At Home Among the Dead
North Americans and the 1825 Guamacaro Slave Insurrection

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On a U.S.-owned plantation outside Havana, the Reverend Abiel Abbot packed mementos of his time in Cuba—a jar of scorpions, a box of oranges, and his spare black hat—and prepared to sail for New England. After spending the winter of 1828 on the Spanish island for his health, Abbot was ready to return to Massachusetts. He never got there: Shortly after leaving Havana, Abbot died at sea. Typically, scholars have presented Abbot’s posthumous collection of correspondence as representative of the origin of nineteenth-century North American involvement in Cuba. Yet on visits to numerous American-owned Cuban slave camps, Abbot documented the extensive investment of American citizens from the U.S. North in the Spanish slave regime. By focusing on an early moment of crisis for American planters in Cuba—the 1825 Guamacaro Slave Insurrection—this article reconsiders the transnational geography of U.S. slavery and capitalism in the Atlantic world.¹

This study is conceived as a work of United States history within a

¹ Abiel Abbot, *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba, Between the Mountains of Arcana to the East, and of Cusco to the West; In the Months of February, March, April, and May, 1828* (Boston, 1829), 231.

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transnational context, rather than as a study of Atlantic or Cuban history with U.S. actors. Such a frame, however, does not suggest that U.S. citizens necessarily dictated Cuba’s development; more often, indeed, early American investors in Cuba were forced to accommodate Spanish and creole ambitions and expectations. I take both the national and the transnational seriously as mutually informative and legitimating paradigms precisely because they best capture how contemporary historical actors apprehended their worlds. For example, most planters from the U.S. North based in Cuba retained their American citizenship, even as they adopted Spanish names. Expansive American investment in Cuba began in the 1790s, and by 1823 Louis Perez suggests that “an estimated fifty North Americans owned plantations valued at more than three million dollars in Matanzas alone.” Yet, as Laird Bergard acknowledges, “Little is known about these early U.S. investors.” The purpose of this article is therefore twofold: to acknowledge this little-known U.S. contingent, and—in so doing—to track the moral geographies that defined the contours of capitalism and slavery in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world.

The presence of slaveholders in Cuba who were also U.S. citizens from the North alters the geography of American slavery. Northern participation in the “agro-industrial graveyard” of the Cuban slave regime both reinforces and complicates scholars’ recognition of slavery as a national, rather than sectional, bedrock of U.S. state formation. When convenient or profitable, the character of U.S. slavery was also transnational. The U.S. North has typically been linked to nineteenth-century Caribbean slave labor camps only through trade. Yet, amid the expansion of the U.S. plantation frontier and the protracted process of northern emancipation, elite and middle class northerners sailed for a deeper south, behind Spanish lines. At the very moment in which scholars have highlighted the cultural divergence of New England merchants from southern and Caribbean planters, northerners became planters and administrators in Cuba, freely traveling from their New England mansions to the tree-lined avenues of Cuban slave camps. In Cuba, a Rhode

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Islander traded a factory account book for a plantation invoice that listed 103 enslaved men, women, and children; a New Yorker forced enslaved Africans to build stone walls around their homes to prevent escape; and a Connecticut merchant, convinced that leniency would trigger revolt, turned his manor into a fortress, surrounded by armed guards and dogs.  

In the United States, northerners were no strangers to the slaveholding South; while some may have readily assimilated, scholars such as Dennis Rousey have suggested that northerners in the U.S. South were “likelier to harbor antislavery feelings.” In Cuba, this was simply not the case. The “little known rebellion” near Guamacaro in 1825 led to a hardening of the heart among northern planters. In the aftermath of the Insurrection—which involved more than two hundred Africans and cost the lives of at least fifteen whites and forty-three Africans across twenty-three slave camps—Americans in Cuba responded not with debates about emancipation or aspirations for amelioration (as in the U.S. slave conspiracies and revolts of 1800, 1822, and 1831), but with heads on pikes. Harboring no illusions about the human cost of their coffee and sugar crops, Americans from the U.S. North made their homes in the center of Cuban slave labor camps. And they did so with remarkable ease.4

At approximately 1:00 AM on June 15, 1825, enslaved Africans assembled at a Spanish plantation near the village of Guamacaro, Cuba, east of the port of Matanzas, and prepared for war. In secret, they quickly moved to a larger neighboring estate, where more enslaved Africans slipped out of their quarters to join them. Drawing on a deep knowledge of magic and warfare, the Africans rushed the mansion and executed the owner, an Englishman named Joshua Armitage, along with his wife and two oldest sons. The owner’s third child, a three-year-old boy, was spared, when an enslaved “mulatto” woman begged for his life. The


woman carried the boy, along with her own child, into the yard. The Africans moved through Armitage’s house, looting clothing, along with knives and forks—anything that might be weaponized. They left the silver.5

In the chaos, the “mulatto” woman slipped away with another enslaved worker and carried the children two miles to a neighboring plantation, the Mount Hope, where she woke the American manager, Stephen Fales. One of Fales’s daughters was away at another American plantation, the San Juan in Camarioca, but he was terrified for the safety of his wife, daughter, and son, who were still asleep. Fales quickly hustled them out of the house, past the slave bohios to the edge of the field, where they ducked past rows of coffee trees into Caribbean jungle and began a long walk. It was thirty-six miles to the Wilsons’ San Juan estate.

