status greatly determined aspects of his life, this thesis aims to achieve this second method by exploring the intersectionality between his race, his enslavement, and his disability. Given Prince was disabled, he was exposed in the archive more as his condition demanded services. However, his Blackness and enslaved status (for some time) contributes to the archival silence that also explains why his contemporaries did not record much more about him. As implied by Burch, when reading sources on Prince, we cannot separate these two identities. They must be interpreted alongside each other, intertwined, leading to a different identity than an able-bodied Black man or a white disabled man. In addition, Mounsey says that new fields start out with broad analysis of a topic and then focus on more personal stories after the field is established. This is what is happening with disability history, so this thesis is part of the trend to move the narrative from broad focuses, like the works of Daen and Blackie, to personal stories like Prince Jenckes.

History of Disability

As early as the 1730s (and likely earlier), disability has been defined as the inability to labor in the United States. This definition, established in the historiography, has been based only upon the empirical archival records of white men upon which disability historians have mainly focused. If one was ill or if one's body differed in some way, but that person could work, then

[22] Mounsey, "Introduction," 2.

they were not necessarily considered disabled (at least if one was a white man). Illness was not that unusual in the early eighteenth century due to infectious diseases and work injuries. However, because infectious disease and work injuries occurred frequently and did not affect working ability long term (if we disregard smallpox scars affecting mobility), they were not considered to be disabilities by white colonists. They were mere variances, like Mounsey refers to in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*. Consequently, they were not stigmatized. Interestingly, perceptions of certain illness/conditions as variances were indeed what Stiker advocated as subjects worthy of deeper study. Therefore, from the beginning it is clear that the definition of disability has been flexible from the beginning of the eighteenth century and has changed over time.[23]

In her chapter in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century,* literary scholar Anna Sagal explains that over time, some disabilities came to be seen as evidence of moral superiority. The disabled person had gone through more than an abled person, and therefore, had moral superiority, especially if the disability was acquired through no fault of one's own (like Prince's) and was not congenital (there at birth).[24] If one had this type of disability and could "push through" it, appear "normal," that may enhance the perception of moral superiority. However, it may have appeared to abled people that if one was dependent on the government (or others such

[23] Mutschler, "The Province of Affliction"; Kim E. Nielson, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Mounsey, *The Idea of Disability,* 1.
[24] Anna K. Sagal, "An HOBBY-HORSE Well Worth Giving a Description of: Disability, Trauma, and Language in Tristram Shandy," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014): 108-111.

as family), one was not pushing through and did not get the admiration that comes from the perceived moral superiority.[25]

The moral superiority perception in certain types of disability may have come about partly due to the ethos of republicanism that shaped the early United States. According to its proponents, republicanism emphasized public virtue and sacrifice for the greater good, and its social definitions interpreted independence and manhood as established through ownership of property. Therefore, the ideal citizen was one who sacrificed for the public good and was relatively wealthy.[26] This philosophy created a sort of standard that disabled people, specifically, disabled people dependent on others, may not have met, especially if their disability prevented them from working and getting income for property. Therefore, if one appeared "normal" and was appearing to "push through" their disability and was not dependent on others/the government to help them make a living, republicanism had no problem with them. However, if they were dependent on others for help, then republicanism could be ableist.

In his research on the way that republican ideals shaped the early United States republic in the years after George Washington's death, historian Francois Furstenberg examined a certain republican idea with resonance in the present day: one must be willing to sacrifice their life for freedom. If one could not push back against power themselves, then they were consenting to it.[27]

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[25] For further discussion on the "normalization" and assimilation of disabled people in addition to the concept of a disabled person pushing through their disability, see Paul Longmore, "Uncovering the Hidden History of People with Disabilities," review of *FDR's Splendid Deception* by Hugh Gregory Gallagher*; When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* by Harlan Lane*; Caring for the Retarded in America: A History* by Peter L. Tyor and Leland V. Bell, *Reviews in American History, 15, No. 3 (Sep., 1987).*

[26] Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Dennis C. Rasmussen, *Fears of a Setting Sun: The Disillusionment of America's Founders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[27] Francois Furstenberg, In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): 192-195.

This again ties into the problem of what if a person could not do something? Then, they were entirely responsible for their fate, even if they did not fully choose the inability to do work or any daily life activity expected of them. It seems then that republicanism, while possibly well-intentioned, left out disabled people in early America and started an ableist trend in American history. Indeed, historian Kim Nielson says that disability conflicts with many American ideals: "when 'disability' is considered to be synonymous with 'deficiency' and 'dependency,' it contrasts sharply with American ideals of independence and autonomy."[28] Therefore, those with disabilities who could not hide their limitations and relied on others, were stigmatized, whereas those appearing to "push through" instead might have been celebrated.

However, the idea of hidden disability was in direct conflict with the Enlightenment's ideals that informed state policy makers during the imperial crisis in the British North American colonies, out of which emerged the late eighteenth century United States. Many drew upon the published writings of John Locke, a seventeenth century empiricist and Enlightenment philosopher. According to Lockean theory of political economy, state policy makers should base science and knowledge on the empirical evidence of things seen. Such policy makers should not guess at how standing policies worked or failed if the mechanisms could not be observed.[29] However, this formulation presents a problem in the history of disability: if abled people saw certain people with a disability were "pushing through" and other disabled people were not, they might suspect the latter to be "faking their disability." In addition, if the abled person could not see someone else's disability, why should they believe it is real, according to late eighteenth century empiricists informed by earlier Lockean political economy theory? Therefore, the

[28] Nielson, *A Disability History*, xii.
[29] Jess Keiser, "What's the Matter with Madness? John Locke, the Association of Ideas, and the Physiology of Thought," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014): 50-52.

theories of political economy that emerged during the late seventeenth century Enlightenment era may have been harmful to the perceptions of disability, not only because of empiricism and invisible disabilities, but also because it may have helped lead to the standardization of medicine.

The American Revolution transformed popular perceptions of disability. During this time, medicine became more formal and professionalized,[30] due in part to new humanistic Enlightenment knowledge and theory, and institutionalization of medical practice became more popular after the Revolution.[31] The more medicine became standardized, the more "binary" the abled body became. If there became a "normal" body standard, what would people do with the abnormal? During this same time, at the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth century, a push towards institutionalization began.[32] It has been thought that the feeling of uncertainty from the Revolution and a new government helped the push for institutionalization. After all, abled people may have felt more safe or normal without having to deal with variance in their homes and communities. Indeed, Barclay tells us that "disability's power to stigmatize is derived from its relationship to abnormality and its ability to rationalize inequality based on one's real or imagined proximity to it."[33] Therefore, the standardization of medicine and institutionalization directly influenced one another.[34]

After the Revolution and during the standardization of medicine, the federal government (after the Constitution was ratified) became more stringent on requirements for invalid pensions

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[30] Laurel Daen, "Revolutionary War Invalid Pensions and the Bureaucratic Language of Disability in the Early Republic," *Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017): 158; Nielson, *A Disability History,* 66.
[31] Nash, "Poverty and Politics," 4; Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town: Poor Relief in Eighteenth Century Rhode Island," in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 135-136.
[32] Nielson, *A Disability History,* 66-67; For explanation of binary and variance, see Mounsey, "Introduction, "16-18."
[33] Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 9.
[34] Ibid*,* 50-51.

for disabled Revolutionary War vets. Federal laws changed to reflect the increased trust politicians had in doctors and not in patients. It seems that the legislators' shift in trust to doctors may have been fear of patients "faking" their disabilities: in 1788, a committee was formed to address invalid pensions. The politicians seemed to think that not everyone applying for an invalid pension was in fact an invalid, hence the more stringent requirements of invalid pension laws in the 1790s. Therefore, both empiricism from the Enlightenment and Republicanism may have had harmful effects on the perception of disability.[35]

Multiple scholars such as Barclay, Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy and Kim Nielson have discussed how Blackness was seen as a disability and used as an excuse for slavery. Indeed, Barclay says that disability had been part of southern (United States) law dating back to the colonies. Black people were thought to be deficient in both body and mind, making them dependent on whites. They were supposed to be deficient in body and mind except they were supposedly built to work.[36] If an enslaved person could not work due to a disability, that person was further stigmatized by white people, and an enslaved person's fate was tied to their "able-bodiedness."[37] Slavery and perceptions of the Black body are perfect examples of how the definition of disability is "elusive and changing."[38] For white people, disability meant not being able to work. For Black people, it had an entirely different meaning, according to whites, and part of that definition meant that they must work and included being "able-bodied."[39] The

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[35] Daen, "Revolutionary War Invalid Pensions," 150.

[36] Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 2. For further details on how Black people were considered deformed and therefore, disabled and how that was used as an excuse for slavery, see Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020) and Jenifer L. Barclay, "'The Greatest Degree of Perfection': Disability and the Construction of Race in American Slave Law," *The South Carolina Review* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 27-43 and Nielson, *A Disability History.*

[37] Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 3.

[38] Nielson, *A Disability History,* xiv.

[39] Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 3.

connection between the two seemingly opposite definitions is dependency. White people who could not work depended on their families or the state, or usually the town, for help. Black people were thought to be dependent on their enslavers, or in many northern colonies, the communities where they had once been enslaved.[40] In the minds of white eighteenth century observers, disability equaled dependency. This is likely where the stigma came from as dependency was seen as shameful.[41] Later, disability was seen to be associated with poverty as institutionalization became to be the "prescribed remedy" instead of outdoor relief. Many disabled people ended up in workhouses/poorhouses along with the poor, creating this association between disability and poverty, especially before almshouses separated the able-bodied and disabled poor.[42] By the end of the eighteenth century, Blackness meant disability, which meant dependency, which sometimes meant poverty.

Disability, Blackness and poverty indicated bad morals to eighteenth century white colonists/Americans, so it seems that Prince would have been morally questionable to them. However, given where he got his disability, things may have been more complicated for Prince. Revolutionary War soldiers and others who got their disability through service were thought to have better morals. Their disability was seen as a sacrifice, so Prince is at a contradictory crossroads in terms of how he is seen: did people see him as the morally questionable Black man, or did they see him as a heroic former soldier? This question is extremely hard to answer.

This was Prince's world in early republican Rhode Island. It was a world with a rapidly changing perception of disability and contradictory views of disability. Because he was Black, he

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[40] Mutschler, "A Province of Affliction"*;* Nielson, *A Disability History;* Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 1.
[41] Nielson, *A Disability History,* xii.
[42] Ibid*,* xvi; Gary B. Nash, "Poverty and Politics in Early American History," in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 16.

may have been thought to be a morally depraved, naturally disabled individual, despite the fact he had served in the war. Having served in the war would have made him morally superior, but being in the workhouse means he did not fit the requirements for moral superiority as he was dependent on others, including the government. Therefore, he may not have been able to "redeem" himself as having morals. Due to his intersecting identities, it is hard to say how Prince was perceived as a formerly enslaved, Black, disabled, poor veteran.

Chapter 2

Prince Jenckes was one of a significant number of Black men who served on both sides of the Revolutionary war. Some served the Americans and some the British. Loyalist or Patriot service notwithstanding, historians have observed that Black veterans articulated their motivations for joining the war as focused squarely on liberty from enslavement.[43] Jenckes served in the Rhode Island 1st Regiment and then the consolidated Rhode Island Regiment. Beyond the traditional example of the long Black freedom struggle, however, Prince's service

[43] Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); *Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

shows us how the Revolutionary era ideals of ability, disability, and race intersected in the context of late eighteenth century military service.

Prince's Enlistment and War Records

Such an intersection is evident in the language prominent statesmen marshaled to attract recruits to military service. On January 25, 1777, the editor of the *Providence Gazette* published a notice written by John Hancock: "By order of Congress, John Hancock, President," which required the state "immediately to inlist into the service of the United States all able-bodied men." Hancock's call sought white men without an illness or disability and men under the age of 50. The notice also excluded deserters from his majesty, King George III, of Great Britain.[44] Given that Blackness was considered a disability and that white people did not want guns in the hands of Black people, Black men (and women) were excluded.[45] Indeed, General George Washington prohibited Black soldiers from enlisting into the Continental Army in November 1775.[46] However, he changed his mind a month later and let free Black men serve.[47] This was most likely due to a lack of recruitment or possibly desertions due to the harsh conditions of the winter months.

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[44] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 60.

[45] For more on the subject of the fear of arming Black people, see Robert Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks: How Race United the Colonies and Made the Declaration of Independence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021): 85, 87, 94, 120, 131, 150.

[46] "General Orders, 12 November 1775," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-02-02-0326. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 2, *16 September 1775–31 December 1775*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, pp. 353–355.]

[47] "From George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 26 December 1775," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-02-02-0568. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 2, *16 September 1775–31 December 1775*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, pp. 610–613.]

Washington made many waffling decisions as general, including changing his mind on Black men serving and whether to inoculate soldiers for smallpox.[48] However, the context surrounding the decision regarding Black soldiers makes clear why Washington changed his mind. In addition to desertions and a lack of recruitment in the Continental Army by November 1775 Lord Dunmore, the last royal governor of Virginia, offered freedom to any enslaved person who joined British forces. Varying reports set the number of freedom seekers who flocked to British lines in Virginia in a range from several hundred to almost 1,000 which gave the British a relative numerical advantage.[49] Not only was it an advantage in terms of the number of fighters, but it also meant that any Black people currently supporting the Patriots might be inspired to run to Dunmore's newly formed "Ethiopian" regiment. Indeed, after receiving complaints from free Black soldiers after he disallowed free Blacks from enlisting, Washington changed his mind. Therefore, the pressure from the British, in addition to desertions and a lack of recruitment, meant that Washington needed Black people on his side even if he did not want to admit it.

