



## PHILIP FRENEAU, *The British Prison-Ship*, 1781

*Heavens! may I never feel the poignant pain, / To live subjected to such brutes again;*

Known as the Poet of the American Revolution, Philip Freneau wrote *The British Prison Ship* as the first-person account of a six-week ordeal on British prison ships, on which an estimated 11,500 Americans died during the war. Although some facts in the poem conflict with ships' records and Freneau's own prose account, it is likely that Freneau was describing his own experiences as a young prisoner in his twenties.<sup>1</sup> Presented here are the imprisonment sections of the first and least-known version, published only months after Freneau's release in summer 1780. He revised the poem six times over the next three decades, retaining the details of the prisoners' harsh treatment but removing his furied denunciations of Britain. Included in the sidebars are selections from Freneau's prose narrative, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, written in 1780 and published in 1899.

As recounted in Canto I, the privateer *Aurora* was captured in 1780 while sailing down the Delaware River, its destination St. Eustatia in the western Caribbean islands. It was taken to New York harbor where Britain moored most of its prison ships during the war. See map, p. 2. (A privateer was a privately owned warship, usually commissioned to attack the enemy's commercial ships.) What follows is the entire text of Cantos II through IV.

### CANTO II. *The Prison Ship.*

THE various horrors of these hulks to tell,  
 These Prison Ships where pain and sorrow dwell;  
 Where death in tenfold vengeance holds his reign,  
 And injur'd ghosts, in reason's ear, complain;  
 This be my talk — ungenerous Britons, you,  
 Conspire to murder those you can't subdue;  
 Why else no art of cruelty untry'd, —  
 Such heavy vengeance and such hellish pride? —  
 Death has no charms — his empires barren lie, —  
 A desert country and a clouded sky; —  
 Death has no charms except in British eyes, —  
 See how they court the bleeding sacrifice!  
 See how they pant to stain the world with gore,  
 And millions murdered, still would murder more;  
 This selfish race from all the world disjoin'd,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Weatherspoon Bowden, "In Search of Freneau's Prison Ships," *Early American Literature*, 14:2 (Fall 1979), 174-192.

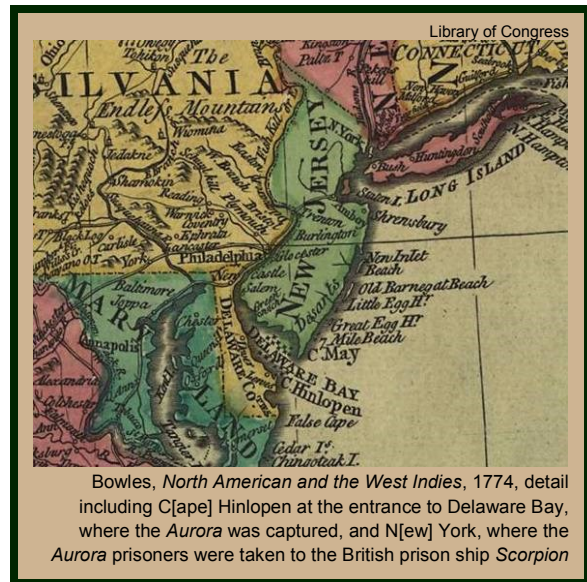
Eternal discord sow among mankind;  
 Aim to extent their empire o'er the ball,  
 Subject, destroy, absorb and conquer all;  
 As if the power that form'd us did condemn  
 All other nations to be slaves to them;—  
 “A generous nation” — is their endless cry,  
 But truth revolts against the daring lie;  
 Compassion shuns them, an unwelcome guest,  
 They to humanity are foes profess'd;  
 In their dark bosoms pity claims no share,  
 For God in anger never plac'd it there:  
 A brutal courage is their ruling pride,  
 For one short hour of fame have thousands died;  
 All nations they abhor, detest, decry,  
 But their dear race emblazon to the sky;  
 As if the sun for Britain only shone,  
 And all mankind were made for her alone.

Weak as I am, I'll try my strength today,  
 And my best arrows at these hell-hounds play;  
 To future years their bloody deeds prolong,  
 And hang them up to infamy in song.

