

ABSTRACT
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING: A CRITICAL EDITION OF
A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE AND TRAVELS
OF MRS. NANCY PRINCE (1856)

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Marquette University, 2024

This dissertation expands on current knowledge of how Black women of the early nineteenth century not only participated in political and social movements within the United States but were instrumental in effecting fundamental social and economic progress both domestically and abroad. They did this while grappling with what their US citizenship meant to them within a gendered and race-based hierarchy. In the process, they had their own labor to sustain their livelihood and apprenticed the future labor of others.

Centering on Nancy Gardner Prince (1799-1859), a Black activist born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, I explore how Prince was not an exception among Black Northern women but part of a small and burgeoning class who were not born with “slave” status,— and who were educated in religious schools,— and who represented the beginnings of a Black middle class in the antebellum United States. Using the 1856 edition of Prince’s *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* as the copy-text, and as the last text, to our current knowledge, that Prince had editorial control over, I have annotated her work with historical and biographical details to better understand her restraints, and conversely, where she received encouragement. Further, I seek circumstances linked to environmental factors, events that were the result of international relations and subsequent wars, and activism from more well-known people to show how these occurrences acted upon Prince and how she responded to them.

By providing an in-depth critical introduction that includes original biographical research pertaining to Prince’s family tree, I relay the timeline of her *Narrative* through a historicist lens, identifying how other activists either supported or tried to obstruct her activism. The annotated 1856 edition then follows, and the edition concludes with a publishing history and comparative textual analysis of the work’s three editions. I also include newspaper articles about or written by Prince along with correspondence relating to Prince’s activism.

Through this scholarly edition of Prince’s 1856 *Narrative*, we can learn from her experience as businesswoman, educator, and missionary to inform a truer United States history.