In the early morning hours, the Africans likely sang, beating drums as they moved from Armitage’s plantation to attack three nearby Spanish estates, burning the buildings with the same New England manufactured spermaceti candles used to light the sugar ingenios at night. At a roadside tavern, the Africans—now well over one hundred in number—executed another Spaniard and an anonymous coach driver, before arriving at another American coffee plantation, the Santa Ana. This cafetal was owned by the Connecticut native Ebenezer William Sage, who was away in Boston and had left his cousin, S. A. Rainey, in charge. Hearing gunfire from the tavern, Rainey rode his horse out to the fields of sugar-cane and coffee trees, where enslaved Africans had already begun the days’ work with hoes and machetes. The Africans had heard the shots too. Rainey urged his workers to drop their tools and return to their

5. The following account is primarily based on the work of Manuel Barcia and the correspondence of Sarah Wilson, Joseph “Jose” O. Wilson, and contacts of Ebenezer William Sage. S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’W (Bristol), June 26, 1825, Box 16, Folder 9, D’Wolf Papers, Bristol Historical Society, Bristol, RI (hereafter BHS); [Joseph] Jose O. Wilson (San Juan, Camarioca) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), June 19, 1825, Box 2, Folder labelled “Correspondence a Plan Cuban Slave,” unprocessed, Edward Spalding Papers, 1795–1825, Cuban Heritage Collection, The University of Miami, Miami, FL (hereafter CHC); Ebenezer William Sage Papers, 1806–1834, Box 2, Folder 1825, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (hereafter MHS); Stephen “Esteban” Fales (Sumedero, Cuba) to Lydia French [Fales] (Bristol, RI), June 21, 1825, Fales Family Letters, 1806–1840, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (hereafter Hay Library).
homes so he could lock them in. But they didn’t move. Behind Rainey, the Africans reached the house, and while some Africans searched for weapons and liquor, others fired on Rainey. He fled on horseback. All but three of the enslaved men at the Santa Ana joined the Africans.

On the road nearby, the Africans ambushed and executed another New Englander, Samuel Bartlett, then divided into two companies. The first company attacked another Spanish ingenio, but they soon began to quarrel and their advance slowed. Meanwhile, the second, larger company neared a cafetal that was owned by a former ship captain from Baltimore named Mr. Taylor. Taylor heard them coming. Armed with heavy firearms, pistols, and swords, Taylor barricaded himself inside his mansion with the enslaved people in his camp. Outside, two hundred Africans surrounded his house with torches and machetes, shouting for his slaves to join them.

By now, however, word had traveled from Guamacaro to Matanzas, and, as American merchants in the port looked on, Spanish dragoons readied their horses, dogs, and guns. Meanwhile, the white planters near Guamacaro also assembled. Fleeing the Santa Ana, S. A. Rainey took a jungle road to La Carolina, a cafetal owned by the Bostonian George Bartlett, whose brother Samuel had just been killed. At La Carolina Rainey joined a small army of planters, guards, and overseers. Around 8:00 AM they rode out to counterattack the Africans who had surrounded Taylor’s cafetal. A battle ensued.

By 10:00–11:00, owners of every nearby estate had been notified to ready arms and sever any potential communication between enslaved laborers and the “insurgents.” Around noon, the Matanzas dragoons arrived on horseback to join the fight, creating an army of at least four hundred men. With three types of Cuban dogs that were infamous throughout the Atlantic for their ability to hunt and kill human beings, the Spanish tracked the Africans through the day, killing or capturing as many as they could. The next day, a second company of dragoons arrived from Havana and “continued the work of extirpation.” This “work” was not quick. An African with military experience, Lorenzo Lucumí, led the African army in combat for ten days, until he was assassinated. Most of the remaining Africans were soon overpowered by the Spaniards’ superior numbers and weaponry. Yet, even as Africans were hanged on the docks of Matanzas or returned to their owners, other participants in the revolt escaped capture altogether, including the insur-
rection’s organizer, Pablo Gangá. (See Figure 1 for a map of the area of
the revolt.)

In 1825, Cuba remained a Spanish colony, and, as Manuel Barcia has
demonstrated, the Guamacaro Revolt was the first nineteenth-century
rebellion in Cuba to be “totally organized and commanded by African-
born slaves.” As Barcia makes plain, the revolt was African in motivation
and execution and can be traced, like other revolts in Cuba and Brazil,
to the Fulani jihad that had enslaved Oyo warriors, beginning in 1804
and peaking in the 1820s–1830s. Although the majority of the twenty-
hundred slave camps attacked in the 1825 insurrection were not U.S. plan-
tations, the revolt also affected Americans: Bartlett, Fales, Rainey, Sage,
Taylor, and Wilson were all United States citizens. Even the Englishman
Armitage had lived in Louisiana before bringing his family to Cuba. In
the revolt’s aftermath, Spanish authorities would blame the insurrection,
in part, on the levity of foreign planters. Although the Rhode Island
D’Wolfs—who invested in numerous U.S. slave camps in Cuba—were
notorious for their role as Atlantic slave traders, there is no evidence that
most of the northerners had slaveholding experience prior to arriving in
Cuba. Stephen Fales may have been an exception.

During his work as a ship captain in the D’Wolf commercial empire,
for example, Stephen Fales’s mother had written his sister in June 1806
that “your brother Stephen in Charlestown . . . [is] very happy in his
humorous way.” Indeed, “how could it be otherwise for he says to one

6. Cuban dogs were so well known that in 1803 the Spanish sold three hun-
dred dogs, along with one hundred horses, to the French for use in Haití. The
horses had “cost from 70 to 100 Dollars per Head and the Dogs from 20 to 50”
dollars. Vincent Gray (Havana) to James Madison (Washington), May 26, 1803,
Reel 1, Dispatches from the United States Consuls in Havana, U.S. National
Archives, Washington, DC. Generations later, Cuban dogs would also be used by
the Confederacy during the United States Civil War to hunt runaways. Childs,
The 1812 Aponte Rebellion, 42. For more detailed information on the breeding and
uses of particular types of Cuban dogs, see Manuel Barcia, Seeds of Insurrection:
Domination and Resistance on Western Cuba Plantations, 1808–1848 (Baton
Rouge, LA, 2008), 58–59. On the dragoons’ involvement, see S. Wilson (Cami-
oca) to John D’W (Bristol), June 26, 1825, Box 16, Folder 9, D’Wolf Papers,
BHS. Two decades later, Gangá would be executed for his alleged participation
in the La Escalera conspiracy in 1844. On the Africans’ ethnicities and slave
camps affected, see Barcia, Seeds of Insurrection, 34–35; and Barcia, The Great
African Slave Revolt of 1825.
go and he goeth and to another come and he cometh.” Years before arriving as an administrator in Cuba, Fales was entirely satisfied at his exercise of total control over the people with whom he had come into contact; how could it be otherwise? One month later, Fales “sent his profile” portrait back to Rhode Island, along with “one of the blacks with a kiss to each of his Sisters.” Slavery and good wishes were inseparable within the context of New England trade networks that had long since disproportionately linked the U.S. North with Cuba.  