While historians have debated Washington's decisions on enlistment of Black soldiers, they have not thought about what it meant for Blackness and disability.[50] Allowing Black men to serve indicates that Washington, and the Continental Congress from whom Washington's authorities derived, considered them able-bodied. Therefore, the definition of disability changed to fit the needs of white men: suddenly Blackness was not a disability requiring dependency.

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[48] For Washington's decisions and dilemma regarding inoculation of the Continental Army, see Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

[49] Parkinson, *The Common Cause,* 142-157. The classic story of Dunmore's efforts to raise the "Ethiopian Regiment" remains Quarles's. See Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution,* 19-32.

I say a relative advantage as many formerly enslaved people died from a smallpox outbreak on Dunmore's ship. See Fenn, *Pox Americana*. For information regarding Dunmore giving people enslaved by Patriots freedom, see Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks,* 101-102.

[50] Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks,* 121.

However, enslaved people were still excluded by Washington.[51] Therefore, the disability that came from Blackness, did it only apply to certain Black people? Or by being free, did free Black people show they were not dependent and therefore, not disabled? The contradictory definition of disability due to Blackness is quite obvious here.

Congress's offer for enlistment was a 20-dollar bounty, a new suit and 100 acres of land after the war was over.[52] John Jenckes, Prince's enslaver, surely saw that offer, or heard about it. If he did not read about it in the *Providence Gazette*, he may have heard about it at a General Assembly session as he was a member of the RI legislature.[53] John Jenckes, a white man who likely did not want to serve, then did what many enslavers did: he enlisted his enslaved people into the Continental Army instead. He enlisted Primus Jenckes and Prince Jenckes. Enlisting one's enslaved people as a substitute for yourself was not uncommon, but it does bring up a question: if the enslaved person served instead of the enslaver, did the enslaver get the 20-dollar bounty, suit and land after the war? An enslaved person likely could not own property as they were property themselves, so if anyone got the land in this situation, it would have been the enslaver.[54]

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[51] "From George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 26 December 1775," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-02-02-0568. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 2, *16 September 1775–31 December 1775*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, pp. 610–613.]

[52] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 60.

[53] For evidence that John was Prince's enslaver, see John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England, Vol. IX, 1780 to 1783* (Providence: Cooke, Jackson and Co., 1863): 582. For evidence that John was a member of the General Assembly, see Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VII, VIII, IX and X,* and Joseph Jencks Smith, *Civil and military list of Rhode Island 1647-1800. A list of all officers elected by the general assembly from the organization of the legislative government of the colony to 1800* (Providence: Preston and Rounds Co., 1900): 317, 369, 370, 382, 451.

[54] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. IX,* 582; John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003): 202-203; Robert A. Geake and Loren Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers: The First Rhode Island Regiment in the American Revolution* (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2016): 41.

Historian John Wood Sweet has noted that the former slaves under Christopher Greene did not receive a 300 dollar bounty paid to all other Rhode Island troops. However, given his focus on the 1778 law, Wood Sweet could have only meant those enlisted under the later 1778 law, not Prince. Therefore, Wood Sweet does not say what happened to Black people who served before passage (and repeal) of the 1778 law. Regardless of how the reward was paid out, the enlistment notice from January 25 was likely the motivating factor for John to enlist Prince a month later on February 28, 1777.[55] Prince, like most in his unit, served for the duration of the war, as opposed to three years, the other option for length of service. It seems as though most soldiers of color in his regiment served a longer time than their white counterparts.[56] Whether this enlistment was done with Prince's consent is questionable, of course. Given the lack of sources in Prince's hand, this question remains unanswerable. However, a year later, after a passage of the law, many Black men eagerly signed up to serve in hopes of freedom.[57] Therefore, there are two possible options here: one, John enlisted Prince (regardless of Prince's feelings) and planned to retain him as a slave after the war; two, Prince and John negotiated a manumission agreement in which Prince was to serve a certain number of years, and John would receive a certain amount of money for Prince's service. Then, Prince would be free after the war. All of this took place in 1777, before the 1778 law that gave many Black men hope of freedom without manumission agreements. Because all of this took place before the law, John was likely able to decide whether he wanted the law to apply to Prince. Would he keep Prince as a slave

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[55] Prince's War Records, National Archives. See page 2 for details on this source.

[56] Ibid; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44; Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 206; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, 102

[57] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 42 says that 140 men in the First Regiment were listed as "negro, mulatto or mustee." However, that number includes those like Prince who were in the Regiment before the law. Therefore, it is difficult to know how many signed up under the law, especially due to situations like Prince and John where the soldier was signed up before the law but the owner likely tried to get money for him under the law. Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 100 says that according to the RI general treasurer's account, from February 25 to October 14, 1778, 67 men of color joined under the law.

after the war, would he manumit Prince due to a deal they had before Prince's enlistment, or would he use the 1778 law to his advantage? It was likely entirely up to him, and because of this, it makes Prince's situation after the war much less certain.

Jeremiah Greenman, Prince's future regiment mate and commanding officer (after the two regiments from Rhode Island consolidated) joined on February 22, 1777, a mere six days before Prince, also being motivated by the notice and having already served one stint. A thin primary record makes Prince's wartime experience hard to track, but through following Greenman, historians may be able to follow Prince, especially after consolidation of the two Rhode Island Regiments.[58]

Greenman's diary has many revealing wartime experiences including his time in Quebec, which includes the smallpox outbreak, the Battle of Red Bank (October 1777), the Battle of Monmouth (June 1778), the Battle of Rhode Island (August 1778), and the Battle (or skirmish) at Pine's Bridge (May 1781) as well as the end of the war. The fact that Greenman's diary must be used to describe Prince's experience (when possible) is an indicator of how severe the archival silence is in Prince's case. His story must be told through context and experiences of those in power who, having access to literacy, recorded their own observations of the war. However, what is just as difficult to interpret as archival silence is when the sources contradict each other. While the sources agree that Prince enlisted for the duration of the war, that he was reduced in April 1781, and that he was captured at Pine's Bridge and returned to Continental forces in a prisoner exchange in September 1781, the sources do not align on other aspects of his enlistment/muster paperwork. The *Regimental Book* for the Regiment says that he was

[58] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 60; for information on the consolidation of the two regiments, see page 28.

furloughed on June 15, 1783, not completely discharged, due to an order by General Washington. It says he was discharged on pension in June 1782. In *They Fought Bravely,* Daniel Popek says that Prince was discharged on pension on June 28, 1783. If the *Regimental Book* is correct, it explains John's timing of getting money for Prince in August 1782. However, how could Prince have been discharged before being furloughed? The *Regimental Book* does not give a second discharge date. In addition, there are two different enlistment dates, but the majority of sources say he signed up in February of 1777, including records from the National Archives. Therefore, this data is questionable and calls for further research.[59]

The Rhode Island First Regiment

As the Continental Army struggled to recruit for its ranks in 1777 and heading into 1778, Brigadier General James Varnum had an idea, which he wrote about to Washington: the two regiments representing Rhode Island should combine into one. Then, the leftover officers would raise another regiment made up of African Americans. Varnum noted: "It is imagined that a Battalion of Negroes can be easily raised there."[60] Washington agreed, seemingly reluctantly: "I have nothing to say… on this important subject."[61] Rhode Island governor, Nicholas Cooke, told Washington that they had a plan to recruit for the regiment. He had already lined up the proposal in front of the Rhode Island General Assembly in February of 1778 (basically a year after

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[59] Popek, *"They "...fought bravely, but were unfortunate,"* 507, 508, 786; Prince's War Records, National Archives; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44, 69, 114, 127; Eric G. Grundset, *Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War* (Washington DC: National Society for the Daughters of the American Revolution, 2008): 220; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. IX,* 582.

[60] "To George Washington from Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum, 2 January 1778," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-13-02-0104. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 13, *26 December 1777–28 February 1778*, ed. Edward G. Lengel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003, p. 125.]

[61] "From George Washington to Nicholas Cooke, 2 January 1778," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-13-02-0095. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 13, *26 December 1777–28 February 1778*, ed. Edward G. Lengel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003, p. 114.]

Prince's enlistment). Their plan was "liberty is given to every effective slave to enter the service during the war; and upon his passing muster, he is absolutely made free, and entitled to all the wages, bounties and encouragements given by Congress to any soldier enlisting into their service. The masters are allowed at the rate of £120, for the most valuable slave; and in proportion to those of less value." In addition, he admitted that Rhode Island did not have a great number of slaves but did say he expected 300 or more to join.[62]

The Assembly's plan became law on February 14, 1778.[63] According to historian Alan Gilbert, 67 African Americans joined between February 15 and October 14, 1778, to create what became known as the Rhode Island First Regiment (the First).[64] Already in service, Prince was not one of the soldiers signed up under the 1778 law, however he was not the only one. Numerous Black soldiers were already enlisted before the 1778 law went into effect.[65] According to the late historian Gary Nash, the 1778 law worked well in terms of recruiting Black soldiers. Nash noted that about 200 slaves enlisted to fight as free men and that 1 in 4 "able-bodied" enslaved men obtained his enslaver's consent to enlist, the consent of the enslaver being required. However, historian Christy Clark-Pujara said consent was not required: slaves merely needed to show up to enlist. Notwithstanding these circumstances of enlistment, the First Regiment became entirely Black or Native American below the rank of corporal.[66]

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[62] "To George Washington from Nicholas Cooke, 23 February 1778," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-13-02-0550. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 13, *26 December 1777–28 February 1778*, ed. Edward G. Lengel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003, p. 646.]

[63] John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England, Vol. VIII, 1776 to 1779* (Providence: Cooke, Jackson and Co., 1863), 359-360.

[64] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 100.

[65] Given that the best kept records of Black men enlisting into the First are enlistments under the 1778 law, it is harder to give exact numbers for how many enlisted before the law. Further research is needed.

[66] Nash, *The Unknown Revolution,* 229; Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 72. Though not stated explicitly in the law, it seems that Clark-Pujara is correct. The enslaved person need not be presented by his enslaver or have his enslaver's permission to enlist. He only needed to show up and pass muster. I am given to understand this based on the law's emphasis of the enslaved man passing muster and saying "such slaves as should be willing to enter into the service"

The law did not last long: after being in effect for about three months, the law was repealed in May 1778. There had been opposition to it during passage. A letter of protest signed by John Northup, James Babock Jr., Othniel Gorton, George Peirce, Sylvester Gardner and Samuel Babcock appears in the records. It gives several reasons for opposition: one, there was not a sufficient number of men of color;[67] two, it would suggest an idea that these men's freedoms have been bought by the state, and they did not like the similarities it had with Dunmore's Proclamation; three, it was too expensive; lastly, the enslavers would not be satisfied with the payments.[68] Another reason the law did not last long is that a new General Assembly had been elected.[69] Sidney S. Rider says that the repeal of the law basically stopped any future recruitments and gives an example of an arrest after an attempt to enlist an enslaved man.[70]

However, there is evidence that enlistments did not really stop and were accepted after the repeal of the law.[71] More or less, John and Prince Jenckes support the argument that the repeal of the law had little effect: while Prince was enlisted in 1777 before the law, John got money for his (and Primus's) enlistment in 1782, four years after the passage and repeal of the law. Considering that enslavers could still get money for their slaves' enlistment after repeal, it seems that the repeal had little effect.[72]

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and "provided, the owner of said slave shall deliver up to the officer, who shall enlist him." This indicates that the owner enlisting the slave and hence, giving his permission, is not necessary. (Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VIII,* 359, 360.)

[67] This reason does not hold water: according to Clark-Pujara, the northern states had the lesser numbers of African-Americans than southern states, but they supplied the most Black soldiers in the Continental Army (Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 71.)

[68] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VIII,* 361.

[69] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 67.

[70] Sidney S. Rider, *An Historical Inquiry Concerning the Attempt to Raise a Regiment of Slaves by Rhode Island During the War of the Revolution* (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1880): 40.

[71] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 101; Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 73.

[72] John was not the only enslaver in the 1782 to get money for his slaves' enlistment. Records indicate others received monetary compensation during this time as well, indicating John is not an exception: Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. IX,* 582.

As a member of the General Assembly, John Jenckes must have been aware of the 1778 law before it was passed. He was also probably aware that gradual emancipation was in Rhode Island's near future: the gradual emancipation law passed in 1784.[73] However, talks about emancipation had begun before 1784. Moses Brown joined the Quakers in 1774 and immediately began to push for numerous antislavery measures.[74] Rhode Island enslavers started selling enslaved people away from the state during the Revolution as they knew emancipation was imminent, and a 1779 law, which prohibited the selling of slaves due to the imminence of gradual emancipation, "probably had little effect," according to historian Joanne Pope Melish.[75] John knew there would be an opportunity with the 1778 law to get money for Prince's enlistment, but he did not take the opportunity in those few months it was valid. He may have had a manumission agreement with Prince where he would get Prince's wages from service. There is a possibility that over time, John realized that Prince was not getting paid the amount necessary to hold up the manumission agreement. Many soldiers promised wages were not receiving them or the wages' values were significantly decreased compared to the British pound.[76] It may be this fact that pushed John to go to the General Assembly and ask for money for Prince.