So much I suffer'd from the race I hate,  
 So near they shov'd me to the brink of fate;  
 When seven long weeks in these damn'd hulks I lay,  
 Barr'd down by night and fainting through the day;  
 In the fierce fervors of the solar beam,  
 Cool'd by no breeze on Hudson's mountain stream;  
 That not unsung these horrid deeds shall fall,  
 To black oblivion that wou'd cover all;  
 Not unreveng'd shall all the woes we bore,  
 Be swallow'd up inglorious as before:  
 The dreadful secrets of these prison caves,  
*Half sunk, half floating* on my *Hudson's* waves;  
 The muse shall tell nor shall her voice be vain,  
 Mankind must shrink with horror at the strain;  
 To such a race the rights of men deny,  
 And blame the tardy vengeance of the sky.

See with what pangs yon' wasted *victim* dies,  
 With not a friend to close his languid eyes!—  
 He late, perhaps too eager for the fray,  
 Chas'd the vile Briton o'er the wat'ry way;  
 Or close array'd — a stranger to all fear,—  
 Hurl'd the loud thunder from his privateer.

Thus do our warriors, thus our heroes fall,  
 Imprison'd here, quick ruin meets them all;  
 Or sent afar to Britain's barbarous shore,  
 There die neglected and return no more.—  
 Ah, when shall quiet to my soul return,



Bowles, *North American and the West Indies*, 1774, detail including [C]ape Hinlopen at the entrance to Delaware Bay, where the *Aurora* was captured, and [N]ew York, where the *Aurora* prisoners were taken to the British prison ship *Scorpion*

Freneau was released in mid July 1780 and returned to his home in New Jersey. He likely began to write the poem soon after his return, as well as transcribing his prose account. [See footnote 1.]

*Hudson*: Hudson River, where the prison ship was moored.

Freneau was a passenger on the *Aurora*, not a seaman, and was assured that he could stay aboard the *Aurora* and be freed on its arrival in New York, but another officer insisted he board the *Iris* with the captured crew. It appears, also, that the *Aurora* captain had listed Freneau as a gunner instead of a passenger.

“[I said] I was a passenger, going on my private business to the islands, and insisted that such usage was cruel, inhuman, and unjust. He asked me if I was not a colonist; I told him I was an American. Then, said he, you have no right to expect favors more than others.”

Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, 1780, publ. 1899

And anguish in this bosom cease to burn;—  
 What frequent deaths in midnight vision rise!  
 (Once real) now all ghastly to my eyes,  
 Youths there expiring for their country lay,  
 And burnt by fevers breath'd their souls away;  
 Where, now so cruel to deny a grave,  
 They plung'd them downward in the parting wave;  
 The parting wave received them to its breast,  
 And Hudson's sandy bed is now their place of rest;  
 In slumbers deep I hear the *farewell* sigh,  
 Pale, plaintive ghosts with feeble accent cry;  
 At distance far with sickly aspect move,  
 And beg for vengeance at the throne of Jove.

### CANTO III.

#### *The Prison Ship, continued.*

**N**o masts nor sails these sickly hulks adorn,  
 Dismal to view! neglected and forlorn;—  
 Here mighty ills oppress the imprison'd throng,  
 Dull were our slumbers, and our nights were long;  
 From morn to night throughout the decks we lay,  
 Scorch'd into fevers by the solar ray;  
 Wretched and poor, insulted and distress'd;  
 The eye dejected, and the heart depress'd;  
 Stripped of our all — affronted and derided,  
 For cruel *Iris* had our clothes divided.—  
 No friendly *awning* cast a welcome shade,  
 Once was it promis'd but was never made;  
 No favors could these sons of death bestow,  
 'Twas endless cursing — ever-during woe;—  
 Immortal hatred doth their breasts engage,  
 And this lost empire arms their souls with rage.