By the 1820s, northerners dominated Cuban trade. In 1820–1821, for example, the value of U.S. imports from Cuba was second only to the value of imports from England: Cuba supplied more than 60 percent of

7. Mary Fales (Bristol, RI) to Lydia S. Fales (Hartford, CT), June 12, 1806, and July 18, 1806, Fales Family Letters, 1806–1840, Hay Library.
sugar, 40 percent of coffee, and 90 percent of cigars to the United States. In this same period, Cuba had grown into an immense market for U.S. exports, including flour (16 percent), beef (18 percent), pork (31 percent), fish (13 percent), wood (19 percent), tallow candles (49 percent), soap (14 percent), nails (74 percent), gunpowder (33 percent), medicinal drugs (39 percent), and spermaceti oil (61 percent). From the candles and oil used to light sugar ingenios at night to the guns, nails, and provisions necessary to coerce and feed enslaved laborers, American exports were essential to the Cuban slave regime’s expansion. A careful review of 2,588 entrances and 2,495 clearances in Havana from 1821 to 1823 shows that approximately 50 percent were American. This proportion matches contemporary accounts of the influence of American merchants in the trade. In this same sample, New England ports accounted for half of all American vessels entering Havana from the United States and almost one-third of all clearance destinations. These longstanding ties of trade allowed northerners to develop key contacts among Spanish and creole merchants and planters, which were essential to increased U.S. investment in Cuba. Indeed, to many northerners the island of Cuba had become as familiar as the U.S. South.8

It was no wonder that by February 1820, a Rhode Island visitor to Matanzas remarked that “the country around resembles the hills of New England.” New Englanders imagined the Caribbean landscape in their own image, even as they blended Spanish/Creole culture with northern sensibilities. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the Cuban slave camps owned by members of the D’Wolf family of Rhode Island. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the D’Wolfs and their allies would invest in at least six Cuban plantations as part of a commercial empire that included shipping, finance, land speculation, and industrial development. In 1818, eschewing typical distinctions between New England factories and Caribbean coffee plantations, future U.S. Senator James D’Wolf had appointed the same man—George Munro—who had

recently supervised D'Wolf's Arkwright Mills in Coventry, Rhode Island to administer his Mary Ann *cafetal* in Cuba. Scholars have increasingly noted the uses of technologies and innovation on plantations, particularly in the Caribbean, and D'Wolf apparently saw no contradiction in shifting Munro from weaving to whipping.  

On Munro's arrival at the Mary Ann in mid-December 1818, ninety-six of the enslaved workers were native Africans; another seven children had been born on the estate. D'Wolf instructed Munro to “treat the Negroes . . . with all the humanity in your power” to compel them to work as “other Coffee Estates [do] from a similar gang.” The following month, Munro’s friend Byron Diman wrote to him from the D’Wolf counting house in Bristol, eager to learn “how you get along the Negroes.” Without apparent irony, he enclosed a dozen chains. 

In February 1820, James D’Wolf wrote to Munro about the arrival of white laborers, who had been dispatched from the United States to build shelters on the plantation for the enslaved Africans. “Never suffer any of the white people to have any thing to do or say to any of the negroes,” D’Wolf wrote, “not even to speak to one of them, for if there is the least


10. “Inventory of Negroes, Stock . . .” D’Wolf Papers Part III, Reel 11, Papers of the American Slave Trade; James D’Wolf (Bristol) to George Munro, Nov. 2, 1818, DeWolf Papers, Reel 9, Part 2, Papers of the American Slave Trade, Series A: Selections from the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI (hereafter RIHS); Byron Diman (New Counting Room, Bristol) to George Munro (Saint Marcos, Cuba), Jan. 24, 1819 and Byron Diman (Bristol) to James D’Wolf (Havana), Feb. 13, 1819, Reel 9, Part 2, Papers of the American Slave Trade. Munro did not get on well: In 1821, like many foreigners in the Caribbean, he died of illness. Following his death, Munro’s allies in Rhode Island would try to collect debts for Munro’s wife and “young family of orphan children” from Cuba for years. Byron Diman (Bristol) to Edward Spalding (Havana), Feb. 7, 1823, Edward Spalding Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, RIHS, and Nathaniel Bullock (Bristol) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), Mar. 14, 1824, Edward Spalding Papers, Box 2, Folder 3, RIHS.
intercourse you will have great difficulty in governing the negroes or the whites.” Notorious for his legacy as a slave trader, James D’Wolf was attempting to impose a North American construction of binary racial slavery on an island where terms of bondage and race were sometimes more fluid. Unfortunately, Munro himself remains silent: The only surviving record of his presence on the plantation is his signature on the plantation inventory. (See Figure 2 for a view of the plantation.)

Stephen Fales’s correspondence provides a more comprehensive picture. As the periodic administrator of the D’Wolf Mount Hope cafetal—the same man who would wake in 1825 to cries from the neighboring Armitage estate—Fales had arrived from New England in 1817. Once his family joined him, Stephen freely permitted his young son Thomas to play “with the little Negroes” and to learn Spanish until, three years later, Thomas had “quite forgotten his mother tongue.” Northerners like the Faleses often attempted to transplant their interests to Cuba, bringing the concerns of the New England parlor to the Cuban countryside. Americans traded, socialized, and even married in Cuba. In 1819, for example, Stephen Fales may have attended the Cuban wedding of the Bostonian George Bartlett to his wife, a native of Philadelphia, at Bartlett’s nearby La Carolina cafetal. “We have,” Fales later reflected, “the best neighbours in the world.” This also included the Englishman Joshua Armitage, who moved with his family to a nearby cafetal in 1822 and who was, in Fales’s estimation “a brother to me & mine.” And, just as Fales’s son Thomas became fluent in Spanish, Stephen Fales also embraced elements of Spanish culture in Cuba. In an attempt to create an Anglo/American–Spanish cultural blend, Stephen Fales, like other American expatriates, even adopted a Spanish name. “We make out to pass our time much more agreeably than you could suppose,” Stephen “Esteban” Fales wrote in April 1824, and “our long residence has assimilated our manner of living to the Spaniards.”