What is strange about the 1782 transaction by which the Assembly awarded John money for Prince is that John received a suspiciously low amount of money: 36 pounds, 6 shillings and 4 pence.[77] If the Assembly was giving John payment for Prince under the 1778 law, he would have been awarded considerably more money. The possible reimbursement amount was capped

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[73] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 7.
[74] Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 244-246.
[75] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 102.
[76] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 104; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 100, 105.
[77] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. IX,* 582.

at 120 pounds for the fittest, youngest enslaved men.[78] According to enlistment records, Prince was 20 and had been a "laborer."[79] Evidence is yet to be found of Prince being disabled before Fort Oswego (winter 1782-1783). In the absence of such evidence, and considering his enlistment in the context of able bodiedness, there is no reason he was not in tip top shape, so why so little payment to John? Possibly, since the law had been repealed, the Assembly may have been able to pay less for soldiers enlisting after the law's repeal. Though they were technically not supposed to take enslaved people, they disregarded that, but they could also disregard the law requiring them to pay enslavers a certain amount as it had been repealed. In essence, it was an advantageous position for the Assembly. Another plausible explanation is that Prince had already been injured by then, which caused John to not want him back, or John still wanted him back, but the Assembly would pay less for a disabled soldier.

If John got a lower amount of money because Prince was disabled by August 1782, then that raises numerous questions: one, why is it not in the records? Prince's injury in Fort Oswego is documented,[80] but nothing else is. Perhaps he did receive an injury, but it was not disabling in the long term. If this is true, then why did John not want him back? Possibly he did not want to pay the medical bills. However, Prince's discharge date is consistent with the others who mustered out of his unit: June 28, 1783.[81] If he was disabled in 1782, a year before discharge, then he must have served in the Invalid Corps. Records of him in the Invalid Corps., or records of another injury sustained during the war, are yet to be read. Therefore, John may have got so

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[78] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VII,* 359.
[79] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44.
[80] For evidence of Prince's Fort Oswego frostbite, see Popek, *"They Fought Bravely…But Were Unfortuante,"* 507.
[81] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely…But Were Unfortuante,"* 507, 786; Jeremiah Olney Papers, MSS 18, Box 3, Folder 4, microfilm, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island. (Hereafter cited as "Olney Papers, RIHS.")

little money because he waited until after the law was repealed. However, why he waited is still unanswered. Indeed, archival silence keeps any answer from being definitive.

1777

As has been established, Prince enlisted (or was enlisted by John) into the Continental Army on February 28, 1777, a full year before the 1778 law. Jeremiah Greenman enlisted six days earlier.[82] After the second week in April 1777, the ranks were filled, and the new regiments could get to work with Prince being in the First Regiment as a private (later he would switch between drummer and private)[83] and Greenman being in the Second Regiment. The two regiments from Rhode Island traveled together quite a bit. Therefore, Prince's experiences can still be tracked through Greenman's diary. The two RI regiments crossed Connecticut, New York and south into New Jersey. They went to the Hudson Highlands in New York, then to Morristown, New Jersey in May 1777.

According to Greenman's diary, smallpox was frequent among the soldiers who were in "rags and tatters." Not to mention there was a lack of discipline, according to Greenman.[84] Though Washington's army was famous for being inadequately clothed, and though desertions were common, the smallpox observation is interesting. By March 1777, the first enlisted Continental soldiers began receiving smallpox vaccinations, as Dr. William Shippen Jr. reported that he was inoculating incoming soldiers in Philadelphia.[85] The rough experience of the two

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[82] For Greenman, this was actually a re-enlistment. See *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman* for this enlistment and his service before it.

[83] Prince's War Records, National Archives.

[84] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 61.

[85] I am unaware of the exact system that was used to inoculate soldiers not enlisting in Philadelphia and more research is needed. See "To George Washington from William Shippen, Jr., 1 March 1777," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0505. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 8, *6 January 1777–27 March 1777*, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, p. 477.]

regiments is interesting also as the later formed "Black Regiment" supposedly got much better treatment. Regardless, if smallpox was rampant, Prince may have gotten smallpox during this time and subsequently did not to be inoculated, or he could have been inoculated due to Washington's order. Also, it is not known how well John treated him. Was he used to being in "rags and tatters?" How did he view the lack of discipline, or was he a part of it? Again, this is unknown as he did not write down his experience.

As the rough experience, typical of a Continental Army soldier, was dawning on these soldiers, they must have realized they were performing a crucial job: the Hudson Highlands were strategically critical to the Continental Army as the location allowed regular monitoring of British movement in and around the western front of New York City. Greenman spent three months in the Hudson Highlands and this time was "filled with desultory camp activity punctuated now and then with foraging or raiding parties into the so-called neutral ground in Westchester County, executions or other highly ceremonial military punishments, and minor disturbances among the men 'concerning their wages' and the fact that the clothing bounty promised by Congress months earlier had yet to be delivered." Given it was mostly ceremonies and "desultory camp activity," it seems that Greenman and Prince did not see battle action yet. Therefore, while the conditions were rough, it was probably an ideal way to be introduced to military life.[86]

While Greenman sounded disdained with the situation, Prince's view is less clear. Did he welcome "desultory" activity? Was it a nice change from being constantly worked by John, or possibly someone John rented him out to? What did he think of ceremonial executions or whippings? Being enslaved, he might have already been familiar with whippings and likely

[86] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 62.

disdained any ceremonial acts of punishment, possibly having been a victim himself. What was his view of the men concerned about wages and bounties? Whether John was getting that money must have played a role in his view on the subject, and it is still unsure whether or not John was getting these wages.

Because Prince never wrote down what he thought of protests and punishments due to lack of payment, his behavior (as interpreted by officers) must be taken into consideration. It is doubtful that Prince caused much of a disturbance or deserted given he got a badge for good behavior later in his military career. In addition, while some fellow soldiers (such as Cuff Roberts) are recorded as receiving whippings for desertions, Prince is never recorded as receiving punishment (except for what may be a reduced rank in 1781).[87] Therefore, his probable lack of disturbance indicates that he did not consider payment important enough to be punished for protesting over, or he had no reason to protest as he was not getting paid anyway. The latter points to John receiving any payment that Prince may have gotten for his service.

In addition to John possibly getting all of his wages, there are other reasons why Prince would not want to create a disturbance regarding wages: he could have been afraid of the possible consequences of causing a disturbance. He could be sent back to John or be whipped. Possibly, pay may have seemed insignificant to not having an enslaver in the military. Maybe patriotism really meant something to him, or he knew that his military service could free him one day. Other than manumission, he could not know this for sure as it was before the 1778 law.

At the end of September 1777, after a defeat at Brandywine and when the British were occupying Philadelphia, Washington ordered James Mitchell Varnum's brigade back to the main army outside Philadelphia. They got to New Hope, Pennsylvania and were directed to march to

[87] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book*, 69, 98, 111; Gabriel J. Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States: Five Microhistories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021): 69.

Fort Mercer. Both Rhode Island regiments received this order, the First (with Prince) led by Christopher Greene, and the Second (with Greenman) led by Israel Angell. Fort Mercer was on the Delaware River in Red Bank in southwestern New Jersey. Christopher Greene led four hundred soldiers between October 22 and November 1777, mainly Black men (before the 1778 law) to defend Fort Mercer in what was later perceived to be a valiant effort by his regiment.[88]

Greene's troops, including Prince, arrived at the fort on October 11, 1777. They were required to perform garrison and fatigue duty. Additional problems led Greene to ask for reinforcements, which was why Greenman's unit went there. Greenman's unit, under Angell, got there on October 18. From there began what Greenman considered momentous events in the course of the war. Obviously outnumbered by the British in terms of men and supplies, the regiments were nonetheless asked to hold the lower Delaware and prevent the British from delivering resources to Philadelphia via the river. Washington hoped to force the British to give up on Philadelphia and evacuate or to at least deprive the British of necessary resources. Soldier and later historian David Ramsay said, "the British were well apprized, that without the command of the Delaware, their possession of Philadelphia would be of no advantage. They therefore strained every nerve, to open the navigation of that river." Therefore, this mission was critical.[89]

The fighting was intense, described as "tenacious and came very close to succeeding."[90] The Hessians made up three brigades: one infantry regiment and a light infantry, came up in two columns towards the Rhode Islanders. Christopher Greene took artillery troops into an enclosure and told them to wait for his command. Troops under Jeremiah Olney broke up one of the

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[88] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 63; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 96.
[89] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 13-14; Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 63-64.
[90] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 63.

columns with gun fire, but the other column advanced further. Hessians then felt safe and started cheering, but they were soon fired upon by Greene's troops. The Hessians, with many losses and injuries, left the fort.

After the battle, the Rhode Island soldiers helped bury the dead from the Battle of Red Bank. In addition to battle, this may have been one of the most traumatic experiences for Prince: burying fellow soldiers, possibly friends. Being 20 at enlistment, he was either 20 or 21 when he had to put up with the emotional intensity of burying possible friends or those he may have come to think of as brothers.[91] Though they experienced such emotional trauma and did not dislodge the British from the Delaware altogether, the valiant effort did not go unnoticed. Christopher Greene received a commendation and a sword. It was considered a major turning point in his career as he would later be picked to lead the "Black Regiment," later formed due to the 1778 law.[92] After that, due to their newly improved reputation, the two regiments were asked to fight at Monmouth, Rhode Island, Springfield (NJ) (June 1780) and during the Siege of Yorktown (September-October 1781). Notice that the two regiments fought together a good amount, so while there are chunks of time Prince and Greenman were not together, they later spent more time together. This allows for easier tracking of Prince.[93]

Valley Forge

After Red Bank, from December 5 to December 8, 1777, the regiment saw action during a skirmish at Whitemarsh, Pennsylvania, but only in an effort to get to winter quarters: Valley

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[91] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 15.

[92] Though there were many Blacks in the regiment before the 1778 law due to Washington allowing free Blacks to serve and enslavers having slaves serve in their places illegally, the regiment did not become recognized as the "Black Regiment" until the 1778 law allowed an influx of Black and Native soldiers into the regiment, see Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 202-208; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 96 and Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 22.

[93] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 65; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 99.

Forge.[94] According to his diary, Greenman was not at Valley Forge during the worst of the winter, but because it was such a harsh experience, others have commented on its conditions.[95] Washington observed the brutal conditions soldiers experienced at Valley Forge in a letter to Henry Laurens, president of the Continental Congress. Washington reported that most enlisted only had one shirt; others had none, and many were unfit for duty due to inadequate clothing. Prince suffered for want of adequate clothing and provisions along with other enlisted men at Valley Forge, but this would not be the last time Prince would have an inadequate amount of clothing during a cold winter.[96]

Of the conditions at Valley Forge, the Marquis de Lafayette had other observations: "The unfortunate soldiers were in want of everything: they had no coats, hats, shirts, or shoes; their feet and legs froze till they became black, and it was often necessary to amputate them."[97] Indeed, amputation can become necessary if tissue that dies from the cold creates an infection that could spread. This is also an important observation as in the present, fingers or toes are often amputated in severe cases of frostbite.[98] Lafayette's observation tells us that in Valley Forge, camp doctors waited for frostbite to spread to the full foot or leg before amputation. Daniel Blackie tells us why: "In the absence of modern anaesthetics, antiseptics, and painkillers, surgery of any kind at this time was extremely dangerous, not to mention painful. The risk of deadly infection was so high that doctors usually only attempted operations as a last resort in the most

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[94] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 65-66.
[95] Ibid, 101.
[96] "From George Washington to Henry Laurens, 23 December 1777," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-12-02-0628. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 12, *26 October 1777–25 December 1777*, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. and David R. Hoth. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002, pp. 683–687.]
[97] Marquis de la Lafayette. *Memoirs, Correspondence and Manuscripts.* Published Online: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8376/8376-h/8376-h.htm
[98] CHE Imray and EHN Oakley, "Cold Still Kills: Cold-Related Illnesses In Military Practice Freezing And Non-Freezing Cold Injury," *BMJ Military Health* 151 (2005): 218-222.

serious cases."[99] Therefore, a soldier who received an amputation and survived it, as Prince did years later, was quite lucky. Because the British occupied Philadelphia for so long, Washington had them stay at Valley Forge until June 1778.[100]

In February 1778, Lt. General Baron von Steuben came to Valley Forge and commented on the soldiers' conditions: "With regard to their military discipline, I may say that none existed."[101] This is a contradictory view given what we know about Prince, but of course, he is only one soldier. To an outsider, one disciplined soldier in an army of undisciplined soldiers would likely not matter. There are different scenarios as to how Prince could have been thinking about Valley Forge as a former slave, and likely, how he viewed his experience in the army as a whole depended greatly on what he endured while enslaved and living with John.[102]

An interesting aspect of Washington's letter is the mild surprise that many soldiers did not know what they were getting into: "we find Gentlemen without knowing whether the Army was really going into Winter Quarters or not (for I am sure no Resolution of mine would warrant the Remonstrance) reprobating the measure as much, as if they thought the Soldiery were made of Stocks or Stones, and equally insensible of Frost and Snow."[103] With this quote, was Washington implying that one could "power through?" If so, then this may have been an

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[99] Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 69.

[100] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 102.

[101] James R. Gaines, *For Liberty and Glory: Washington, Lafayette, and Their Revolutions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007): 104.

[102] Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 46.