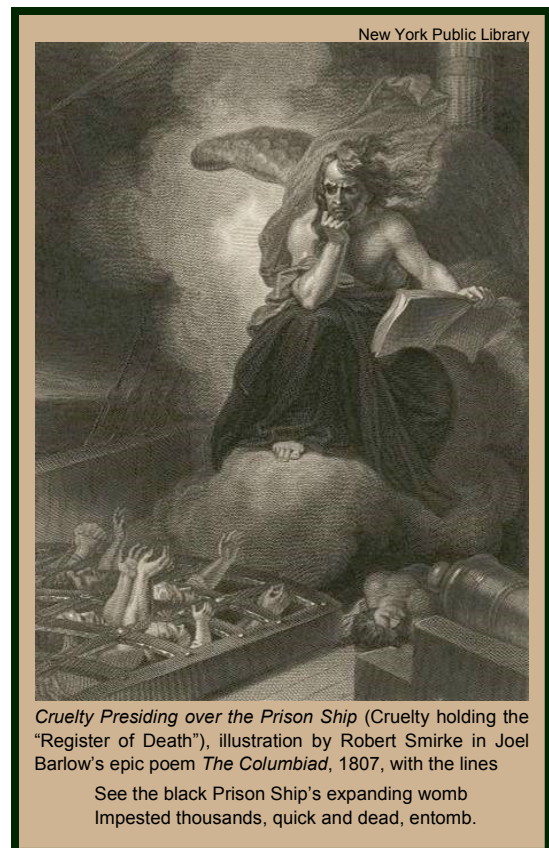
Two hulks on Hudson's rugged bosom lie,  
 Two, farther south, affront the gazing eye.  
 There the black *Scorpion* at her mooring rides,  
 There swings *Strombolo*, yielding to the tides;  
 Here bulky *Jersey* fills a larger space,  
 And *Hunter* to all hospitals disgrace.

Thou *Scorpion*, fatal to thy crowded throng,  
 Dire theme of horror and Plutonian song;  
 Requir'st my lay — thy sult'ry decks I know,  
 And all the evils of thy holds *below*;  
 Must nature shudder at this scene of fears,  
 And must I tell what must provoke thy tears;  
 American! — inactive rest no more,  
 But drive those murd'rous Britons from your shore;  
 And ye that o'er the troubled ocean go,  
 Strike not your standards to this cruel foe;

Freneau was transferred from the British ship *Iris* to the prison ship *Scorpion* on June 1, 1780.

"At sundown we were ordered down between the decks to the number of nearly three hundred of us. The best lodging I could procure this night was on a chest, almost suffocated with the heat and stench. I expected to die before morning, but human nature can bear more than one would at first suppose. The want of bedding and the loss of all my clothes rendered me wretched indeed; besides the uncertainty of being exchanged [released], for who would assure me that I should not lie six or eight months in this horrid prison?"

Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, 1780, publ. 1899



*Cruelty Presiding over the Prison Ship* (Cruelty holding the "Register of Death"), illustration by Robert Smirke in Joel Barlow's epic poem *The Columbiad*, 1807, with the lines

See the black Prison Ship's expanding womb  
 Impested thousands, quick and dead, entomb.

In New York harbor, the British prison ships *Scorpion* and *Strombolo* were anchored in the Hudson (North) River, the *Jersey* and the *Hunter* in the East River. Scholar Mary W. Bowden, Freneau's biographer, notes his placement error in the poem. [See footnote 1.]

Better the greedy wave should swallow all,  
 Better to meet the death-conducting ball;  
 Better to sleep on ocean's Oozy bed,  
 At once destroy'd and number'd with the dead;  
 Than thus to perish in this dismal den,  
 Starv'd and insulted by the worst of men.  
 Some cruel ruffian o'er these hulks presides,  
 Clinton to *such* the imprison'd host confides;  
 Some wretch who, banish'd from the navy crew,  
 Grown old in blood would here his trade renew;  
 Whose venom'd tongue when on his charge let loose,  
 Utters reproaches, scandal, and abuse;  
 Gives all to hell who dare *his* king disown,  
 And swears the world was made for George alone.