12. John D’Wolf (Bristol) to Stephen Fales, Apr. 5, 1817, and James (Bristol) to Francis M. Dimond, May 20, 1821, Reel 9, Part 2, Papers of the American Slave Trade, RIHS; Willia)m Fales (Madruga, Cuba) to Lydia S. [Fales] French
Yet, no matter how “agreeably” he and his family lived, the reality of the Caribbean slave labor camp continually intruded. Many of Fales’s concerns, from education and improvement for his children to family squabbles and business investments, were typical of middle-class New England. Others were not. Immediately after Fales arrived, for example, he was “obliged to report more deaths of our Negroes” and track down runaways who had been stolen by another New Englander, William Gowen, whose sister, the poet Maria Gowen Brooks, also spent time on the cafetal in 1823. “That gentlem[a]n,” D’Wolf wrote, “fell so obviously in love with my property that he makes it his own when ever he can.” D’Wolf was also certain that Gowen had information on “several more of our de[a]d & missing Negros.” Discipline and submission among his “property” were important, D’Wolf wrote in October 1817, but “never suffer any capritious [sic] or wanton cruelty practiced upon them as has be[e]n the case.” Based on a legal dispute one year earlier related to Bowen’s neglect of the estate, it is likely that D’Wolf had Gowen in mind. Whether or not Fales continued to torture the enslaved Africans, he was compelled—by the demands of the coffee crop and the plantation’s U.S. investors—to work them to death.13

With the start of the rainy season in June 1822, for example, he wrote, “the poor negroes have but little time for rest [and] consequently my

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Figure 2: Mary Ann *café*, c. 1820. “Mary Ann, Plats, ca. 1820,” Series III: Plantation Accounts, 1818–1852, Reel 11, D’Wolf Papers, Papers of the American Slave Trade, Part 2, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI.
presence is wanted in the field as I have no white men on the place.” No distant administrator, Fales supervised the Africans as an overseer, almost certainly with whip in hand. And although Stephen Fales took numerous business leaves from the Mount Hope, the brutality took a toll. After five years at the cafetal, Fales admitted that the violence had changed him, numbing whatever humanitarian sensibilities he had once had. “Since my living in this country,” he confided to his sister in August 1822, “I have seen so many sudden deaths that they do not affect [me] so awfully as formerly.”  

Closer to Havana, at the D’Wolf Buena Esperanza and Arc de Noe estates, the New Yorker Joseph Goodwin tersely catalogued a similar regime in his plantation diary from 1821 to 1827. Here, Goodwin counted over two hundred and forty enslaved laborers, although their number was never constant. Slave names regularly overlapped from one estate to the next, suggesting that workers were routinely shifted between the camps. An undated register of the eighty-two “Negros belonging to the Ingenio Nuevo Esperanza,” for example, listed the names of ten men who had been brought “with their families from the Mount Hope Coffee Estate”; ten women were also tallied as “From the Mt. Hope.” In addition to two names that had been crossed out and removed from the total (“Justo” and “Carolina”) an addendum at the bottom noted that people marked with a small x (such as “Basindo,” “Clotilda,” and “Juliana”) “have died” and people listed with a cross (“Felix” and “Carlos”) had “run.”  

In mid-April 1821, two weeks after his arrival as administrator, Goodwin noted, “The first Negro I struck was this evening for laughing at Prayers.” Line by line, his writings provide a glimpse of the toil and death, runaways and suicides that characterized the life of enslaved Africans on cafetals and ingenios in Cuba. That summer, for example, he discovered two runaway Africans hanging by ropes in the jungle, their

14. Stephen Fales (Sumedero) to Lydia S. [Fales] French (Bristol), June 24, 1822, Fales Letters, Hay Library; Stephen Fales (Sumedero) to Lydia S. [Fales] French (Bristol), Aug. 22, 1822, Fales Letters, Hay Library. Fales was granted a leave, for example, in May 1821 and temporarily replaced with Francis Dimond. James D’Wolf (Bristol) to Francis M. Dimond, May 20, 1821, Reel 9, Part 2, D’Wolf Papers, Papers of the American Slave Trade, RIHS.

15. “List of the Names of the Negros belonging to the Ingenio Nuevo Esperanza,” Reel 11, D’Wolf Papers, Papers of the American Slave Trade, Part 2, RIHS.
bodies decayed after at least three days exposure. Rather than reflect on “the unfortunate circumstance,” Goodwin coldly remarked, “suffice it to say they are no more.” This was a shame, he said, since “they were the two best Bosals on the Plantation.” It is impossible to know if they were the same “Felix” and “Carlos” listed as missing in the ingenio inventory, precisely because marronage was so constant. The “best Bosals” suggests that these Africans may have been worked hard, pushed by Goodwin’s Spanish mayoral overseer and his armed guards until death seemed preferable to the lash. During harvest season, enslaved workers on Cuban ingenios routinely labored for up to twenty hours each day.16

Like Rhode Islander Stephen Fales, the New Yorker Joseph Goodwin could not claim ignorance of the brutal reality of these Cuban slave camps. When two more Africans named “Pablo” and “Padro Marea” who had run away “came back” the following day, for example, Goodwin catalogued how he planned to torture them: “Their punishment will be as follows, four days in the Sapo heavy ironed, four days in succession after prayers, twenty four lashes on the naked bottom each, after which lanced and well rubbed down with rum and salt.”17

But the runaways continued, and so Goodwin assigned his enslaved laborers not only tasks traditionally associated with the Caribbean coffee frontier—such as clearing jungle and “trimming,” “weeding,” and “cleaning” coffee leaves—but also to “collect stone” to build walls. Amid the tens of thousands of coffee trees at the Arc de Noe and Buena Esperanza, Goodwin oversaw the construction of walls, which not only encircled the camps to discourage runaways but also likely separated the bohios, where enslaved Africans lived, from the grounds. Indeed, Theresa Singleton has demonstrated that “enclosing slave quarters within a prison-like wall” on both Cuban coffee and sugar estates was a “known

16. Apr. 14, 1821, Joseph Goodwin Diary, Manuscript Collections Relating to Slavery, New York Historical Society, New York, https://www.nyhistory.org/slaverycollections (hereafter NYHS); Sept. 28, 1821, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; May 20, 1821, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. Enslaved ingenio workers typically worked from 3:00 AM until noon, and after a brief break, continued to work until sunset or later; during harvest these hours might last from 4:00 AM until midnight, with a single one hour break. Childs, The 1812 Aponte Rebellion, 61, 57. See also José A. Benítez, Las Antillas: Colonización, Azúcar e Imperialismo Havana, 1977), 88.

