

Old-School

Season 1, Episode 2

“Bibleistic: The Poetry of Jupiter Hammon”

Chi: One of the most defining genres in American religious history is the jeremiad—the often fiery list of moral complaints or critiques that pastors like Jonathan Edwards used to exhort parishioners to *do* better and *be* better...or else face terrible spiritual consequences. As Edwards put it at the end of his famous 1741 sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,”

“...let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come.”

Chad: It’s one thing for a minister—someone with acknowledged power and authority—to tell fellow community members how to behave. But what happens when the person offering the spiritual instruction is of much lower social status? What if he’s Black and enslaved? And what if his name is Jupiter Hammon, and he works in the home of Mr. Henry Lloyd on Long Island in New York state, circa 1760?

[intro music: “Who Dat” by Amber Spill]

Chi: Welcome to Old-School! A podcast about African American studies and the classics. Our podcast today is called “Bibleistic,” and it’s all about America’s first published Black poet, Jupiter Hammon. I’m your host, Chiyuma Elliott.

Chad: And I’m your other host, Chad Hegelmeyer.

Chi: As you might have guessed from this episode’s title, Jupiter Hammon wrote religious poetry that told its readers how to behave.

Chad: He also wrote at least two overtly political essays, and an unpublished poem called “Essay on Slavery” which declares:

Our forefathers came from Africa
Tost over the raging main
To a Christian shore there for to stay
And not return again.

Dark and dismal was the Day
when Slavery began,

All humble thoughts were put away
then slaves were made by Man.

Chi: Today, on Old-School, we're talking about Hammon's "Bibleistic" writing. And we're taking you along on a trip to his former home on Long Island to talk with some members of the non-profit organization Preservation Long Island who are trying to answer questions about Hammon's life and the lives of the other enslaved people he lived and worked with.

Chad: Including: What was Jupiter Hammon's day-to-day life like? How exactly did he learn to read and write poetry when most people in the then-British colony of America—both free and enslaved—were illiterate? And what do we make of his poems now that they've been rediscovered, after over 150 years of obscurity?

Chi: Hammon's work and life circumstances offer a tiny, mysterious, Bibleistic window onto early American life and art. Stick around and look through it with us!

[Recorded sounds from the Joseph Lloyd manor: birds, insects, and cars driving by in the distance.]

Chad: I'm standing outside of the Joseph Lloyd Manor on Lloyd Neck, Long Island, on the 3,000-acre farm where Jupiter Hammon lived and worked for much of his long life. Lloyd Neck is a peninsula that extends into Long Island Sound from the island's north shore. It's really almost an island, a blocky piece of land connected to the rest of Long Island by a thin strip of sand called West Neck. It's a perfect autumn day. Newly fallen leaves are scattered all over the large lawn that slopes down from the house to the road and the shore of Lloyd Harbor. The water is perfectly still. It's peaceful and bucolic, though, as you'll hear, even out here the peace is interrupted occasionally by the ubiquitous Long Island road noise.

This is part of the north shore is colloquially called the Gold Coast, known for its late nineteenth and early 20th century mansions—think the West Egg nouveau riche and East Egg old money types from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. So even though I have seen photos of the Joseph Lloyd Manor on the internet, I'm still surprised by its contrast with those opulent homes. It's simple, symmetrical, and white—two stories with clapboard sides. There's a front porch with Greek Revival columns and small gabled dormers, but even these are features that were added on by later occupants. The Georgian core of the house is a vestige of a time before Long Island was a place for the rich of New York City to spend their summers, a time when it was instead an important agricultural area for the British colony of New York.

Chad: When we think about slavery in America, this isn't the landscape that comes to mind for most people. Mainly because it's in the North. But slavery was legal in the state of New York until 1848, though the state started gradually emancipating people in 1799, depending on their age. Gradual emancipation began when Jupiter Hammon was eighty-eight years old. Twenty years after he died, Sojourner Truth—another famous African American author—took her infant daughter and escaped from slavery in rural New York in 1826. Generations of people were enslaved here on Long Island, and in places like it throughout the state.

