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Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery FREE

[Vincent Brown](#)

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ABOARD the *Hudibras* in 1786, in the course of a harrowing journey from Africa to America, a popular woman died in slavery. Although she was “universally esteemed” among her fellow captives as an “oracle of literature,” an “orator,” and a “songstress,” she is anonymous to historians because the sailor on the slave ship who described her death, the young William Butterworth, did not record her name. Yet he did note that her passing caused a minor political tumult when the crew herded the other enslaved women below decks before they could see the body of their fallen shipmate consigned to the water. This woman was no alienated isolate to be hurled over the side of the ship without ceremony. She had been, according to Butterworth, the “soul of sociality” when the women were on the quarterdeck. There she...

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