17. See Jan. 19, 1823 and Jan. 20, 1823, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS.
practice." Goodwin knew this practice well and sometimes acted—like Stephen Fales—as overseer himself. In fact, Goodwin may have demanded more labor from his enslaved workers than some Spanish planters: The Africans on these American camps regularly worked on the Sabbath, and Feast days were often ignored. Only Christmas seems to have been sacrosanct.18

Although Goodwin may not have followed the Spanish labor traditions, he, like Fales, readily embraced the Spanish “manner of living,” and the Spanish were happy to include him. In July 1821, for example, Joseph Goodwin dined with a company of Spanish planters at a “Superb Palace,” where he played “Billiards,” before enjoying a lavish dinner, dessert, and cigars. In Cuban ports, American merchants routinely socialized with the Spanish, and on the coffee and sugar frontier, American planters and administrators were welcomed into the circles of the Spanish and Creole elite. In fact, the estates’ owner, George D’Wolf—nephew of James—was not only a friend to U.S. President James Monroe, but also to the Spanish Captain-General of Cuba.19

18. For typical labor tasks and wall-building, see Jan. 7, 1822, Feb. 1, 1822, and Mar. 13, 1822, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. For the persistence of runaways see, for example, Apr. 1, 1826, Apr. 9, 1826, June 25, 1826, and June 27, 1826, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. For wall-building, see also May 31, 1822, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; Theresa Singleton, “Slavery and Spatial Dialectics on Cuban Coffee Plantations,” World Archaeology 33 (June 2010), 103. On Goodwin’s relationship with the overseer and personal field management, see Mar. 31, 1823, Apr. 8, 1823, and Apr. 27, 1823, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. For sample Feast Days, the Sabbath, and Christmas, see June 8, 1823, June 24, 1823, and Dec. 25, 1824, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. On the structure and implications of the labor regimes of Cuban cafetales, see William Van Norman, Jr., “Shade Grown Slavery: Life and Labor on Coffee Plantations in Western Cuba, 1790-1845” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005).

19. For Goodwin’s socializing with Spanish/Creole planters, see July 25, 1821, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. For Americans’ relations with Spanish merchants and elites more generally, see for example J. J. Latting (Camarioca, Cuba) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), Feb. 20, 1824, Box 1, Folder 8, Edward Spalding Papers, CHC. On a tour through New England in 1817, for example, President James Monroe had visited Bristol and “dined at Geo. D’Wolf’s house, stayed about one hour [and] was very affable.” John D’Wolf (Bristol) to James D’Wolf, July 1, 1817, D’Wolf Papers, Box 8, Folder 11, BHS. On George D’Wolf’s relationship with Captain-General Francisco Dionisio Vives, see George Locke Howe, Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle (New York, 1959), 235.
In April 1825, just months before the Guamacaro revolt, George D’Wolf arrived in Cuba with a small group of fellow New Englanders and “a disposition to make trouble and difficulty on the Estates with the Negroes.” Goodwin was concerned that D’Wolf would “spoil” the Africans and offered him “one negro to do with him as he pleased . . . but to no effect.” “I shall go on patiently,” Goodwin fumed, “a few days longer.” Goodwin’s notes suggest that the New Englanders, enjoying the novelty of the slave camp, had arrived with domination and rape on their minds. On a visit to Bristol, Rhode Island four years earlier, Goodwin had described George D’Wolf as “the Prince of the Place.” “I should be ungrateful,” he wrote, “if I forgot Genl George DWolf and Family after receiving the kind treatment while in this place.” Now, years later and perhaps fearing both a breakdown in discipline and resistance from the Africans, Goodwin “prevail[ed] upon G.B.D.Wolf to return home” for days. Based on the stockpile of arms in his personal quarters, which included “two Blunderbusses[,] two pair[s] of Pistols, two Broad Swords, Plenty of Chain and round shot, together with 4 Canisters of Powder and fixed am[m]unition,” Goodwin was well aware of the danger. But there was no revolt, and when George D’Wolf did eventually leave, he took “a Black girl by the name of Jane” with him to Havana, “bound to the United States.” “I shall go on,” Goodwin wrote after D’Wolf and his entourage departed, “friend or no friend.” When D’Wolf left, Goodwin’s attention returned to coffee, sugar, and walls. And it paid off: by August 1825, Joseph Goodwin—a native of Hudson, New York—was purchasing newly arrived enslaved Africans for himself.

Back in the Matanzas region, just before the uprising, Joseph “Jose” O. Wilson of the San Juan estate was invited to attend the marriage of Stephen Fales’s daughter Mary to a man named James William Brown. Amid the wedding celebrations, another supervisor of the Mount Hope,

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20. Apr. 24, 1825, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; Page 1, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; Nov. 25, 1821, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; May 1, 1825 and May 3, 1825, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; May 4, 1825, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. Two years later, after a similar visit, Goodwin also noted that George D’Wolf left with “his son George & Charles two Negroes & a wench.” Feb. 22, 1827, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS. From August 1825–June 1826, Goodwin purchased a total of 18 slaves, some from the estate, and others which had no doubt recently arrived in the illegal African trade. See “Account of Speculation in negroes, 1825,” Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS.
Asa Anthony, worried about the prolonged absence of an enslaved woman named Ines, who had been sent on an errand over one month earlier. In a move suggestive of the uncomfortable mobility American planters were forced to allow enslaved people in Cuba, Anthony wondered if he should “send to the Havana to inquire for her?” Although it is impossible to know if Ines knew of the Africans conspiring to revolt, Spanish authorities certainly feared African information networks, which criss-crossed plantation walls. Because of their growing influence in the Cuban slave regime, United States citizens found themselves at the center of these Atlantic circuits.21