Chad: What made the estate of the Lloyd family unique was that enslaved people were taught to read and write here—even encouraged to do so. The Hammon family even had its own prayer book, and the ledgers of the Lloyd family include lines for other books purchased by the people they enslaved.

Chad: Jupiter Hammon was born just down the road in 1711. His parents, Obium and Rose, were both enslaved by Joseph Lloyd's father, Henry Lloyd. Jupiter grew up in Henry's house with Henry's three oldest children and wrote his first poem there when he was almost fifty years old. He spent the majority of his long life enslaved by three generations of the Lloyd family. After Henry's death in the 1760s, Jupiter was inherited by the third Lloyd son, Joseph, and moved down the road to this: Joseph's newly constructed manor house.

[sounds of walking through gravel, footsteps up the stairs and front porch]

Chad: Can we go in?

Brincat: Sure, yeah! You will notice, as soon as you walk in, so in 2020, on Jupiter Hammon's birthday, we formally recognized the house as a national literary landmark in his honor, which is very exciting.

Chad: That's Lauren Brincat, curator at Preservation Long Island.

Brincat: ...When Henry Lloyd moves here, and the house is built, he brings an enslaved labor force with him as well. So it's likely that that house and this house are framed up by enslaved people and cutting down the timbers and, you know, fashioning them to construct the frames of both these structures. And Hammon's born in that house the same year it's completed.

Chad: When you will start doing tours in this house about Jupiter Hammon, or even maybe when you were doing tours before, where do you start, what do you tell people?

Andrew: Yeah, so we usually start out on the porch here, and give sort of a general an introduction to the landscape, talk about the Matinecock and indigenous presence here.

Chad: That's Andrew Tharler, Preservation Long Island's Education and Engagement Director.

Tharler: There were excavations conducted since, I think, the '80s

Brincat: Um hmm...yeah

Tharler:...in different trenches around the property where they recovered projectile points

Chad: Hmm

Tharler:...What else, like?

Brincat: Potsherds

Tharler: Potsherds...there was like a baking pit for cooking oysters, right?

Brincat: Yeah, we recently reopened one of those units and found *tons* and *tons* of just, like, bivalves!

Tharler: Yeah!

Brincat: in there

[laughing]

Tharler: Yeah! So it was sort of a good way to begin. By reminding people of, like, you know, the longer history beyond the Lloyds on this landscape.

Chi: Most of the Lloyds were patriots who supported the Revolutionary War. So in 1776 when the British occupied Lloyd's neck and the Joseph Lloyd Manor House after the

Battle of Long Island, the family—including Jupiter—escaped across Long Island Sound to Connecticut, where they remained in exile until the end of the war.

Chi: Hammon published his most famous poem during the Revolutionary War: a 21-quatrain tribute honoring fellow African American poet Phillis Wheatley, who'd published her own book of poems three years earlier. Each quatrain of Hammon's rhyming tribute poem is linked to a Bible verse, and the whole thing was meant to encourage Wheatley's Christian faith life. After the war, in a speech, he reflected on that conflict. Hammon wrote,

“That liberty is a great thing we may know from our own feelings, and we may likewise judge so from the conduct of the white-people, in the late war. How much money has been spent, and how many lives have been lost, to defend their liberty. I must say that I have hoped that God would open their eyes, when they were so much engaged for liberty, to think of the state of the poor blacks, and to pity us.”

[source: “An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York”]

[sound of footsteps on wooden floors]

Brincat: We first acquired this house in 1968 and, we spent pretty much a decade researching, working on bringing this house back to the chosen time period of the post-Revolutionary War period so there—we have lots and lots of papers about the work that they did here. They did x-ray analysis of the woodwork, they did paint analyses, they dove back into the historical record, so there was a lot a lot of work, lots and lots of work that was done in that initial interpretation phase of this house. And that's kind of what's still here right now, and that we are rethinking with the Jupiter Hammon project...it was all about focusing on the prominent Lloyd family, as merchants, the aftermath of the American Revolution, the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, craftsmanship, the decorative arts, and so these were, you know, interpreted as historically accurate period rooms from the 17- you know, the mid-1780s, early 1790s. And the existence of a 1793 estate probate inventory taken at John Lloyd's death which itemizes all of the “stuff” that was in the house at the time, including Jupiter Hammon and a number of other enslaved people, guided, you know, what was put in these rooms.