[103] "From George Washington to Henry Laurens, 23 December 1777," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-12-02-0628. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 12, *26 October 1777–25 December 1777*, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. and David R. Hoth. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002, pp. 683–687.]

unintentional showing of ableism. Indeed, the "power through" narrative is frequent in disability rhetoric.[104]

Because of Washington's potential unintentional showing of ableism, it may be a good time to point out how ableism affected Prince's experience. Though when signing up, he was considered "able-bodied," Black people were thought to be uniquely disabled and made to work.[105] Therefore, one must wonder if other soldiers expected the Black soldiers to do more work or possibly thought that the Black soldiers did not need as much food or clothes (there was not enough to go around anyway). Given the lack of records in his own hand, it is hard to know if Prince experienced any of this. Regardless, Washington clearly employed the ableist philosophy of "toughing it out" or "pushing through" hardship.

The "Black Regiment"

Having been heroic at the Battle of Red Bank, Christopher Greene was picked to lead the First Regiment, which placed him in command of Prince (a private/drummer) and his fellow soldiers of color, a regiment formed due to the law passed in February 1778.[106] According to John Wood Sweet, after two months of recruitment for the new "Black Regiment,"[107] it seemed all was in order. The First had far better uniforms than most of the troops from the state, and the incoming soldiers had been inoculated for smallpox.[108] Whether the soldiers already in the First (like Prince) also received a nice uniform and were inoculated is uncertain.[109] However, it is

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[104] Mutschler, "A Province of Affliction," 75; Longmore, "Uncovering the Hidden History of People with Disabilities," 361.
[105] Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery,* 2.
[106] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 99; Nash, *The Unknown Revolution,* 229.
[107] It must be noted that Native Americans were also included, so the term "Black Regiment" though common, is inaccurate.
[108] Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 208.
[109] The fact that this question is unresolved is quite surprising as the companies enlisting soldiers under the 1778 law had already had many Black soldiers since 1777 (Prince's enlistment year). See Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 208.

possible that he may have gotten smallpox already in the Hudson Highlands or had been inoculated due to Washington's pre-existing order for inoculation of all soldiers. Whether Prince was inoculated will be a clue to questions regarding events later in his life.

Regardless, the regiment is described as "the most neatly dressed, the best under arms, and the most precise in its maneuvers," indicating that it was the most well dressed and disciplined, which given attitudes of whites at the time is a surprising perception.[110] It is also curious that they received the best uniforms, but it could have been a show of the state's desperate situation. Given they went out on a limb to recruit Black soldiers, it could have been disastrous to have these men desert, especially given Washington's attitude on Black soldiers. Therefore, the soldiers must be kept happy. Historian John Wood Sweet suspects that new uniforms "may have been meant to encourage the recruits to believe they were being received into service with dignity. At the same time, the uniforms may have been intended to protect the state from accusations that they were sending lowly recruits."[111] The latter is an interesting observation given Washington's reluctance to approve the regiment.

It would not be surprising to learn that Prince's experience vastly improved after the recruitment resulting from the 1778 law. He got a new uniform,[112] and by then, unlike some of his fellow Black soldiers, had been in the army a full year.[113] It is impossible to know what exactly he was feeling given there are no sources written by him, but it may have been a nice change for him to have more Black people in the regiment as well as a new uniform potentially.

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[110] Nash, *The Unknown Revolution,* 230. This quote is by Francois Jean Marquis de Chastellux in *Travels in North America,* Vol. II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963): 229.
[111] I partly agree with the former as they would want to avoid further desertions, however apart from retaining soldiers, I doubt that the state cared that much about Black men's dignity.
[112] Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 208.
[113] Prince's War Records, National Archives.

It is hard to track the First using Greenman's diary during spring 1778. He says "we," but it is uncertain as to whether he was referring to the Second regiment only, or both regiments.

In June 1778, the soldiers who had joined the First under the 1778 law were most likely seeing their first battle.[114] When the British left Pennsylvania, the RI regiments pursued them through New Jersey, where the Battle of Monmouth, the "last important engagement of the north," took place in June 1778. It was described in Greenman's diary by the editors as "protracted and intense," "fought in unbearable heat" and "remains to this day the hardest battle to chronicle, let alone to analyze." Considering its intensity, Prince's experience is interesting here. He is described as both a private and a drummer. If he was a drummer, he was at the front of the line and in a position to see the British first. He could have been scared, or was he used to things by then?[115]

After Monmouth, in July, the Rhode Island troops went with Major General John Sullivan back to their home state. The British had occupied Newport for a year and a half, and the goal was to dislodge them. Sullivan was very confident in the mission, while Washington was characteristically cautiously optimistic. However, all did not go as planned: British General Robert Pigot and his troops were not dislodged from Newport, and Sullivan and his troops were driven off, though not losing army or baggage. Americans blamed the Comte D'Estaing of France for the failure as he abandoned the mission. However, it is noted in Greenman's diarythat Sullivan had offended Estaing.[116] In August, the first joint operation of the French and American forces (under Sullivan) converged on Narragansett Bay. On August 9, 1778, Sullivan's troops (including the First), got to Aquidneck Island, ten miles north of Newport. The British arrived

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[114] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 47.
[115] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 102; Prince's War Records, National Archives; Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.
[116] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 103-104.

from New York, and the France unit sailed to greet them. The weather was quite awful that day and very stormy. American forces got near Newport and started to make trenches. Once again, the French bailed when the Americans expected them: the French commander returned to Rhode Island on August 19 to announce that he would not participate in their attack and did not send any infantrymen ashore.

On the night of August 28-29, Sullivan ordered his soldiers to go towards the northern part of the island, and at daybreak, the Newport troops set off. American officers had their troops face the British chasing them to ensure proper retreat. The First Regiment showed "desperate valor" as they fought off three sets of Hessians and dazzled onlookers in other units. Those in other units were surprised for multiple reasons: one, the soldiers impressing them were Black and Native. Two, most of these soldiers had never seen battle before. Indeed, the First Regiment was mostly formed from the 1778 law from a few months before. However, there were some like Prince, who were more experienced and had been mixed with the newcomers. Historian Woody Holton says that "no white person who witnessed the August 29, 1778, Battle of Rhode Island would ever again doubt the courage of the recently freed African Americans in the First Regiment." Indeed, Red Bank and Rhode Island were big battles to be remembered in terms of Rhode Island's troops' reputation. Notwithstanding this change in reputation, the British would stay in Newport until 1779.[117]

1779

In the fall of 1779, Israel Angell's Second Regiment, with Greenman, was ordered to return to the grand army and then stationed around Morristown, New Jersey. They prepped for a

[117] Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021): 363-364. In this assertion, Holton cites "a proposal to create a Black battalion": "Speculator" [Sergeant], proposal to create a Black battalion, enclosed in Sergeant to Adams, Aug. 13, 1776, Adams to Sergeant, Aug. 17, 1776, *Founders Online.*

winter that would be worse than Valley Forge. Greenman was to face this harsh winter, but whether Prince was there is questionable. Greenman's account of the war is the one of the best available, however he is in the Second Regiment, and this is before the two Rhode Island regiments consolidate. Though it does seem that historians are not missing much action from Prince: the diary says that there was little action for the "northern army."[118]

However, desertions and recapturing were common. Cuff Roberts, in the First Regiment with Prince, got whipped 100 lashes for desertion.[119] Daniel Blackie estimates that one in five soldiers in the Continental Army deserted: "Rather than being simply a form of protest, as many social historians have asserted, it may be that some sick or wounded men left the ranks to ensure they received the medical attention their ailments necessitated."[120] Therefore, lack of pay or protest of the conditions were not the only reasons for desertion: poor medical care was another. Consequently, the pay, conditions and recent battles/opportunities for injuries were the factors for determining desertions.

It seems that there was not much battle action in 1780 for the First and Second Regiments, and Greenman's diary notes that the soldiers in the regiment had "worked through their grievances the year before." Therefore, desertions may have been low during 1779 in the Rhode Island regiments. This could also have explained civilian support back home as the editors of Greenman's diary note: "The journal for this period gives the impression of the Rhode Islanders as loyal and supportive, while their brethren of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania were the mutineers. Though they were not essentially better men than their fellows, the Rhode Island soldiers had the obvious benefit of having worked through their

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[118] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 105, 162.
[119] Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 69.
[120] Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 74-75.

grievances the year before." Therefore, late 1779, early 1780 was seemingly a relatively calm time for the Rhode Island troops.[121]

1780

In June 1780, the Second Regiment went to Springfield, New Jersey while the First Regiment stayed back in Rhode Island. From June 7 to June 23, the Second was involved in what historians called a "raid" and the soldiers called a "battle" against a German force. Therefore, Greenman saw some action while Prince was back in Rhode Island. After this battle or raid, a very advantageous event (at least for historians) happened: the two regiments consolidated. Therefore, Greenman and Prince can be tracked together.[122] Tracking the two soldiers together, using Greenman's diary, offers a closer view of Prince's Revolutionary war world.

The new Rhode Island Regiment mostly consisted of soldiers from the First as the Second had been depleted during the action at Springfield. Col. Angell, head of the Second Regiment, retired. Christopher Greene, once promoted to oversee the "Black Regiment," was once again promoted to oversee the entire Rhode Island Regiment. During recruitment at this time, though the forces had depleted enough to warrant a single regiment, Jeremiah Olney, who would later become the regiment's commanding officer, claimed that they were no longer taking Black soldiers. The 1778 law had been overturned two years ago. Notwithstanding the law's reversal, Black men still sought enlistment. Olney's claim is noteworthy considering his attitude towards the Black soldiers under his command. He is known to have helped Black soldiers under his command by bailing them out and helping them get pensions later. Therefore, his harsh claim

[121] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 162.
[122] Ibid, 162, 164.

of not taking anymore Black soldiers may not have been his choice but rather someone else telling him to say it.[123]

1781

Though 1781 is already considered a momentous year in Revolutionary history due to the Continentals' victory during the Siege of Yorktown in October, it is a noteworthy year in the history of the Rhode Island Regiment due to the action at Pines Bridge, New York. Late in April 1781, Greenman was sent to command a guard at Pines Bridge, which was the northern barrier of the "neutral ground" of Westchester County. It was an area of almost daily confrontation between loyalists and Patriots. Greenman's work consisted of meeting flags of truce and checking bona fides. Sometimes spies came to check the regiment. Therefore, while a big battle was not expected, constant vigilance was required. "De Lancey's refugees" were the most active loyalist group that came to Pines Bridge to spy upon the Continental Army's positions and movements. Therefore, guard duty at Pines Bridge was very important. Its importance was demonstrated on May 14.[124]

In the early morning hours of May 14, 260 infantrymen loyalists under James De Lancy (De Lancey's refugees) crossed the Croton River two and a half miles from Pines Bridge and performed a surprise attack on the regiment.[125] The Black soldiers in the regiment have been noted for their bravery. William Cooper Nell, the Black activist and early historian in Boston, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, gave this description: "Among the traits which distinguish the black regiment was devotion to their officers… [Christopher Greene was] cut down and mortally wounded but the sabers of the enemy only reached him through the bodies of his

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[123] Ibid, 164; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VIII,* 399; Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 209, 221, 224.
[124] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 199-200.
[125] Ibid, 200-201;

faithful guard of blacks, who hovered over him to protect him, and every one of whom was killed."[126] However, Henry Lee says that Ebenezer Flagg engaged in pistol fire and was killed quickly, whereas Greene was in his "apartment," drew his sword and was killed. Lee does not mention the black soldiers, but he was known for his disdain of Black soldiers. Some say that Greene offered to surrender but was dragged from the house, into the woods, and quartered. Then, the British left him, forgotten, to lie in the forest, his body mangled. Military surgeon James Thatcher said that Greene had his vigilant guard at the Croton River, but he called them off at sunrise as the loyalists were unlikely to cross during the light of day.[127]

Greenman, appointed lieutenant hours before, supported Thatcher's account. Greenman surrendered himself and his men to be taken prisoner: "they soon surrounded me and being vastly superior in force--- and having no prospect of escape, I thought it most advisable to surrender myself and Guard (as) prisoners of War." They were "paraded and marched into New York--- my men all put into the Sugar House myself paroled to Mrs. Wheatons in Clefts Street a house prepared for the reception of any Officer that might(t) be made Prisoners 'till they got their parole." If Greenman had not been promoted hours before, then his fate would have been vastly different. He said that this house on Clefts Street was for officers. If he had not been appointed mere hours before he would have gone to the Sugar House, one of the city's several notorious prisons for wartime captives, with all of his troops. Another question is whether he would have had the authority to surrender if he had not been promoted hours before. It seems that Greenman being promoted saved the lives of him and his soldiers, including Prince.[128]

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[126] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 69.
[127] Ibid, 69-71.
[128] Ibid, 71-72.