In the aftermath of the 1825 Guamacaro Revolt, as Joseph Wilson’s wife Sarah later reported, free blacks from the surrounding neighborhoods would also be summarily “shot as being principals in this affair.” It is difficult to know if Sarah expected such violence before arriving at the San Juan plantation in July 1818. On reaching the cafetal, she was reasonably satisfied that her family would “be comfortable & look at least as well as our neighbours.” But she also acknowledged the extreme mortality surrounding her new home: “we have buried three children,” she wrote, “but they had long been weakly.” Her inability to speak Spanish and lack of “female society” drove Sarah to supervise the construction of a camp hospital, which she came to resent. “Negroes,” she wrote, “are such miserable beings, wild and—everything thats bad.” Even more frustrating for her, those few Africans who she deemed “valuable good” died just as frequently as the others. As Sarah tended to the hospital and sewed clothing for her children, she found time to write for the comforts of home, asking for hair combs, “an Iron Griddle for baking,” “neck kerchiefs” and “nice riding whips,” as “it is always necessary to keep our horses harness in order in this country.” Horses, like dogs, were an essential component of control in the Cuban slave camps, and Americans always rode armed. In the 1820s, as enslaved Africans died around her, Sarah Wilson wrote to her friend, John D’Wolf—the brother of James—

21. [Joseph] Jose O. Wilson (San Juan Plantation) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), May 25, 1825, Box 1, Folder 8, Edward Spalding Papers, CHC. See Asa Anthony (Mount Hope) to E Spalding (Matanzas), May 5, 1825 and Asa Anthony (Mount Hope) to E Spalding (Mat), June 8, 1825, Box 1, Folder 8, Edward Spalding Papers, CHC; S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’W (Bristol), June 26, 1825, Box 16, Folder 9, D’Wolf Papers, BHS.
for more goods from New England: “I am sorry,” she said, “to give you so much trouble for shoes.”

From food to furniture to clothing, northerners in Cuba tried to stock their plantation manors with all the comforts of home. Along with items typical of the New England–Caribbean circuit—such as “flour,” “beef,” and “new hhds”—the Cashier, for example, sailed from Rhode Island to Cuba in 1819 with accounting books, “Pens,” and two types of chairs, “Fancy” and “Windsor.” In addition to typical cargoes, American ships routinely entered Havana in the early 1820s with tables, cotton, clothing, and paper, some of which had no doubt been personally requested by Americans already living on the island. In fact, after the Guamacaro Revolt, Sarah Wilson noted that Stephen Fales’s wife recognized an African man as a “slave of Armitage” when “a handkerchief was found with him marked with Mr. A’s name,” condemning the African with an article of clothing his dead owner may have requested from the United States.

In the immediate aftermath of the insurrection, Americans in Cuba welcomed the hardening of disciplinary lines in the slave camps. Four days after the Guamacaro Revolt, on June 19, 1825, Joseph Wilson wrote from San Juan that although some were suspicions of the Africans on his estate, he had overhead his slaves “say those negros were fools and would all be filled by the Spaniards.” Still, Wilson was worried. “I am in want of six blunderbusses for the use of the plantation” from Matanzas or Havana, at any price. A week later, Wilson repeated the

22. S. Wilson (St. Juans Plantation, Camarioca) to John D’Wolf (Bristol, RI), July 11, 1818, Box 16, Folder 2, D’Wolf Papers, BHS; S. Wilson to John D’Wolf, Feb. 10, 1819, Box 16, Folder 3 and S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’Wolf, May 18, 1820, Box 16, Folder 4, D’Wolf Papers, BHS; S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’Wolf (Bristol), Mar. 19, 1823, Box 16, Folder 7, D’Wolf Papers, BHS; S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’Wolf (Bristol), July 6, 1823, Box 16, Folder 7, D’Wolf Papers, BHS. On the frequency of Americans riding armed in Cuba, see Robert, ed. New Year in Cuba, 79.

23. Invoice, Cashier for Trinidad de Cuba, April 14, 1819, Jacob Babbitt Papers, Reel 1, Papers of the American Slave Trade, Part 2, RIHS; S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’W (Bristol), June 26, 1825, Box 16, Folder 9, D’Wolf Papers, BHS; El Diario de la Habana, Rare Books and Manuscript Library, The University of Havana, Havana, Cuba.
request, specifying that he did not want pistols: The larger, more deadly blunderbusses were necessary to prepare for an attack “of the kind they have had lately in the other neighborhood.” Wilson hoped that the recent executions by the Spanish of enslaved and free blacks would “be a strong lesson” not to the enslaved, but “to all of us to be on our guard,” adding that “such things take place in all slave holding countries.” In this telling reflection, Wilson did not reconsider the violence of the Cuban regime or his participation in it; instead, he suggested armed preemptive measures. Wilson, like other New Englanders, had no illusions. His home was at the center of a slave labor camp—manageable only with extreme violence—and he knew it.24

Similarly, at the Mount Hope, Stephen Fales was happy to report on June 21, 1825, that his “Negroes [were] perfectly contented and submissive.” On the day of the insurrection, the enslaved Africans under his supervision had been “unconscious of what was going on,” thanks to the slave camp’s location, which was “retired from the main road.” If the “insurgents” had reached the estate, Fales had “no doubt our names would have been added to the ‘Killed.'” Now, the Spanish issued orders that any Africans discovered in “the woods” should be killed on sight, and when the militia publicly executed, mutilated and burned suspected African “insurgents,” even Stephen Fales was disturbed at the “shocking scene to see the dead beside the road” that had “been burnt” and left “in such a state that it was impossible to bury them.” The Spanish blamed the revolt, in part, on the levity of foreign planters, and now they intended to set an example for the enslaved.25

At the Santa Ana plantation, however, this conflicted with the interests of American investors, who sought to protect their slaves just as they would any other highly capitalized investment. After the insurrection, six Africans from the estate had been killed in the fighting, and another six were imprisoned at Matanzas, awaiting sentencing. The northern camp administrator, S. A. Rainey—who had narrowly escaped on June 15—