Chad: I see.

Brincat: And how they were interpreted.

Chad: Yeah. Okay.

Brincat: Yeah, so there are...I believe there are ten enslaved people that are on that list, along with a suite of chairs. A pallet bed, things like that, are part of that estate inventory...

Chad: Okay.

Brincat: And Jupiter Hammon is specifically listed there.

Chad: Okay. Wow...

Tharler: Yeah. And something Lauren and I have been working on recently was how do you bring the story of Jupiter Hammon, but also other enslaved people, into a room like this...

Chad: Yeah

Tharler:...which is really set up to be all about, like, the wealth and status and luxury of the Lloyd family

Chad: Yeah

Tharler: So Lauren and I are sort of thinking about how can we take some of these objects that really are sort of emblematic of that—of that wealth—and sort of flip them to think about how they speak to the lives of the enslaved. So we—we talk about the mahogany chairs and the tea table as, you know, obviously really valuable objects that the Lloyds would have wanted displayed in their parlor, right, but also mahogany's sourced from Jamaica, the Bahamas, right, products that could not have been in this house without it being sort of entangled in these other, right, the broader network of slave labor

Chad: Yeah, and the Atlantic slave trade

Tharler: Exactly

Chad: Yeah, that's so interesting...

Brincat: The project for us is really about working with community stakeholders, having conversations, and having that guide what we ultimately do in terms of reinterpretation of this house.

Chad: Cool. Where should we go next?

Brincat: Let's go up.

[footsteps on stairs]

Tharler: So here we have the upstairs bed chambers, um, where John Junior and his wife Amelia probably slept and also their three children probably shared some of the rooms here, too.

[footsteps]

Tharler: This would have been sort of the nicest room in the house

Chad: Okay

Tharler: And you can see the nice classical details

Brincat: Done by a craftsman who came across the Sound from Connecticut...who was recommended by Joseph's brother, John.

Chad: Okay

Brincat: Who was like, "you should hire this guy Abner Osborn!"

[everyone laughing]

Brincat: Who does all of the interior architecture, so there was always talk about Abner Osborn and his apprentices building this house but like, they're doing the interior finishing

Tharler: The inside

Brincat: It is enslaved people who are really building this

Chad: Building the structure

Brincat: Who built the house and its structure

[footsteps on floorboards]

Chad: There was another question I had...Oh: so do we know anything about his education, why he was taught to read and write. Was it, like, for the purposes of him working in the family's business or, or..yeah, what do we know about that?

Tharler: So there are a few possible explanations for his literacy. I don't think we know exactly why, or which one is true, or it could be a combination of a few of them. One is that his father, Obium, may have been literate himself, and Obium's wife...Rose, who was also enslaved here, because we know that Jupiter inherited this book of prayers from Obium, right, and there's an inscription in the book...

Brincat: Yeah, so the book is missing. But there is record of it in that 1870s article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* that describes it in detail and actually describes the inscriptions in it. So it's like, "Obium, his book" and then there's a date, and then there's another inscription below it with a date, and it says "Jupiter Lloyd" actually, or like "God give him grace," or something like that. So there is this indication that, you know, Obium owned it and then it was given to Jupiter, who is his son. And we do know that there were a number of enslaved people who were literate in this house because in the Henry Lloyd ledgers, there are records of not only Jupiter getting and purchasing a Bible but others as well who were enslaved in this household acquiring prayer books.

Chad: Okay...

Brincat: And also, like, getting sheets of paper. And other enslaved people acquiring prayer books. And so a big part of what we still need to do is to dive back into those primary sources, particularly those ledgers that are not transcribed and not digitized. And to spend some, some good amount of time just going through them...and kind of bringing to the forefront these references to enslaved people.

Brincat: More and more, we think Hammon was a preacher. In our conversations from the second Jupiter Hammon Project Roundtable and working with a poet-performer who has done a lot of reciting of his works that it seems like this is something that was probably meant to be, you know, presented

verbally. And maybe even set to music, and very connected to the West African griot tradition. And so that's more and more the kind of feeling about the delivery of his poetry.