Prince was likely among the soldiers under Greenman's command that day: it seems that the troops under Flagg and Greene were on the front lines and were more likely to be killed, whereas those under Greenman were more likely to be taken prisoner. However, the majority of those taken prisoner were white, whereas the majority of those killed were Black, so the fact that Prince was taken prisoner instead of being killed was lucky for him.[129] Some of Prince's fellow former slaves killed were Africa Burk, Cato Bannister and Simon Whipple. Prince Childs would die days later from his injuries. 22 soldiers (including Prince) were taken prisoner. It seems as though Ichobod Northup and Prince were the only Black soldiers taken prisoner. One must wonder if Prince realized how good his luck was that day. However, regardless of his luck, many of his Black comrades were no more. He once again was in a majority white regiment. Did he switch his mentality at all? Did he think *Ok, we're back to 1777 days?* Or was that of little significance to him? Did he grieve his commanding officers, particularly Greene, who had been with him since 1777, and whose body he had to see lying in the forest, mangled and forgotten? Regardless, since he and Northup were the only two Black soldiers taken prisoner, one has to wonder if he had a closer relationship with Northup after this experience.[130]

In the wake of the skirmish or battle, Prince was now to live in a Sugar House until September.[131] While historians know it was until September,[132] it was likely Prince had no idea when he was to be released, if ever. Because Greenman was to live in a house for officers, his fate was highly different. He is described as quite bored; having time to read and receiving gossip on the war.[133] Likely reduced in rank a mere month before his capture, Prince's

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[129] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 200-201; Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 70.
[130] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 70.
[131] Ibid, 72.
[132] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 69.
[133] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 201.

experience as a Black private is harder to discern.[134] First, the place must be taken into consideration: the Sugar House. Apparently, sugar houses were places where sap was collected to make syrup, but the experience of collecting sweet sap and getting to enjoy maple syrup of course was not in the cards for Prince. Sugar houses, used by the British as prisons in New York, were actually hell holes. Jonathan Gillet Jr., a Continental soldier, was taken prisoner in the "Old Sugar House on Liberty Street" a few years before. He had no food. They were forced to eat any animals or bugs that might have been living in the house at the time. One day, he found "the dry parings of a turnip which seemed to him a delicious banquet." "Jail fever" was common, and while they got outdoor time, they had to stand at the windows to get air in the hot, stuffy summer.[135]

If Prince was from Guinea, as enlistment records tell us, he had experienced the horrific conditions of the Middle Passage.[136] Imprisonment in the sugar house during the war seems analogous to the experience of forced confinement in a slave ship, but not nearly to the same degree: needing air in an environment where one cannot breathe, starvation, being crowded in a dark, hot, enclosed space. Having been through Valley Forge, and likely the Middle Passage, was Prince mentally prepared for this experience, or despite his experience, was it traumatizing nonetheless? With time to stare into the insides of the cabin, did he replay his commanders' deaths over and over in his head, or had he seen enough death to not be too affected? Because historians have no writings from him, they cannot know his direct experience, but he had likely been weakened mentally by trauma and weakened physically by lack of food and the heat of summer.

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[134] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 69.
[135] Danske Dandridge. *American Prisoners of the Revolution* (Charlottesville: The Michie Company, 1911): 26-28. Accessed via HathiTrust: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t9d51771m
[136] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44.

Another question to ask is whether the British tried to get anything out of him. Did they offer him freedom for exchange of information? Did they torture him more than his white counterparts because he was Black? This indeed happened to the only other Black soldier with him: Ichabod Northup.[137] However, there is no evidence of Prince being tortured. Of course, more research on the experiences of Black soldiers taken prisoner would be useful here.

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In the wake of Christopher Greene's death, Jeremiah Olney was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and oversaw the regiment from there on out.[138] As with many aspects of Prince's experience, the records are not certain on when he rejoined his unit. The records consistently say that he was exchanged and rejoined the First of September 1, 1781.[139] However, he is also marked as having missed Yorktown.[140] Indeed, most soldiers taken prisoner did not join their regiment until early 1782.[141] Though Prince was lucky to not have died at Pines Bridge, he was unfortunate to have gone through something like Pines Bridge and not have gotten to experience the triumphant moment of Yorktown.

1782

After Yorktown, the Regiment went to the Chesapeake, to the Elk River and then to Philadelphia. During the winter, many were furloughed.[142] The Rhode Island Regiment stayed in Philadelphia until April 1782. In April 1782, Greenman (and likely Prince with the rest of the troops taken prisoner) joined them. They went back to Red Bank to commemorate their battle at

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[137] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 943.
[138] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 103; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 55; Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 72.
[139] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 69; Grundset, *Forgotten Patriots,* 220.
[140] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.
[141] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 201; Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 943.
[142] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 81-84.

Red Bank years before. After going through his experience at the Sugar House, a reminder of triumph and good he did during the war was likely a welcome reminder to Prince. After Red Bank, they were once again directed to the Hudson Highlands. Greenman did routine guard duty at Pines Bridge, Constitution Island and Dobbs Ferry. One must ask what it was like for them to be back there, especially for Greenman doing the exact same work he did back in May a year before. He must have realized that routine guard duty can go from routine to deadly in a matter of minutes. If they were vigilant before, they surely were more so in spring 1782.[143]

In mid-summer 1782, Washington decided to give honorary badges of distinction. Each badge represented three years of good behavior. Prince got one badge, having served since February 1777. Therefore, if he had served just one more year, he could have gotten two badges. However, a distinction like this would nonetheless have been a nice moment for Prince.[144]

On October 1, 1782, Greenman was named an adjutant, a different honor, but likely just as nice for him. Therefore, though Pines Bridge must have been a traumatic moment, Prince's and Greenman's lives were filled with triumph after. Indeed, after Yorktown, it seems as though things calmed down a bit, so even if they did not get to be at Yorktown, it affected them in a positive way.[145]

1783

Though not in battle, this calm triumphant summer was replaced by a harsh winter. Indeed, Fort Oswego in the winter of 1782 to 1783 is remembered as a particularly difficult time for the regiment. February 1783 at Fort Oswego was extremely cold. Prince Greene, Prince's regiment mate, lost all toes on both feet when walking in the snow, and like many others, was

[143] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 232-234.
[144] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 91, 99.
[145] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 236.

discharged as disabled because of frostbite from Fort Oswego.[146] What makes this relevant to Prince is that his situation was similar to Prince Greene's. Both needed an extra coat at Fort Oswego and are marked as invalids in the memo for the coats.[147] Prince Jenckes is also in the records as losing "part of six toes" in Fort Oswego. Therefore, both Princes became "invalids" from frostbite of their toes due to inadequate clothing in Fort Oswego.[148] It is interesting that Fort Oswego was severe enough to disable them via frostbite, but Valley Forge is remembered as the harsh winter with inadequate clothing. While the frostbite explains how Prince got to be an "invalid" by definition of laws passed by the Continental Congress with respect to disabled soldiers, it does not explain his amputation years later.

With respect to the overall mission at Fort Oswego, it was seemingly not worth their disabilities: Marinus Willet, in a letter to Washington, said the mission did not go as planned, however he also says "long as there was a prospect of effecting the business of the expedition, No troops could exhibit a more chearfull fortitude under the Severest Toil then the whole of the Officers & Soldiers did—But as that prospect vanished with the approaching Day Their great fatigue got the better of the Spirits of the Soldiers." Therefore, the soldiers, including Prince possibly, had good attitudes, but that level of cold could get the best of anyone. Indeed, Willet describes the severe circumstances in Prince's regiment: "One of Colonel Olneys Black Soldiers & one of [our] State troops by leaving their ranks in the Night and Lying down in the Snow got frozed to Death."[149]

Goodbye

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[146] Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 223-224; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 67.
[147] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 53.
[148] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.
[149] "To George Washington from Marinus Willett, 19 February 1783," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-10677. [This is an Early Access document from The Papers of George Washington. It is not an authoritative final version.]

Additional information cannot be obtained from Greenman's diary as he was on leave from Fort Oswego from December 28, 1782 to April 15, 1783. However, he did come back to sign discharge certificates with Jeremiah Olney in June 1783.[150] Upon disbandment of the unit on June 13, 1783, Olney gave a speech that must be noted as great appreciation for the soldiers, including all the Black men, in the regiment:

> the Commandant though happy on the occasion, cannot dismiss those brave officers and men he has so long had the honour to command … to acknowledge the very great share of merit they have acquired in faithfully preserving in the best of causes in every stage of service with unexampled fortitude and patience through all the dangers and toils of a long and severe war, and he is at the same time extremely happy at the opportunity to declare his entire approbation of their valour and good conduct displayed on every occasion when called to face the enemy in the field, and of their prompt obedience to order and discipline through every stage of service; and it affords him the most perfect satisfaction and pleasure to find those brave men now retire from the theatre of war… that conscious honor and applause that is only to be experienced by long and faithful service in the righteous cause of God and our country. The Commandant has to lament that such faithful service has heretofore been so illy rewarded, and painful indeed it is to him to see the officers and men retire from the field without receiving any pay, or even their accounts settled and the balances due ascertained; however... he has reason to hope Congress or the State will make provision shortly for paying some money on account, and give good securities on interest for the Ballances due each individual… he [the Commandant Olney] now voluntarily offers a continuance of his interest in their favour, and shall be happy to be usefull to them in future in using his endeavours to obtain their just dues from the public and on every other proper occasion. The Commandant now begs leave to address those officers and men who having a longer time to serve continue in the field; it affords him particular satisfaction to see a disposition in the officers and men to end their engagements in their usual regularity and good order which will reflect on them the Highest Honour, and erc long return them with the conscious applause of having preserved constancy of character…[151]

One reading of this speech suggests that at the end of the day, Olney was appreciative of their service without respect to their skin color, indicative of how the military might have been a more

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[150] Bray and Bushnell, *Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman,* 237.

[151] Sidney Smith Rider, *An historical inquiry concerning the attempt to raise a regiment of slaves by Rhode Island during the war of the revolution* (Providence, Rhode Island, United States: S.S. Rider, 1880). *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/O0103070133/SAS?u=rhode&sid=gale_marc&xid=88880115&pg=102.

tolerant context of race interactions than other professions. This may be seen as a pattern for Prince: being in professions that are tough mentally and physically but are better with respect to racism in the civilian sector of Prince's Revolutionary world.

Also, Olney's disdain at the soldiers not receiving their wages should be pointed out. He offered to help them get their wages. This will be extremely important as he helps Prince get money years later in 1788. Olney was so appreciative of their service and the cause of them being rightly paid, that after four and a half years, he helped Prince receive money.[152] Though more research is needed on Olney's views regarding Black people, one must appreciate his willingness to help his soldiers.

After all of his effort in the war, this thank you from Olney could have possibly meant a lot to Prince. He was one of the soldiers to serve longest, to survive the horrors of war, as most of his fellow regiment mates from the "Black Regiment" signed up in 1778 or later, so Olney praising the longer serving soldiers must have felt good to Prince. Once again, the First was praised for their discipline and valor. The other interesting thing here, and Prince must have taken this in, is Olney saying he believes the state or Congress will come around soon and decide to give them their money. The circumstances surrounding Prince's possible agreement with John are still unknown. Did his wages go to John? Bottom line, since Olney offered help, Prince took him up on it.

After Olney's speech, Prince is recorded as being discharged on June 28, 1783, on pension.[153] However, whether he received that pension is quite questionable, and given the help

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[152] Jeremiah Olney to Rhode Island General Assembly, Petitions to RI General Assembly, Volume 24, page 37, Rhode Island State Archives, Rhode Island; RI General Assembly response to Request by Jeremiah Olney, 1 March 1788, Petitions to RI General Assembly, Volume 24, page 37, Rhode Island State Archives, Rhode Island. (This and the source preceding it are on the same page, so both as a combination will be cited as "Invalid Petition, 1788.")
[153] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507; Olney Papers, RIHS.

Olney gave him years later, he may not have received that money until Olney helped him. Indeed, historian Alan Gilbert says that they were not paid, which Olney affirms, but they got their freedom.[154] Therefore, Prince was free, and likely indigent.

Chapter 3

Legal Precedent for Government Aid for Disabilities

Historians including Daniel Blackie, Laurel Daen and Ben Mutschler have argued that the Invalid Pension laws governing disabled Revolutionary War veterans' pensions, including Prince's pension, were foundational in American disability history. These laws helped create a

[154] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 105.

definition of disability with respect to the United States government.[155] However, on closer examination, these laws were not groundbreaking or remarkable. They were based on English legal precedent and pre-existing English culture.[156] Early American culture ensured disability was determined by whether one was able to work, the concept of which came from England and other European countries in the 1600s. Therefore, English jurists created the *disability is determined by ability to work* theme. Then, the English settlers brought it over and put it into American culture and government in the 1700s.[157]

As referenced in the introduction, the most concrete foundation for these laws is the 1601 *Elizabethan Poor Law: Act of Relief for the Poor.* In fact, if one looks at the system of welfare in the early United States, it was awfully similar to the system established by the "Old Poor Law of 1601": people who were too disabled to work were to be put in a workhouse; poor people who could work were to be put to work. In the eighteenth-century colonies/early United States, the definition of disability was based on the ability to work. It makes sense that the system was built on who could work and who could not work. With outdoor relief, which was shown in English and American welfare, a poor person would work for their keep in the home of a person/family paid to house and feed them. Indoor relief, also in English and American welfare systems, entailed the poor being in a workhouse. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, indoor relief, or workhouses, came to be preferred for poor people, but that still meant work for those who could. They just had to live inside the workhouse. Regardless of the change over time of welfare

[155] Laurel Daen, "Revolutionary War Invalid Pensions," 141-167; Mutschler, "The Province of Affliction," 286-287; Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 79-80.
[156] Wallis Herndon, "'Who Died an Expence to this Town,'" 136-137; Mutschler, "The Province of Affliction," 275.
[157] Nielson, *A Disability History,* 20.

relief in America, the systems of early America and Britain shared similarities in organization, divided between outdoor and indoor relief and determined by the ability to work.