24. [Joseph] Jose O Wilson (Sn Juan, Camarioca) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), June 19, 1825, Box 2, Folder: “Correspondence a Plan Cuban Slave,” Edward Spalding Papers, CHC; [Joseph] Jose O. Wilson (Sn Juan, Camarioca) to Edward Spalding (Matanzas), June 26, 1825, Box 2, Folder: “Correspondence a Plan Cuban Slave,” Edward Spalding Papers, CHC.
25. Stephen “Esteban” Fales (Sumedero, Cuba) to Lydia French [Fales] (Bristol, RI), June 21, 1825, Fales Letters, Hay Library.
now struggled to convince the Spanish that “twelve [dead] would be a sufficient example” and to “have as few arrests as pos[s]ible.” Even as rumors of new slave plots circulated, Rainey “secreted and protected” many of the Santa Ana’s workers “who were engaged” in the Guamacaro insurrection. “Be assured,” he wrote to both his cousin, Ebenezer William Sage in Boston and to the estate’s New York investor, N. Talcott, “everything that can be done for your Interest shall not be neglected.” Sage’s brother-in-law—the fellow Connecticut native and manager of the nearby Ontario estate, Ephron Webster—was shocked that planters would protect their guilty slaves for pecuniary interests, rather than see them hanged. And after five of the six captured Santa Ana Africans—Felix, Isidro, Gregorio, Caitano, and Ramon—were executed, Webster wrote simply that they “are now on the Estate in front.” In Boston, Sage knew what Webster meant; Rainey had already told him. “According to the sentence,” Rainey wrote Sage, “the Head and hands were cut off and nailed on posts or trees on the places of their former abode. The Head of Felix I had put . . . near the Negro Hog Pens.” Even as Rainey continued to lobby the Spanish to save the valuable lives of African laborers for their owners in the U.S. North, he dutifully nailed the rotting heads and hands of these five African men to trees and poles on the Santa Ana grounds.26

Such graphic displays were only the beginning. After the Guamacaro Revolt, Matanzas province became even more heavily militarized. As at the Buena Esperanza and Arc de Noe, walls were common in many Cuban slave camps, but after the 1825 Insurrection, the governor of Matanzas province issued new security regulations to enforce the practice, requiring owners of estates with enslaved laborers to “build fencing or a palisade around the [slave] houses” between 3.40 and 4.25 meters high. By January 1826, Americans such as Stephen Fales could happily report that “most of the Negroes concerned [in the insurrection] are either executed or under sentence,” and the planters were “in complete readiness” to prevent another uprising. The Spanish also required planters to send half of their enslaved laborers two days each month to con-

26. S. A. Rainey (Santa [La] Carolina) to Ebenezer William Sage (Boston), June 18, 1825; S.A. Rainey (Santa Ana) to N. Talcott (New York), June 19, 1825; Ephron William Webster (Ontario) to Ebenezer William Sage (Boston), Nov. 13, 1825; S. A. Rainey (Santa Ana) to Ebenezer William Sage (Boston), Sept. 9, 1825, Box 2, Folder 1825, Sage Papers, MHS.
struct roads, and in April 1826 a road was completed, linking Matanzas with Camarioca to allow for an even more rapid response from Spanish dragoons. That same month, Sarah Wilson remarked that “ten [“little negroes”] have died [of disease] within the last month and eight of them within the last week.” “I assure you,” she wrote, “it is very painful to see the little things that have been raised under my own eyes suffer as they have done.” A middle-class woman from New England, Sarah might have questioned her place in the Cuban slave camp, but she did not. By November 1826, she wrote of happiness, not death, and, throughout the 1820s and early 1830s—when a cholera epidemic would kill Africans faster than they could be buried—Sarah continued to urge her husband to protect his Cuban investments. 27

By February 1828, when the Massachusetts Reverend Abiel Abbot arrived in Cuba, New Englanders were comfortably armed. On a tour that began and ended with Boston expatriates—from George Bartlett’s La Carolina camp near Matanzas to Nathaniel Fellowes’s Reserva, Fundador, and Pequena Cabana camps outside Havana—Abiel Abbot witnessed a sustained northern presence in the Cuban slave regime. Almost immediately after his arrival at Matanzas, Abbot was even taken to “the battle ground of 1825.” Here, he wrote, “a few gentlemen by uncommon daring, killed a few, and put to flight six or seven hundred insurgent negroes.” “Four gentlemen, if I mistake not,” he said, “put the whole multitude to rout.” Abbot was mistaken, but in his travels he would become well versed in the uprising’s impact on American planters. 28

Abbot documented northern-owned slave camps, describing a “fine square of negro huts or boheas,” surrounded by walls that rose “ten feet high.” He noted that the enslaved were engaged in “a great extent of wall building” to create a “beautiful and permanent fence.” He alluded to constant security measures to prevent slave “thieving and conspiracy”

27. Translation quoted in Singleton, “Slavery and Spacial Dialectics on Cuban Coffee Plantations,” 103; S. A. Rainey (Santa Ana) to Ebenezer W. Sage (Boston), June 8, 1826, Box 2, Folder 1826–1830, Sage Papers, MHS; Stephen “Esteban” Fales (Sumedero, Cuba) to Lydia French [Fales] (Bristol, RI), Jan. 28, 1826, Fales Letters, Hay Library; S. Wilson (Camarioca) to Susan D’Wolf (Bristol), Apr. 3, 1826, Box 16, Folder 9, D’Wolf Papers, BHS. See S. Wilson (Camarioca) to [unknown], Nov. 26, 1826, Box 16, Folder 9 and Box 16, Folder 11, D’Wolf Papers, BHS.

and the use of “dogs, the lash, and sometimes the punishment of death.” After recently visiting South Carolina, Abbot praised the brutality of the gang system on American plantations in Cuba as far superior and suggested that the enslaved Africans in Cuba “accomplish one third more labor than the tasked slaves of Carolina.” From “daybreak,” he wrote, “they labor till the light is gone, and renew it on some plantations, by the light of the moon or stars, or a blazing fire.” Driven by the whip, Africans worked silently, “and it is confidently said,” Abbot wrote, “that on estates there is a loss of from 10 to 15 per cent of their laborers each year.”

Abbot dutifully reported on the escalating punishment system employed at the Lemonal American camp, noting that discipline was meted out by the whip in increments of three lashes, twenty-five lashes, or two hundred lashes. As he left grounds, Abbot “heard the snap of the lash, but no other noise.” A half mile down the road, he “heard ten lashes more.”