Chad: Oh, that's so fascinating!

Brincat: He probably was, you know, a minister of some sort. And there's a really interesting—I don't remember the date right now, but there's a diary for a woman in Oyster Bay who talks about going to see a Black man preach. And this is a part of the town of Oyster Bay, so that's not too far away. So it's tantalizing to think that that person, that Black man, was Jupiter Hammon.

Tharler: And I think, like, the orality, the potential orality, of Jupiter's poetry is something I'm interested in...

Chad: Yes!

Brincat: Yeah!

Tharler: I also have a background in classics, and so when I think of orality, I think of, like, epitaphs and type-scenes and formulae, and I think you can see some of those techniques in his poems with like the repetition

Chad: Yes!

Tharler: Even between poems, his little phrases stay together and get recontextualized in different ways in different poems

Chad: Yes! I'm, I'm so glad you brought that up because going back to the early twentieth century rediscovery of some of his poetry, it was so interesting to read people *complaining* about the repetitiveness of his poetry. Like, over and over again. Someone like Oscar Wegelin would say, like, "Oh, he's not that great of a poet! It's really repetitive."

Brincat: Right

Tharler: Hmm

Chad: And I'm like, "What are you *talking* about?"

Tharler: Yeah. Read Homer.

Chad: Clearly, this is part of an oral, or even, like, homiletic, you know, type of tradition.

Brincat: Um hmm. Yep. Yeah.

Chad: But there are also parts of it that feel really weirdly modern because of that repetition. His, like, *slight* changes to the context of the exact same or very similar line that totally changes its meaning.

Brincat: Yeah

Chad: So, that's so fascinating that you bring up, like, the oral potential [skip words], like, what was the purpose of these poems? They clearly have this very, like, evangelical purpose to them, but they're also very *introspective* and, like, prayerful and lament-ful, and all kinds of things happen simultaneously. It's really interesting...

Tharler: Also they're also just *stuffed* with Biblical allusions, and references to specific verses...so this is sort of, like, the stuff he's drawing from....potentially.

Chi: For centuries after his death, Hammon was forgotten. Americans generally thought of Phillis Wheatley as the first Black poet. But in 1915, a collector named Oscar Wegelin found Hammon's poem "An Evening Thought" in the New-York Historical Society's archive and realized that it had been published twenty-four years before Wheatley was born. Wegelin announced his discovery by publishing a small collection of Hammon's known poems along with a short biographical introduction. In it, he evaluated the poetry in a shockingly condescending way: "Hammon was undoubtedly deeply religious, but his religion was somewhat tinged with narrowness and superstition, a not uncommon fault of the time in which he lived and wrote...It seems too bad that his verse is entirely of a religious nature. Much would have been added to its interest had he written about some of the events that were transpiring all around him during the War for Independence and the years that followed that struggle."

Chi: If we stop thinking about the prominence of the Bible as a problem in Hammon's poetry, it frees us up to consider what it's actually doing. Hammon uses scripture to reflect on his own historical and social context. He uses the authority of preaching and the Bible to talk about his complicated position as an enslaved person, as an educated

person, as a Christian, and as a poet who has lived through the War for Independence and the tumultuous beginnings of the United States.

Chi: One of the most dramatic things that Jupiter Hammon does in his poetry is use Christianity to critique slavery. He addresses the “slaves obey your masters” Biblical injunctions that were so popular with slave owners: he says enslaved people are only required to fulfill lawful commands; he emphasizes the importance of the comfort and happiness and peacefulness of enslaved people; and he confronts head-on the real difficulty of obedience when one objects to the institution of slavery itself. Throughout, he focuses on what he thinks are universal moral laws and first principles of behavior. In his poems and his prose, he rejects the commonplace idea back then that Black people were tainted or lesser in the eyes of God. As he told an audience once, “If we should ever get to Heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black, or for being slaves.” [source: “Address to Negroes of the State of New York”]. In Section 25, the Master in one of Hammon’s poetic dialogues says this to his Servant:

My Servant, we are sinners all,
But follow after grace;
I pray that God would bless thy soul,
And fill thy heart with grace.