Like the Poor Laws and American welfare in the early United States, the Invalid Pension Laws also depended on the ability to work, which is what made them so unremarkable: they were built around the assumption that disability status was determined by the ability to work. The amount of pension was determined by the ability to work.[158] The first Invalid Pension law came in 1776. It applied to commissioned and non-commissioned officers as well as privates (which Prince was), who lost a limb or were "disabled as a result of service, which prevents further service in the armed forces or getting their livelihood and need relief." Therefore, if a soldier could not work or obtain a livelihood through labor during or after the war, they may have been eligible for a pension. What is interesting about the 1776 law is that losing a limb guaranteed eligibility, whereas with other disabilities in soldiers, the soldier was required to show the disability was in service and that it rendered the soldier incapable of working. Why this is the case demands future research, however losing a limb may have symbolized triumph. Surviving amputation was a feat on its own, but it was also an injury that was clearly from battle, an acquired injury that involved sacrifice. Other injuries, such as sores from smallpox, that also affected mobility, happened by chance and were not from battle.

The 1776 law also encoded post war pensions under the authority of the Continental Congress. The pension law stipulated that the disabled soldier would receive his pension for the duration of his disability, or if a lifelong disability, he would receive a pension for the rest of his life. If he could not work at all, he got half of his monthly service pay each month from the time

[158] Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 5: 702-705; Vol, 28:436; Vol. 34: 204-206.

his service ended. If he could not serve but could work a little bit, he would get a monthly sum proportionate to his disability as determined by the state he lived in, and it could not exceed half of his monthly pay in the service. To receive such pay, the disabled veteran or soldier had to produce a certificate from the commanding officer and surgeon who attended to him. The 1776 law also asked states to appoint a person or committee to record all pensions and report them to Congress or the Board of War. Then, it also formed a Corps of Invalids.[159]

A newer law in 1785 was more stringent but was consistent with the 1776 law. This postwar code featured newer rules for record keeping of the soldiers. It also capped pensions for non-commissioned officers and privates. If a non-commissioned officer or private could not work at all, then they were to "be allowed a sum not exceeding five dollars per month." If they could work, the law directed that they be paid "a sum as shall correspond with the degree of their disability, compared with that of a non-commissioned officer or private wholly disabled." The 1785 law and the ones following it also, as Daniel Blackie pointed out, do not specifically mention which types of injuries are guaranteed pensions: "Dropped, for example, was the 1776 resolution's privileging of the loss of a limb in battle over all other injuries. After the early 1780s, national disability pension provisions for Revolutionary War veterans never again mentioned specific types of injuries such as the 'loss of a limb.' Moreover, the principle of automatic qualification, where an impairment such as the loss of an arm or leg automatically qualified a soldier for a pension, was also abandoned."[160]

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[159] JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 5: 702-705. A thing to note here is the gendered language in the 1776 law. The law uses "he/his" pronouns, however a female, Margaret Corbin, received an invalid pension from the Continental Congress. See Holton, *Liberty is Sweet,* 273.

[160] JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 28:436; Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 82.

Additional laws that governed Invalid Pensions came after, particularly as Henry Knox and the postwar federal Congress were concerned that not everyone applying was eligible. Also, they were disgruntled with the record keeping done by the states, but with the standardization of medicine, Knox enforced laws that relied more on the opinions of doctors.

However, Prince was lucky in terms of timing. The law that governed his pension was the 1785 law (as his pension was given in 1788, before another law was passed),[161] before Knox really started to make the system more stringent. Therefore, the 1785 law was the one applied for his pension in 1788.

Post war life

A lack of extant sources contributes to the archival silence that defines the record of Prince's life between his discharge in June 1783 and his invalid pension in February 1788. During this nearly five year long period, Prince may have done some work in maritime labor. It is questionable whether he did maritime labor given his disabilities. Losing toes from frostbite and an amputation of a leg has serious implications for balance, a requirement for working on ships. In addition, the treatment of disabled workers in maritime labor is not known. However, if he did do any work, maritime labor is likely given the numbers of Black men in the profession, particularly in New England.[162] Whatever job he may have had, it had to have been a job where he did not need to walk or run very far as he lost part of six toes in Fort Oswego.[163] However, that by no means excluded him from working. A good example is William Lee who was

[161] Invalid Petition, 1788.
[162] Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 43, 49.
[163] Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.

enslaved by George Washington: he broke both kneecaps but worked making shoes, where he could sit down more often.[164]

The one clear archival presence of Prince in the period between his discharge in 1783 and when his pension was granted in 1788 is in the invalid pension records. Interestingly, his attempt at a pension in 1788 was not the first attempt made by someone to get money for him. In August 1786, Thomas Tate petitioned a committee made of William Rhodes, John Jenckes (Prince's former enslaver) and John Brown for a pension of 19 pounds and 12 shillings on Prince's behalf, for use by Prince and by virtue of power of attorney. However, Thomas Tate does not pop up in any sources other than this one. Therefore, his relation to Prince is not known and there is need for skepticism of Tate's attempt at money and as to whether he was actually Prince's power of attorney. He may have been trying to scam the committee into giving him money for his own usage and was using Prince as a cover.[165]

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[164] "[Diary entry: 22 April 1785]," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-04-02-0002-0004-0022. [Original source: *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4, *1 September 1784–30 June 1786*, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978, pp. 124–126.]; "[Diary entry: 1 March 1788]," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-05-02-0004-0003-0001. [Original source: *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 5, *1 July 1786–31 December 1789*, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979, p. 281.]; "To George Washington from Clement Biddle, 27 April 1789," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-02-02-0115. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 2, *1 April 1789–15 June 1789*, ed. Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, pp. 133–134.]; "Washington's Slave List, June 1799," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-04-02-0405. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, vol. 4, *20 April 1799–13 December 1799*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999, pp. 527–542.]; Brenda Parker, Intertwined, podcast audio, November 22, 2021. https://www.georgewashingtonpodcast.com/show/intertwined-the-enslaved-community-at-george-washingtons-mount-vernon-1/episode-3-revolutions/#transcript.

[165] Rhode Island. General Assembly. *August, 1786. At the General Assembly of the governor and Company of the state of Rhode-Island, and Providence-Plantations, begun and held (in consequence of warrants issued by His Excellency the governor) at Newport, within and for the state aforesaid, on Tuesday the twenty second day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty six, and in the eleventh year of independence. ..* Providence, Rhode Island: Printed by Bennett Wheeler, 1787. *Readex: Readex AllSearch*. https://infoweb-newsbank-com.uri.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=ARDX&docref=image/v2%3A0F2B1FCB879B099B%40EAIX-0F2FD3E8717291C0%40-0FAD46DECA6AE690%403. (Cited hereafter as "Tate Request, 1786.)

The 1787 Amputation and 1788 Pension

There are two sources from December 1787. The first is dated December 15 and was a request from Nathaniel Wheaton, overseer of the poor, to Jonathan Arnold, the Providence town treasurer: pay Coley Yeates "nine shillings silver Lawful money (viz) Fifty four shillings paper Lawful money out of the Town Treasurey and Charge the same to the Town. it Being towards his Services in attending Prince Jenckes a Black invalid Soldier who has had his Legg Amputated by Dotr. P. Bowen…"[166] A payment receipt to Bowen for Prince's amputation from Prince or Wheaton is yet to be found, however it is doubtful that Bowen did it for free. Four days later, on December 19, there was a second request, almost identical to the one on December 15. The only difference was the amount of money: the December 19 request is for "Eighteen shillings silver L. money (viz) Five pounds Eight shillings paper L. money." The December 19 request also said that Prince had been in the workhouse. Yeates had been attending to Prince for two weeks according to the December 19 request. If Yeates had been caring for him for two weeks and there is no evidence of another caretaker, then it is not unreasonable to suspect that Prince had his leg amputated about two weeks before the December 19 request. This would put the amputation of his leg around the beginning of December 1787. It is not clear exactly why the amputation was necessary.[167] As Daniel Blackie tells us, amputation was rarely performed due to the level of risk and pain as anesthesia was not available.[168] There are two possibilities for the cause of Prince's amputation: one, the wound from his frostbite years earlier had gotten infected and was starting to spread to the rest of his leg. Two, he got hurt on the job. His profession is still uncertain, but if

[166] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 15 December 1787, document number 4566, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island; Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town," 151.
[167] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 19 December 1787, document number 4572, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island.
[168] Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 69.

he was a sailor, then it was not exactly a low-risk job. Also, whether he would have been hired as someone with lost toes also calls being a sailor into question, but he could have served a different role in maritime labor.

The 1788 Pension

In February 1788, the Rhode Island General Assembly considered Prince for an invalid pension. Though not in the official records of the proceedings that were eventually digitized, a two-sided document with quite a bit of information regarding his pension is preserved in the Rhode Island State Archives. One side of the document has commanding officer Jeremiah Olney's request for the Assembly to grant Prince an invalid pension. The document's other side shows the Assembly granting Prince his pension. The side with Olney's request reads:

> The Subscriber begs leave to Represent to this Honorable House that Prince Jenckes an Invalid is now in the Work House and in the Town of Providence by Reason of a Late Amputation of one of his Leggs, and is under very Necessitous Circumstances wherefore the Subscriber inbehalf of Said Prince Jenckes Requests the Same allowance may be made for his Relief and Support as has been Extended to other Invalids.

The back side is written by a member of the General Assembly (seemingly the leader of the upper house):

> Resolved that [ ] Col Jeremiah Olney be and he is hereby empowered to receive fifty pounds lawful money out of the Genl Treasury to and for the use of the said Petitioner Prince Jenckes an Invalid, and that the Same be accounted for in the Settlement of [ ] Invalids accounts, and he the Genl Treasurer do not pay the Said Invalid further [ ] until the further orders of Assembly Voted and Passed.[169]

While the recorded proceedings do provide evidence of the Assembly's approval for Olney to take fifty pounds out of the treasury for Prince's use, they do not have the context given in these

[169] Invalid Petition, 1788. For the documents cited as "Invalid Petition, 1788," see note 136.

handwritten records.[170] What is clear from these documents is that Olney took leave to represent Prince to the assembly and ask that he receive the same money other invalids have received. It is clear, therefore, that Olney kept the promise he made in his speech at disbandment: he would help his men get their rightful money. [171]

In addition, Olney said that Prince was under very "necessitous circumstances." One must wonder if he was in the workhouse before he needed an amputation, or if he was renting from someone and was indeed working elsewhere. His workhouse admission records are yet to be found, if they are there, so it is still uncertain how long he had been in the workhouse or if he only ended up there due to his amputation. With his amputation, it was less likely that he would receive "outdoor relief" for, as historian Karin Wulf explains, men were more likely to end up in a workhouse/almshouse, while women were more likely to receive outdoor relief.[172]

Prince's amputation potentially made servant work in a white home for outdoor relief difficult. Indeed, his presence in the workhouse with a caretaker indicates he could not care for himself after his amputation, much less work for outdoor relief. Another thing to note is that this amputation was not the loss of his toes in Fort Oswego. Olney's request indicates that the amputation was performed "late," meaning recently in relation to the petition for relief.[173] Also, Wheaton's pay request makes it seem like the amputation happened in early December 1787. Therefore, by the time of his pension, Prince had lost part of six toes (so he has lost toes on both

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[170] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 272.

[171] Sidney Smith Rider, *An historical inquiry concerning the attempt to raise a regiment of slaves by Rhode Island during the war of the revolution* (Providence, Rhode Island, United States: S.S. Rider, 1880). *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/O0103070133/SAS?u=rhode&sid=gale_marc&xid=88880115&pg=102.

[172] Karin Wulf, "Gender and Political Economy of Poor Relief in Colonial Philadelphia," in *Down and Out in Early America,* ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): 163-212; Nielsen, *A Disability History,* 35.

[173] Invalid Petition, 1788.

feet) and had lost a leg. His very limited mobility surely limited what future work he could perform.[174]

One of the most compelling questions raised by the 1788 petition is why it was necessary for Olney (or anyone) to take out the money for Prince. Why could Prince not just go to where the proceedings were taking place and ask for it himself? Given it was established that he had extremely limited mobility, that alone could have been a reason. This is especially the case given his fellow Black soldier, Bristol Rhodes, was able to take out money for himself directly.[175] William Hall was also paid money for the use of John Slocum, a white soldier, in a very similar transaction to Prince and Olney's deal.[176] This indicates that Slocum's and Prince's disabilities likely limited their ability to appear in front of the assembly and that race was surprisingly not a factor in whether a proxy versus the soldier appeared in front of the Assembly.