In Abbot’s estimation, such violence paid off. Near the Buena Esperanza, where Joseph Goodwin may have still been employed, Abbot wrote, “Plantations of coffee, beautifully laid out and neatly cultivated are almost continuous, and the eye of the traveller is constantly delighted with the finest specimens of agriculture.” This was the direct result of Goodwin’s brutality, and in 1828 a New England Reverend reveled in the wealth it created.

By the 1830s, the U.S.–Cuba trade would occupy a position only rivaled by the U.S.–English trade. Liverpool, London, and Havre were the only three foreign cities to trade more heavily with New York City than Havana or Matanzas. And whereas Cuba represented just 7 percent of total New York foreign trade tonnage, in other U.S. ports, it was much more significant. For both Boston and Philadelphia, just one foreign port—Liverpool—occupied more shipping tonnage than Havana or Matanzas or Trinidad, Cuba. Cuba had become a central spoke in the

29. Ibid, 12–13, 54, 144, 13, 41.
30. Ibid, 50, 55. On Abbot’s sense of restraint see also S. Everett, ed., Sermons by the late Rev. Abiel Abbot (Boston, 1831), ix.
trans-Atlantic networks of commodities, specie, and human beings that
made the expansion of U.S. capitalism possible. As northerners invested
in the expansion of the U.S. South, they also had no reservations sailing
for the deeper south of the Cuban agro-industrial graveyard. 32

As slave revolts continued to surface across the Spanish island, U.S.
planters took the Guamacaro Revolt to heart. They well knew that the
Africans in their camps were ready to resist, whether through marronage,
suicide, insurrection or more covert methods. Despite increased security,
for example, there were hundreds of reported acts of enslaved violence
after 1825 in Matanzas province alone. It is hardly surprising then that
by the time of Mary Gardner Lowell’s visit to American-owned Cuban
plantations in 1831–1832, the 1825 Guamacaro Revolt had become a
cautionary tale on the island. A woman from the same elite northern
families typically associated with shipping, industry, and finance in the
early United States, Mary Gardner Lowell saw another side of their com-
mmercial empires and became well acquainted with the reality of the
Cuban slave labor camps. “It is a rare thing,” she noted, “to see an old
negro.” 33

She learned the history of the 1825 Guamacaro Revolt from the wife
of Connecticut native Ebenezer William Sage, who suggested that the
revolt “began on the estate of Mr. Armitage,” precisely because the Ar-
mitage family “were extremely indulgent to their blacks & had not the least
suspicion of danger.” Guamacaro did not lead Sage to reconsider the
brutality of his Santa Ana and Ontario slave camps, but to follow Spanish
planters in embracing increased militarization and violence. As Joseph
Wilson and the Spanish authorities had suggested, the revolt was inter-
preted as the natural result of leniency, not oppression. Ebenezer William
Sage responded not with questions of humanity, but with dogs and guns.
By 1832, Sage’s paranoia about enslaved laborers led him to tolerate no
household slaves at night, and he regularly beat enslaved children if they
were found too near the stone, single-story house. Like Goodwin, Sage
slept with “two or three pairs of pistols, guns & swords.” Even his house
“itself [was] a sort of castle” situated on a hill overlooking the fields

York, 1939), 394–97.
33. Paquette, Sugar Is Made with Blood, 72; Robert, ed. New Year in Cuba,
16. For perhaps the most comprehensive study of African resistance in this period,
see Manuel Barcia, Seeds of Insurrection.
and surrounded by “noisy dogs” that were “very savage.” Here too, the Africans were forced to build stone walls as armed guards looked on. By the time of Mary’s visit, however, the mounted skulls and hands seem to have been taken down. (See Figure 3 for an example of walls built for security.)

In Cuba, Americans from the U.S. North and their Spanish auxiliaries watched down open avenues with dogs and guns as enslaved Africans labored, surrounded by tall hedges or walls. Although nineteenth-century American-owned Cuban slave camps have tended to elude scholars, contemporaries were well-aware of them. In his famous 1841

Figure 3: New Hope ingenio, c. 1830s. Note not only the broad lawns and regular avenues surrounding the sugar mill, but the presence of high, wall-like foliage entirely encircling the estate. “Steam Sawmill on the New-Hope Sugar Estate, Cuba,” c. 1830s, D’Wolf Papers, Bristol Historical Society, Bristol, RI.

34. Robert, ed., New Year in Cuba, 79. For more on the walls and security measures at the Santa Ana in this period, see the loose pages of Baconais’s “Plantation Journal,” 1832, Box 2, Folder 183 –1833, Sage Papers, MHS. See also Megan Marshall, The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism (Boston, 2005), 275.
Amistad defense, for example, John Quincy Adams acknowledged the interests of “American citizens who own plantations in the island of Cuba, which they cultivate by the labor of slaves.” That many of these U.S. planters were also northerners went unsaid, and with good reason, as these camps would persist throughout the century. The behavior of Cuban planters and administrators from the U.S. North complicates both national and sectional formulations of American slavery. It suggests that the capitalism of the U.S. North and Caribbean slavery were interdependent, not merely in the push-and-pull of trade but in the ease with which northerners changed their names and raised the Cuban whip. The brutality of the northern response in Cuba demonstrates how readily the logic of the Caribbean slave regime impacted transnational cultural sensibilities: the moral geographies of the U.S.–Cuban Atlantic world were as malleable as the trade routes they followed. Trading factories and counting houses for ingenios and cafetales, northerners became untroubled planters and administrators in the heart of the Caribbean. “One child died this morning,” New Yorker Joseph Goodwin wrote tersely in 1822, “all han[d]s trimming coffee and carrying stone, pleasant day, cold night.” And, as Africans were worked to death around her a year later, Sarah Wilson urged a friend in Rhode Island to visit: a trip to Cuba “would do you good,” she wrote without irony, “why it would take fifteen years off.” She, like many Americans from the U.S. North, was at home among the dead.35

35. John Quincy Adams, Amistad Argument (Whitefish, MT, 2004), 20; Oct, 29, 1822, Joseph Goodwin Diary, NYHS; Sarah S. Wilson (Camarioca) to John D’Wolf (Bristol), Oct. 26, 1823, Box 16, Folder 8, D’Wolf Papers, BHS.