Chi: They have different roles in life, but in these essential things—having souls, sinning, praying, and repenting—the two of them are equals. Most of the poem is the two of them talking to one another. But at one point in the dialogue, the Servant addresses the poem’s readers directly. Here’s what the servant says to us:

Believe me now my Christian friends,
Believe your friend call'd HAMMON:
You cannot to your God attend,
And serve the God of Mammon.

[source: section 27 of “The Kind Master and Dutiful Servant”]

Chi: I love that Hammon name-drops *himself* in the middle of that exhortation to be faithful and non-materialistic! One of the things that makes him different from the totally fire-and-brimstone Great Awakening preachers like Jonathan Edwards is the fact that Hammon calls himself “your friend.” And he does this more than once! He’s your relatable friend who’s praying for you and with you, and empathizing when you mess up, and letting you know about the risks of worldliness.

[footsteps]

Chad: Is there an explicitly religious reason for, you know, educating one's slaves?

Tharler: We know that Jupiter Hammon, when he's born to the Henry Lloyd house, the Lloyd family are sort of, you know, very prominent, enthusiastic Anglicans...

Brincat: So, yeah, it's a little interesting. So there have been references to the Lloyds, so they are Anglican, they actually travel for some time before there is Episcopal church here in Huntington to Connecticut to worship, and are involved in the establishment locally of the Episcopal church. So probably involved in the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

Chad: Okay...

Brincat: Um, which, you know, its mission is to educate enslaved people.

Tharler: And the last, I think, little little bit of evidence is: we know that near the Henry Lloyd House, the original house, there was a small schoolhouse building built.

Brincat: Um hmm

Tharler: You know, people are imagining Jupiter receiving some kind of education in his youth, maybe he was educated in that sort of purpose-built building next to the Henry Lloyd House.

Chad: Yeah. Okay.

Brincat: I think it was Ebenezer Pemberton Jr. who actually talks about how his mother, who was deeply religious, you know, devoted the Sabbath to educating everyone in her household how to read. So how to read the Bible.

Brincat: And then Andrew's mentioning Mary Clark, who was the second wife of Henry Lloyd, she's actually a Congregationalist. And she has connections to the Congregational church in Boston.

Brincat: So it's [Mary Clark Lloyd's] son [Ebenezer Pemberton, Jr.] who knew Phillis Wheatley, who was one of the prominent members of Boston who attested to the authorship of her poems who delivered a letter to Ober Tanner...

Chad: Okay.

Brincat: for Phillis Wheatley, and so Hammon is not that far connected personally from Phillis Wheatley through, you know, the Lloyd family. Through Henry Lloyd's second wife.

Chad: Thus his "Address to Phillis Wheatley"!

Brincat: Exactly!

Chad: I mean, like that makes sense...

Brincat: And...I wonder, you know, he goes to Boston with Joseph to visit James, Joseph's brother, and Wheatley's in Boston at that time. And...

Chad: So there is some possibility that they even met.

Brincat: Did they meet? Who knows?

Chad: Wow! That's amazing...

Brincat: Yeah...

[footsteps on floorboards]

Brincat: And one thing we've been experimenting with on the house recently is moving people through the space in different ways. So we had barriers here and people couldn't walk into the rooms. But now we're bringing people, you know, through all of these interior spaces, um, to get a sense of how different people would have moved and experienced this house.

Brincat: So this room, until fairly recently, was an education office. And when we brought the Jupiter Hammon Project Advisory Council in here for the first time, we did a walk through this house, and the president of the town of Huntington African American Historic Designation Council walked into this room and was like, "This is the enslaved quarter." And it had never been part of the tour, and,

you know, that prompted us to clear out this room and think more about how we engage people with the space and try to bring people in here. And it makes complete sense that this was the enslaved quarter in the house if you think about how you can access the rest of the house from this room, the back stair is right there.

Chad: Accessibility. Yeah...