Given how earnest Olney's request was in saying that Prince was under very "necessitous circumstances," it seems as though that was the first time Prince received money and that Tate's request was denied. There is a slight chance with Tate that John, being Prince's former enslaver, knew Tate was not Prince's power of attorney.[177] Olney was much more credible, had a history of supporting his soldiers in their fights for pensions, and as we know from the invalid pension laws, a commanding officer needed to support a pension application. Therefore, to have Olney himself petition for the pension made the application much more credible with the Assembly:

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[174] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 19 December 1787, document number 4572, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island; Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.
[175] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 269.
[176] Ibid, 270.
[177] Invalid Petition, 1788; Tate Request, 1786. (See note 139.)

with other soldiers, he provided support, but this time, he petitioned for Prince himself. That Olney presented the petition himself may have been compelling to the committee.[178]

Another thing that must be analyzed is the payment amount: fifty pounds. Going by the most recent law passed by the Continental Congress in 1785, a non-commissioned soldier was allowed a monthly allowance not exceeding five dollars per month if he was deemed to be "wholly incapable of military or garrison duty, or of obtaining a livelihood by labour." This definition may have been applicable to Prince's case, particularly if he could not attend the proceedings and if he needed a caretaker in the workhouse. However, Prince was paid in pounds, making this calculation more difficult, and more research into the exact currency relations between continental dollars, shillings, pence and pounds in Rhode Island, is needed.[179] In the June 1788 proceedings, he was recorded as receiving 1 pound, 10 shillings and 0 dollars for his monthly invalid pension. While this is hardly a sound way to analyze his payment, if we temporarily disregard the payment of 10 shillings, that is 50 months' worth of backpay, a little over four years' worth. Fifty months from February 1788 is December 1783. Indeed, he possibly first filed as an Invalid relatively soon after being discharged in June of that year.[180]

Prince's pay was near the median of Invalid pension amount per month when compared with others in June 1788. That Prince's pay approximated the median indicates that the Rhode Island Assembly did not exactly follow the Continental Congress's 1785 law, unless they did not

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[178] Geake and Spears, *From Slaves to Soldiers,* 89; Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 221; Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 105; JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 5: 702-705; JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 28: 436.

[179] According to Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic,* 208, when the 1778 law was created, RI gave 120 pounds for the most valuable slave/soldier, which was considered 200 dollars. However, currency rates change over time, so this may be inapplicable. Also, I am unaware as to the conversion between shillings, dollars and pounds.

[180] JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 28: 436; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 272; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 297

consider Prince "wholly incapable of" working.[181] However, Olney claimed Prince was under very "necessitous circumstances."[182] Did that mean he was unable to work? Or was he in a bad situation but might work later? These inconsistencies in the record call into question Prince's ability to work. The inconsistencies also turn attention to Rhode Island's payment system. A pensioner incapable of working was supposed to get the maximum amount of money that the state distributed for pensions, not the median. That the Rhode Island Assembly did not give Prince the maximum amount of money indicates that the assembly members responsible for evaluating the claim on Prince's behalf likely believed that he may have been capable of working. While his ability to work was certainly questionable as he had one leg and a fractional number of toes on that leg, the idea cannot be discounted. However, speculation into his experience in the workhouse is needed before speculating on his life after the workhouse and amputation.

Workhouse History in Rhode Island

The question of whether Prince should have been able to get into the workhouse at all is disputed by historians, especially ones who focus on the history of "warning out." Warning out involved identifying people trying to receive welfare or admission to the workhouse and either asking them to leave or not giving them that welfare on the basis of lack of residency.[183] Joanne Pope Melish writes that in 1780 and later years, warning out became even more used against Black people. Melish refers to the statistics given by Wallis Herndon saying, "though only 5

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[181] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 272; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 297; JCC, 1774-1789, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), Vol. 28: 436.

[182] Invalid Petition, 1788.

[183] Loiacono, *Howe Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 61; Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town," 136-137; Mutschler, "The Province of Affliction," n. 22, 93-94; Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 2, 165, 190-191.

percent of transients were designated as people of color in the 1750s, that number had grown to 22 percent in the 1790s and 50 percent by 1800."[184]

Though Prince's residency in Providence was established in enlistment records, it is questionable whether that qualifies as residency.[185] When he lived in Providence before the war, he was a slave, therefore, property himself?[186] According to the logics of eighteenth century property laws across the Atlantic world, defined as a type of fungible property themselves, enslaved property could not own property. Therefore Prince, if enslaved, could not be recorded as a Providence resident. Pope Melish tells us that town officials used warning out on the poorest people and people of color, which Prince was. This may be considered ironic, especially if it is remembered that at the end of the eighteenth century, due to the uncertainty around them, able-bodied, well-off people wanted dependent people to be institutionalized.[187]

Rhode Island's town councils were no exception to the rule in New England when warning out on people of color. Indeed, Gabriel Loiacono has described Rhode Island's town councils as not creating discriminatory laws but using them in "racially discriminatory ways."[188] They used these laws on people who did not qualify for legal settlement. Legal settlement was obtained the following ways: "by birth; residence of indenture;[189] ownership of real estate of a certain value [...]; payment of taxes for five years within ten years residence; or successful completion of one year of residence without having been warned out." This last option,

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[184] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 190. Though the quote is from Pope Melish, Pope Melish is citing Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Women of 'No Particular Home': Town Leaders and Female Transients in Rhode Island, 1750-1800," in *Women and Early America,* ed. Larry D. Eldridge (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 272.
[185] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44; Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.
[186] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. IX,* 582.
[187] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 2, 132-133, 165, 190-191; Nielson, *A Disability History,* 66-67; Bourque, "Poor Relief 'Without Violating the Rights of Humanity,'" 189.
[188] Loiacono, *Howe Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 63.
[189] Possibly how Prince qualified though he was not an indentured servant.

successful completion of one year of residence without having been warned out, may have been how Prince qualified for legal settlement.[190]

People of color represented many of the petition cases that town councils examined. After 1780, "the legal settlement requirement clearly began to be used explicitly to maintain control of local black communities." Melish says that "warning out achieved what abolition could not---removal."[191] However, the gradual emancipation law and the 1778 law (enforced after repeal) may have protected Prince here. The gradual emancipation law, though applying to children born after March 1, 1784, said that poor Black people would be supported by their town.[192] The 1778 law said newly freed Black soldiers would be supported at the state's expense.[193] Therefore, while warning out was a phenomenon that should have impacted Prince, it seemingly did not as he did end up in the Providence workhouse.[194] He was partially protected by being a soldier, a pattern seen for him in terms of how his disability was perceived. His military experience makes him the "deserving" kind of dependent.

Though Melish uses warning out as an example of ways to drive Black people out of a town, another big reason for warning people out was money. After the revolution, warning out and money spent on the poor increased. The percentage of the population who were warned out dipped at the start of the war and jumped to an almost all-time high in 1784. The percentage dipped again in the 1790s. Warning out likely increased to save money and prevent further financial burden from supporting the poor.

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[190] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 190.
[191] Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery,* 190.
[192] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 7.
[193] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VIII,* 359.
[194] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 19 December 1787, document number 4572, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island; Invalid Petition, 1788.

Providence warned the most people out in terms of Rhode Island towns. Interestingly, it had a growing mercantile economy and rising upper class. It became the state's "great attraction" instead of Newport. This is not surprising as Newport had been under British control and had been subject to their blockades, which affected Newport's economy.[195] Therefore, it is no surprise that many tried to move to Providence and get access to Providence welfare leading to increased warnings out.

According to historian Ruth Wallis Herndon, there were three years of peak warnings out: 1764 (right after the Seven Years War), 1788 (as Rhode Island's assembly vigorously debated the ratification of the new United States Constitution), and 1791 (after Rhode Island finally ratified the Constitution). Herndon explains, "The focal point of distress occurred in the 1780s, when the most severe depression, following on the heels of the revolutionary war, disrupted the lives of countless Rhode Islanders… people dislocated by British occupation fled inland as refugees, swelling the population- and the relief problems- of those more secure towns." Herndon also describes men in Prince's position: they had been in the war but now searched for jobs post war. Did Prince get a job after the war or was he in the workhouse the entire time? Without workhouse admission records, one cannot be sure.[196]

The definition of the workhouse or poorhouse seems to have changed over time. In the early 1800s, there came to be almshouses for the sick versus poorhouses and workhouses where the poor worked for their keep.[197] Poorhouses and workhouses were not unlike a prison.[198] However in the 1780s when Prince was in the workhouse, it encompassed all those things: a

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[195] Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town," 153.
[196] Ibid, 152-153.
[197] Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 12-13.
[198] Nash, "Poverty and Politics," 20.

place for the sick, a place for the poor to work, a place for any needy person.[199] This shows a clumping of poor and disabled as has been mentioned.[200] As disability and poverty became intertwined, it may be interesting to focus on sustained study of a dual ableism/bias against poverty, especially as both seem to have run counter to the essential ideals of republicanism: providing for one's self. Therefore, those with very prevalent ideals of republicanism may have been especially prone to this bias.[201] Indeed, poor clothing and diet among the poor signified dependency, which also signaled a lower status to others.[202] Especially among those with strong ideals of republicanism, dependency was greatly stigmatized.[203]

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Historian Philip Morgan has noted that "All discussions of poverty in early America should begin with discussion of slaves, not free whites."[204] Indeed, it is useful to remember that Prince had experienced a different type of poverty before the workhouse. In fact, for all his time in America, he had been poor: enslaved, enlisted in the rank and file in the Continental Army and now remanded to the Providence workhouse. As Morgan explained, "Distinguishing between dependent (deserving) and able-bodied (undeserving) is one useful historical way to think about the poor, but conceptions of poverty are not straightforward."[205] It is worthy to note Morgan's reiteration of "deserving" versus "undeserving" and emphasize that Prince was in both categories: he was "undeserving" as a poor Black person and "deserving" as a former soldier. Prince's identity to others becomes more confusing. He had so many identities: slave, former

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[199] Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 12-13.
[200] Nielsen, *A Disability History,* xvi; Nash, "Poverty and Politics," 1-4.
[201] see pages 6-8 of this paper to see analysis of republicanism and ableism.
[202] Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town," 143.
[203] Again, see pages 6-8 of this paper.
[204] Philip Morgan, "Slaves and Poverty," in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 94.
[205] Ibid, 93.

slave, soldier, Black man, poor man, disabled man. He was in many places on the deserving/undeserving spectrum. His race and poverty possibly made him morally degenerate to some while to others, his disability from Fort Oswego and his amputation made him "deserving."

It is important to note that Prince had already experienced what might be called poverty through the army. However, Morgan equated all slavery with poverty, and that may not necessarily be true. Morgan's analysis of this matter focuses on slaves in the Chesapeake and the Caribbean. Those enslaved people faced harsh conditions and had their own living spaces that may have reflected poverty.[206] However, whether Prince was impoverished in slavery was entirely up to John Jenckes. John himself seemed quite wealthy with being involved in sending ships to different places and having been in the Assembly.[207] Indeed, his house on Benefit Street is preserved today as an eighteenth century historic landmark in Providence.[208]

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Prince's time in the workhouse, even if he was not working due to his amputation, likely involved very rough situations: rations in the almshouse in Philadelphia were cut for certain groups, including African Americans.[209] They may not have done this in Providence, but it is

[206] Ibid, 93-122.

[207] Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. VII,* 588; See note 36 for evidence of John's role in the General Assembly.

[208] Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. John Jenckes House, 43 Benefit Street, Providence, Providence County, RI. Providence Providence County Rhode Island, 1933. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/ri0216/.

[209] Simon P. Newman and Billy G. Smith, "Incarcerated Innocents: Inmates, Conditions, and Survival Strategies in Philadelphia's Almshouse and Jail," in *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America,* ed. Michele Lise Tarter and Richard Bell (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012): 72.

possible. Prince would have already experienced hunger in the military. Though Prince likely could not work as he needed a caretaker,[210] others were forced to work to pay for being there.[211]

While workhouse life was very strict, and in the nineteenth century lines between workhouses and prisons blurred, the poor were thought to have some control, mainly through resistance.[212] One might wonder if Prince participated in any resistance, however given his weak condition and lack of evidence of past resistance, it is doubtful that he did much resisting of work requirements or living situations.

The Welfare Process

According to historian Gabriel Loiacono, in Rhode Island, the process for welfare was as follows: "The overseer of the poor would spend what he thought was necessary, charge it to the Town Treasury, and every year, the Town Tax Assessor would add up all expenditures and include them in that year's property tax bill… If a neighbor with a settlement could not afford healthcare, and his family could not cover the costs, the town paid for doctors, nurses, and prescribed medicine. In fact, if your neighbor needed help and you gave it to them, chances were good that the town treasury would reimburse you for this help."[213] Indeed, this is shown in Prince's life: the overseer of the poor, Nathaniel Wheaton, requested money from the town to pay the caretaker, Colley Yeates, and presumably the Doctor, Pardon Bowen.[214] However, it has

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[210] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 15 December 1787, document number 4566, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island; Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 19 December 1787, document number 4572, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island.

[211] It is well established that in workhouses and poorhouses, people (if they could) were required to work to pay for their keep (and the keep of those who could not work). See Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States;* Smith, ed. *Down and Out in Early America;* Lise Tarter and Bell, ed. *Buried Lives.*

[212] Nash, "Poverty and Politics," 4, 19-20; Newman and Smith, "Incarcerated Innocents," 72-73; Monique Bourque, "Poor Relief 'Without Violating the Rights of Humanity': Almshouse Administration in the Philadelphia Region, 1790-1860," in *Down and Out in Early America,*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 191, 204-205.

[213] Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 31.

[214] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 15 December 1787, document number 4566, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island.

been stated that Bowen's pay receipts for performing the amputation are yet to be found. Loiacono also explains that there are multiple overseers of the poor, so although Wheaton is on both payment requests, he was not the only overseer of the poor.[215]

Ruth Wallis Herndon says that the process of whether someone received poor relief was decided by five to six town councilmen who made the decision based on three things: one, residency (described by Joanne Pope Melish in a previous section); two, how necessary is it? Three, make the relief as brief as possible. Indeed, the town did not want to pay to support someone for numerous years. Disabled people on town welfare for decades were rare.[216] Whether Prince was one of them is doubtful but not certain as documentation for both his admission to and exiting the workhouse is yet to be seen.

