

Forum

Journey of the MLA Job Candidates

A bunch of us new PhDs went together,
 And a cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year—
 For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The roads hubcap-deep in slush,
 The airport jammed with holiday families,
 Little kids lying down on the concourse floor,
 Snot-nosed, screaming, refractory,
 Even the Hare Krishnas cursing and grumbling,
 The ticket agents hostile, the flight attendants unfriendly,
 The plane packed, cramped, and filthy,
 And two bucks for one drink!
 Who had two bucks? We were grad students, for Christ's sake!
 I could only sleep in snatches, too,
 Though it was the red-eye flight,
 Because I could still hear Dad
 Muttering as he loaned me the airfare,
 "You could've gone to B-school."

We touched down at dawn—I hate dawn—
 All of us smelling like last week's armpits,
 But at least no snow; instead it was raining.
 Raining? Pouring! The streets ran like rivers,
 So we pooled our pennies and split a cab
 To the three conference hotels downtown.
 It was packed six-deep at check-in and registration,
 And the information board was chaos,
 And if you asked anyone for directions
 They ran away—I just felt like kicking somebody—

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But we finally found the bullpen just in time,
And since I'm here, I guess you could say it went OK.

You've got to remember, all this was a long time ago,
And I might do it again, but set down
This set down
This: Sorry, lost my train of thought
There: But think about
This: Do you want to go all that way
For one lousy interview?
They'll hire you certainly,
I know your CV and have no doubt.
But there are jobs, and there are Jobs.
I know being a part-time temp at your alma mater
Is hard and kind of embarrassing,
With all your old crowd gone off
And the new bunch seeming like aliens to you,
But for a position teaching five sections of comp?
Tenure-track or not, I'd rather die.

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Deciphering the Equiano Archives

TO THE EDITOR:

In his "The Other Interesting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano's Public Book Tour" (121 [2006]: 1424–42), John Bugg welcomes my "company in studying the book tour" Equiano took throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland between 1789 and 1794 (1438n2). To my earlier narration of the tour in *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (U of Georgia P, 2005), Bugg has added several letters Equiano published in newspapers during those years, as well as indications of Equiano's posthumous reception history. Bugg has clearly done some rewarding and welcome archival digging. Readers of *PMLA* will decide for themselves the extent to which Bugg's account of Equiano's book tour and its implications overlap with my own.

Several comments and suggestions Bugg makes in the first section of his article, however, require a response. His assertion that I "claim that Equiano was born in South Carolina" misrepresents my position (1424). In my biography I say that if the baptismal and naval records are accurate, Equiano was born in South Carolina, and not Africa. I admit that "[r]easonable doubt raised by the recent biographical discoveries inclines me to believe that

the accounts of Africa and the Middle Passage in *The Interesting Narrative* were constructed—and carefully so—rather than actually experienced and that the author probably invented an African identity. But we must remember that reasonable doubt is not the same as conviction. We will probably never know the truth about the author's birth and upbringing" (xiv–xv). Similarly, citing an article I published in 2003 in which I mistakenly say that Equiano did not publicly claim an African nativity before the 1780s, Bugg ignores my more recent observation in the biography that Equiano may have first made such a claim in 1779 (197).

Bugg and I disagree about likely interpretations of evidence found in Equiano's naval records. Since the grounds for his disagreement are anticipated and addressed at length in chapter 7 of my biography, I shall treat the issues only briefly here. Citing David Waldstreicher's "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic" (*William and Mary Quarterly* 56 [1999]: 243–72), Bugg suggests that "Equiano may have listed an American birthplace to deflect those pursuing runaway slaves" (1425). His suggestion, however, overlooks Waldstreicher's caveat that "[a]ny effort to appreciate the nature and impact of