Brincat: Which brings you into the kitchen. You can go to the basement from there and then you access the back hall. This room here—this bedchamber—was likely Joseph's, and so there's direct passageway from that room into there as well.

Brincat: So what we're doing in here is, a lot of our research is trying to bring to the forefront and learn more about the lives of *everyone* who was enslaved here, not just Jupiter Hammon. And so this projection recognizes about 50 people who the Lloyds enslaved across the eighteenth century.

Chad: One of the things they've done is commission a video installation from Malik Work, a writer and performer who does this amazing reading of Hammon's essay on slavery. A poem which was written in this house. The video projects onto the wall of the room.

Brincat: It takes a little bit to get going...

Tharler: Yeah

Chad: So we've got a projector projecting names onto the wall of this room...presumably of different enslaved people who were here on the estate? That's what the names are? Or were they people who participated in the reading? [laughing]

Brincat: People who the Lloyd family enslaved. Something that we found in our research into the enslaved population as well is that there was someone enslaved in this house at the same time named Michael Cox, who was a musician, who played the violin and who read sheet music, and so the potential for the fact that also the oration of his poetry could have been also accompanied with music...

[instrumental organ music plays in the video that is being projected onto the wall]

Malik Work:

Our forefathers came from Africa
Tost over the raging main
To a Christian shore there for to stay
And not return again.

Dark and dismal was the Day
when Slavery began,
All humble thoughts were put away
then slaves were made by Man.

When God doth please for to permit...

Chad: About two minutes in, the video starts toggling between images of Work reciting Hammon's words, and the names of all the people who were enslaved here. It makes the wall of the house into a kind of tribute or a memorial, starting with these names: Sarah, Elkina, Oweyou, Boston, Brigit, Tom, Richard, Tony, and Hannah. Hammon's words, and the litany of names, stretches on and on. The prayer, and the sheer number of people who Hammon literally prayed with and for, seems so vast:

Work: Each humble voice..

Chad: Phillis...

Work: with songs resound
That slavery is no more.
Then shall we rejoice and sing
Loud praises to our God
Come sweet Jesus heavenly king
Thou art the Son our Lord.

Chad: Obediah... [20:55]

Work: We are they children blessed Lord
Thought still in slavery
We'll seek thy precepts Love thy word
Until the day we die.

Chad: Nero [21:04]

Work: Come blessed Jesus hear us now
And teach our hearts to pray
And seek the Lord to whom we bow
Before tribunal day.

Chad: Caesar [21:13]

Work: Now glory be unto our God
All praise be justly given
Come seek his precepts Love his works
That is the way to heaven.

Chad: Maria [21:24]

Chad: One of the most striking things about visiting this property is confronting the mixture of generosity and exploitation that Hammon experienced here. On the one hand, his faith life was encouraged and fostered by the Lloyds, who believed that literacy was an important way to promote Christian reflection for everyone, regardless of race. On the other hand, legally, he was their property, and he wasn't always treated kindly or respectfully or fairly. For example, when Hammon dies, the Lloyds reclaim an orchard that they'd given to him instead of letting him pass it on to the extended family members who took care of him when he was old and infirm.

Tharler: I don't know the details from the primary sources, but I think there is some indication

Brincat: Okay

Tharler: that at some point, the Lloyd family gives Jupiter an orchard of his own, that he may have derived some income from during his lifetime. So, after Jupiter is emancipated around 1793, he goes to live in Huntington with his grand-nephew Benjamin and Benjamin's wife, Phoebe. Um, and then after Jupiter's death, it seems that the Lloyd family repossesses his orchard. And so they sort of deny Jupiter's family a sort of income and an intergenerational wealth that they otherwise would have received and had been living, maybe to some extent, had been living off of.

Brincat: Um hmm.

Tharler: And so, as a result of that, we know that Benjamin goes to appeal to the Overseers of the Poor in Huntington, so

Brincat: He has to sell the house.

Tharler: Right. Yeah.

Brincat: So Benjamin Hammon was the—I think the first Black man to purchase a house in the town of Huntington. And there is a Census record that comes up, an 1800 listing, you know, Jupiter, Benjamin, and so the feeling has always been that Jupiter probably supported that young family with some income from his orchard. And so when he passes away, Benjamin and Phoebe not only, you know, experience this personal loss, but financial setback as well.