Sometimes towns, like South Kingstown, RI, designated one physician for medical care to the poor, and Herndon says Providence also practiced this. Therefore, Doctor Bowen could have been the designated physician for the poor of the town of Providence during Prince's time.[217]

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[215] Loiacono, *How Welfare Worked in the Early United States,* 34.
[216] Wallis Herndon, "Who Died an Expence to This Town," 137-139.
[217] Ibid, 151.

Conclusion

Due to his poverty and military service, there are enough sources on Prince for his story to be told, but quite a bit regarding his life beyond the battlefield remains shrouded in the shadows cast by primary source paucity. While the Assembly proceedings establish a consistent pension for Prince after the 1788 request from Olney, his living situation is unknown. Was he still living in the workhouse after obtaining his pension? Was he working? If so, where? Did he have friends or a community? Historians including Christy Clark-Pujara have demonstrated that free Black men joined and formed societies. These societies included fraternal organizations, mutual aid societies, and most especially, Black churches. Such communal institutions gave a

sense of manhood and helped men provide for their families. This seemingly shows that the American ideal of independence and freedom through patriarchy and providing for one's family spread to Black men.[218]

Another source of pride and manhood was work. Maritime labor was considered to be especially manly, according to historian W. Jeffrey Bolster.[219] Therefore, it gave a sense of pride, and Black men chose this trade to establish households and families.[220] Black sailors and crew members were more likely to be married, older, attached to home ports (were more likely to sail out of a specific port and return regularly) and more likely to "persist" going to sea than white counterparts.[221] This "persistence" seemed to be a theme: the RI First Regiment after the 1778 law was considered to be one of the most passionate and persistent units;[222] Bolster explains that Black maritime laborers were more likely to persist at their jobs. It is certain whether or not Black laborers were better or had a better attitude at their jobs, but there may have been a building theme, that Prince may have taken part in, of Black men persisting more as they had more to prove leading them to be better at their jobs than their white counterparts. Bolster also attributes it to "limited employment opportunities."[223]

Probability suggests that Prince may have worked in maritime labor after recovering from his amputation. He may have left the workhouse as soon as he healed up and did not need a caretaker anymore. The 1790 census, the first U.S. federal tally of the nation's population, showed him as the head of a three-person household. It is uncertain as to whether the head was

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[218] Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work,* 113-114.
[219] W. Jeffrey Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man': Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1183.
[220] Ibid, 1189.
[221] Ibid, 1190.
[222] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 102-105.
[223] Ibid, 1191.

included in that count, but all people in Prince's household were under the category of "all other free persons." That would be free people of color, so it is not a leap to suggest that Prince was living with a spouse and a child. Also, it seems improbable that he would have been marked as head of a household if he were in the workhouse, not to mention his receiving a pension in the median amount of pay indicates that the Assembly expected him to still work. Therefore, he may have been working in 1790 after recovering in the workhouse.[224]

The reason maritime labor is specifically a good guess for Prince's profession is because of the environment and statistics given by Bolster. Bolster says that at the time, maritime labor was the "most integrated and tolerant industry in the nation."[225] It was also very likely that a free Black man in Providence would have been working in maritime labor. Black men were employed in maritime labor disproportionate to their numbers in the overall population. 20% of the available "berths" in maritime were employed by Black men in Providence, whereas Black men made up only 8.5% of Providence's population and 4% of the state's.[226] Bolster guesses that it could have been due to their limited career options. The main options were farm labor and "odd jobs," but agriculture was declining during the early nineteenth century.[227] Also, ships provided a room and food, which was important for poor laborers.[228] Given he could not pay for

[224] 1790 United States Federal Census, National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed: https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/28905383?h=093ca0; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 272; Russell Bartlett, *Records, Vol. X,* 297.
[225] Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man,'" 1184.
[226] Ibid, 1174.
[227] Ibid, 1182. While Prince's experience here is late eighteenth century, I am hoping the trends that Bolster is attributing to are also starting to take place during Prince's time.
[228] Ibid, 1183.

a caretaker and doctor himself, it is likely that Prince was a poor worker.[229] Indeed, the letter at the beginning of this thesis has Prince admitting he lived in poverty.[230]

In addition to the advantages of room and board and other limited opportunities, maritime labor was advantageous to Black men because it had its own culture. Bolster says that while it had "psychological and social ramifications," it may have been a slightly better environment in terms of racism.[231] Of course, racism in Prince's life as a soldier or in maritime work is likely, however due to both environments containing order based on rank and not skin color, he may have been treated more based on status. Bolster says that maritime culture was based on order, and therefore, order determined a Black man's life, his skin color less so.[232]

Still, racism existed in both the army and maritime labor. In the army, Black men were whipped more often or had more whips for a certain punishment than whites,[233] and Bolster admits that whites' prejudice did not just disappear when they stepped onto a ship.[234] Black maritime workers had little chance for advancement/promotion. Therefore, while treatment was likely better than in a civilian job, these Black men were still in a subordinate position, unless the ship had an all-Black crew.[235] This shows in Prince's military career as well: despite being one of the longer serving in his regiment and getting a badge, he never moved past drummer. Indeed, the records indicate a reduction in rank without giving a reason for it.[236]

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[229] Nathaniel Wheaton to James Arnold, 15 December 1787, document number 4566, Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island.
[230] Providence Gazette, April, 4, 1807.
[231] Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man,'" 1174, 1177.
[232] Ibid, 1180.
[233] Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists,* 102-103.
[234] Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man,'" 1181.
[235] Ibid, 1184.
[236] MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 69, 98; Popek, *"They Fought Bravely,"* 507.

Still, as Bolster explains, Atlantic maritime culture created its own institutions and arrangements of systems, which could have been advantageous to Black men. Other historians of maritime culture, including Marcus Rediker, observe the "egalitarian impulses" that characterize the record of maritime voyages and crew, the egalitarianism that "frequently confounded shoreside racial etiquette."[237] Indeed, Blacks received similar wages to whites who were in a similar position.[238] They also shared food equally, unlike the workhouse where sometimes rations were taken from people of color.[239] However, living spaces were still very segregated.[240]

If Prince did work in maritime labor, then there may be an emerging theme of his life: he was in jobs where the environment was extremely harsh physically and mentally but different from civilian life. He might have had a better chance at being treated more equally in these non-civilian cultures. Bolster says that maritime labor was a particularly distinct context defined by multicultural, polyglot populations. There was a culture on the boat and a culture on shore.[241] It appears Prince may have learned quite a bit if he labored in a maritime context: he was part of a civilian culture and was part of a culture based on order in the military and maritime. Indeed, this highlights the disposition mentioned multiple times about Prince: he was not an ordinary civilian Black man. He was a Black man who served in the military and *possibly* in a maritime world too. This makes it hard to analyze how he was perceived as this experience is multicultural and his military experience skews the analysis around whether he was perceived positively or negatively

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[237] Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man,'" 1179. Bolster cites Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Angelo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 286.

[238] Ibid, 1181.

[239] Ibid, 1185; Newman and Smith, "Incarcerated Innocents," 72. It is not confirmed that rations were cut for certain people in the Providence workhouse as this source is for almshouses in Philadelphia, but it is not unreasonable to speculate that this may have applied to Providence as well.

[240] 1186

[241] Ibid, 1199.

with respect to his disability and race. Therefore, Prince is hard to compare to other Black people in the time period as his experience is hardly comparable.

Bolster acknowledges the archival silence we have surrounding these Black maritime workers. There are sources on the system and white workers, but we can only guess at the experience of the Black workers.[242] To acknowledge the gaps in the record as central to telling Prince's story, as Bolster does for the history of maritime culture, is to perform the work of *historical recovery* so essential to learning about Prince Jenckes. There is complete archival silence from Prince himself, so one can merely speculate on his experience and must fill in the blanks with experiences of those in power whose berths of power in late eighteenth century Rhode Island conferred the privileges of literacy, that in turn, explain why Prince's experiences appear as glimpses in the archival record.

This thesis began with a letter that Prince wrote in 1799, two years before his death, which raises interesting questions about Prince's literacy. Though the population of New England reflected much higher literacy rates than other parts of the new United States due to its cultures of religion and education, that does not mean Prince was literate.[243] Indeed, if he was, would there not be another source written by him? He may have dictated the 1799 letter to someone. Regardless, the letter shows that he was still poor despite receiving his pension and was possibly working a job in maritime labor, and he was lamenting his health. If he was working, it is remarkable that he could get around on one leg that did not have all its toes, especially without modern prosthetics.

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[242] Ibid, 1185.

[243] Antonio T. Bly, "A Prince among Pretending Free Men: Runaway Slaves in Colonial New England Revisited," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 14 (2012): 102-103.

To find out more about Prince's post war life, it is important to know who "Mrs. F" was. Why did he write this letter to her? In addition, why was the letter published in 1807, eight years after it was written? The context surrounding the letter in the *Gazette* was unremarkable: it was surrounded by advertisements for people to buy coffee, flaxseeds, other goods and advertisements for land. This indicates that the *Gazette* may have printed things like Prince's letter all the time, but why eight years later? It is possible that there was increased support for Revolutionary War veterans from the general public around this time. The 1806 Invalid Pension Act, while relying on medical doctors more, was a message of increased support for disabled veterans. Indeed, there was an opportunity for increased support for veterans whose disabilities had gotten worse over time. Possibly, increased interest in supporting these veterans created an environment in which the general public had increased interest in reading about these disabled veterans, hence the *Gazette*'s printing of this letter.[244]

Even Prince's death provides evidence of the research challenges raised by archival silence. The only source obtained for his death is archived in the United States Vital Records. However, the cause of death is not recorded. There is no grave site listed in the record.[245] It is almost as if people did not care about Prince's life story at the time of his death. That is the larger story of archival silence: people did not care enough at the time to record in detail Prince's life story in sources preserved for posterity. Until recently, people in later generations of nineteenth and early twentieth century Rhode Island did not acknowledge Prince's life and death. The resulting lack of sources means that one can only speculate on Prince's cause of death.

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[244] Providence Gazette, April 4, 1807; Blackie, "Disabled Revolutionary War Veterans," 89-92.
[245] James Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island 1636-1850, Vol. XII,* 343. Accessed: https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/28905920?h=2008a9.

Maritime labor supports a hypothesis for Prince's death. If he worked on a ship, he would have been particularly susceptible to yellow fever. Death from yellow fever is probable for several reasons: one, he was only forty-four when he died, as enlistment records said he was twenty in 1777.[246] He did not die of old age, and an infectious disease would be one of the first guesses for the death of a young man in early America. Two, yellow fever was going around Providence in the early nineteenth century, and him contracting smallpox seems unlikely due to inoculation or previous infection.[247] He might have gotten it already at Hudson or had been inoculated due to Washington's order (see chapter 2). If he was inoculated against smallpox in the military or had it at some point, then in 1801, yellow fever was his biggest infectious disease risk, not smallpox.

If he was in maritime labor, he would have been in the perfect position to contract yellow fever. Historian Kathryn Olivarius tells us that the mosquito transmitting yellow fever favored warm environments and could lay eggs in water containers, such as those on a slave ship. Indeed, Olivarius suspects that the transatlantic slave trade brought yellow fever to North America. The mosquito would also bite humans on those ships that traveled to warm climates, such as Africa, where that type of mosquito was frequent. Therefore, if Prince was a sailor going to warm, tropical climates, he would have come into direct contact with this mosquito and have been at a high risk for yellow fever.[248]

While archival silence limits Prince's experience, inferences must be made to tell his story, especially through his impoverished experiences in war and in the workhouse. Indeed,

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[246] Ibid; MacGunningle, *Regimental Book,* 44.
[247] Edwin M. Snow, "History of yellow fever in Providence in years 1797, 1800, 1803, 1805, 1820," National Library of Medicine, http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101222073.
[248] Kathryn Olivarius, *Necropolis: Disease, Power, and Capitalism in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022): 35-36.

whether he worked in maritime labor or died of yellow fever is yet to be found out. What he did before the workhouse post-war is also unknown, and his direct experience of the war is undocumented. However, I hope to continue to tell his story accurately so his fascinating story may be recovered.

Prince is also a unique subject to study due to his intersectional identity as a disabled, formerly enslaved Black soldier. It seems as though warning out would have affected him, but the 1778 law and the gradual emancipation law may have protected him.[249] It seems as though he would have been stigmatized for being disabled, but it having been a war injury complicates such an interpretation. Indeed, it is not just the categories that Prince was in that makes interpreting his experience difficult, but it is also the ways in which he fell into those categories. For example, if he obtained his disability from working in the field, his experience may have been very different. Part of this is due to republicanism as earlier discussed, and if he continued to work after his amputation, he would have seemed to be "pushing through" his disability and might have been less stigmatized due to lack of dependency. Therefore, if Prince was injured as a soldier (which he was), continued to work and got off welfare, republicanism may have applauded him for a lack of dependency on others. However, archival silence keeps us from knowing whether he continued to work, so it is unknown whether he was able to fulfill the expectations of republicanism.

Because Prince is such a unique subject to study, his experience will help historiographically. Disability historians studying the Revolutionary War and early United States have yet to include Black people and their experiences. Historians of slavery during these time periods have yet to include disability in their analysis. As Jenifer Barclay has helped our

[249] Russell Bartlett, Records, Vol. X, 7; Russell Bartlett, Records, Vol. VIII, 359.

understanding of the experience of a Black, disabled person in the antebellum United States, I hope Prince gives us a better understanding of the experience of a Black, disabled person in the Revolution and early United States.

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