Chad: Wow...

Brincat: Because it's around that time he has to sell the house.

Chad: Wow.

Tharler: That story's sort of a way for us to speak more probably about the legacy of slavery. The outcomes of the Lloyd family versus

Chad: Yeah

Tharler: Jupiter and his family.

Brincat: And also complicate, too, in bringing to this discussion his "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York," which is a really *complex* piece of prose! It requires a lot of reading between the lines. And understanding the historical context around it being written, and what prompted Hammon to say what he said in it about his personal freedom.

Chad: Lauren Brincat is talking about a speech Hammon gave in New York City in the fall of 1786, when he was just about to turn 76 years old. In the speech, Hammon said that he himself didn't want to be emancipated. But he told the audience that he wanted other Black people to be free, especially the young people. This is surprising to people today. Why wouldn't someone want to be free? But look at it this way: back then, emancipating old people was seen by many as abdicating responsibility. You've gotten all the hard labor out of someone...and then you abandon them when they're too old or

infirm to take care of themselves. New York state even passed a law prohibiting the practice, but not until after Hammon had already been emancipated by the Lloyds.

Brincat: ...and then what ends up happening in reality is that Amelia Lloyd, the widow of John Lloyd II, manumit-, probably manumits Jupiter Hammon despite him being in his eighties and him professing his reservations about his own personal freedom.

Chad: Yeah...

Brincat: You know, being full aware that there is no social safety net for him, for elderly, you know, persons who are indifferently emancipated by enslavers. And so, you know, that causes him to express that. But then that happens to him.

Brincat: But yeah, this is also just right before gradual emancipation, Hammon, you know, doesn't have any children and so he is fortunate that there is family, there is this community around him

Chad: Okay.

Brincat: that is able to care for him in his elder years.

Chad: Okay.

Brincat: Where Hammon ends up living becomes like a pretty significant Black community in the town of Huntington, um, and the local Bethel A.M.E. Church is kind of there and is founded years later but is a part of this same community that he ends up living in at the end of his life.

Chad: That's very cool...

Chad: Jupiter Hammon wrote beautiful poetry here and prayed and maybe preached sermons and ran a lot of errands for the family and tended the gardens and orchards and the land....

He read the Bible and listened to music played by fellow slaves and thought and wrote about weighty subjects such as faith, the meaning of life, the purpose of liberty, the joys of peace, wartime suffering, the gifts of fellow artists, and what we owe to—and hope for—the younger generations.

Chad: Over 150 years after Hammon died, the poet James Weldon Johnson penned a tribute poem to his African American poetic predecessors that feels germane, called “O Black and Unknown Bards.” The poem ends like this:

You sang not deeds of heroes or of kings;
No chant of bloody war, no exulting pean
Of arms-won triumphs; but your humble strings
You touched in chord with music empyrean.
You sang far better than you knew; the songs
That for your listeners' hungry hearts sufficed
Still live,—but more than this to you belongs:
You sang a race from wood and stone to Christ.

[Source: <https://poets.org/poem/o-black-and-unknown-bards>]

[outdoor sounds of wind, birds, insects, and footsteps through gravel]

Chad: After I toured the Lloyd House, I spent some time just walking around outside, taking it all in. Walking where Jupiter Hammon walked and thought. I headed down the hill and looked out over the water, and thought about this amazing, groundbreaking writer who was forgotten for so long, but now is finally being remembered as a key part of America’s literary story. That recognition is overdue, but it feels like poetic justice. And I feel lucky that I get to see it happen...

[theme music: “Who Dat” by Amber Spill]

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Chi: Check out our show notes if you want some reading recommendations, or to find our mini-podcast about one of Hammon’s poems. You can find them at the African American Intellectual Traditions website: aaiti.berkeley.edu.

Chi: See you later back at the podcast; our next episode is about the inimitable W. E. B. Du Bois. And Shakespeare! It’s Black + Classics, folks! Thanks for listening to Old-School. Bye for now.