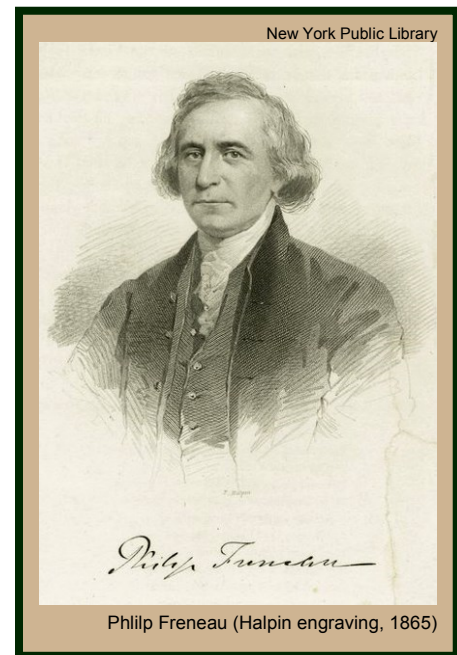
Such are the men who rule the captives there,—  
 A menial tribe their brutal feelings share;  
 Stewards and Mates whom fam'd Britannia bore,  
 Cut from the gallows on their native shore;  
 Heavens! may I never feel the poignant pain,  
 To live subjected to such brutes again;  
 Their ghastly looks and vengeance-bearing eyes,  
 Still to my view in all their horrors rise;  
 O may I ne'er review these dire abodes,  
 These piles for slaughter floating on the floods;  
 Natures recoils in agonies of woe,  
 And truth astonish'd, asks, Can this be so?—

American, on thy own plains expire,  
 A glorious victim to the hostile fire;  
 In thy own ship expect the deadly blow,  
 But be no captive to this tyrant foe;  
 Yield not alive to glut their greedy jaws,  
 First faint, first perish in thy country's cause;  
 Prefer to meet the winged, wasteful ball,  
 And cut to atoms for lov'd freedom fall.  
 Such scenes are acted in these gloomy cells,  
 Such horror in these doleful mansions dwells;  
 So many ills these loathsome hulks defame,  
 That *to be here* and *suffer* is the same;  
 Death has its woes and sickness claims its share,  
 But both are trifles if you die not there;  
 When to the ocean dives the parting sun,  
 And the scorch'd Tories fire their evening gun;\*  
 A scene of horror rises to the view,  
 Such as the boldest painter never drew;  
 Three hundred prisoners banish'd from the light,  
 Below the decks in torment, spend the night;  
 Some for a bed their tatter'd clothing join,  
 And some on chests, and some on floors recline;  
 Shut from the blessings of the cooling air,  
 Pensive they lie, all anguish and despair;

*Clinton*: General Sir Henry Clinton, commander in chief of British troops in America; headquartered in New York City.

*George*: King George III.

*Stewards and Mates . . . Cut from the gallows*: Many British crewmen were prisoners released to military service.



\*The evening gun was commonly fired from a little fortification called the Refugee fort, north of King's College [now Columbia University in New York City] — at the discharge we were constantly driven below decks, our tormentors crying out, Down Yankees.  
 [Freneau note]

From later version of *Prison-Ship*:  
 "Down, rebels, down!" the angry Scotchmen cry,  
 "Damn'd dogs, descend, or by our broad swords die!"

Meager and sad and scorch'd with heat below,  
They look like ghosts 'ere death had made them so;  
How should they bloom where heat and hunger join,  
Thus to debase the human form divine;  
Where cruel thirst the parching throat invades,  
Dries up the man, and fits him for the shades.

No waters laded from the bubbling spring,  
To these dire ships the *generous* Britons bring;  
Oft through the night in vain their captives ask,  
One drop of water from the stinking cask;  
No drop is granted to the earnest prayer,  
To *Dives* in the regions of despair;  
The loathsome cask, a fatal dose contains,  
Its poison bearing through the alter'd veins;  
Hence fevers rage where health was seen before,  
And the lank veins abound with blood no more.

O how they long to taste the woodland streams,  
For these they pine in frantic feverish dreams;  
To springs and brooks with weary steps they go,  
And seem to hear the gushing waters flow;  
Along the purling wave they think they lie,  
Quaff the sweet dream and all contented die;—  
Then start from dreams that fright the restless mind,  
And still new torments in their prison find.

Dull flow the hours till from the sky display'd,  
Sweet morn dispels the horrors of the shade;  
But what to them is morn's delightful ray,  
Sad and distressful as the close of day;  
At distance far appears the dewy green,  
And leafy trees on mountain tops are seen;  
But they no groves nor grassy mountains tread,  
Mark'd for a longer journey to the dead.

At every hatch a group of sentries stands,  
Cull'd from the Scottish or the English bands;  
As tigers fierce for human blood they thirst,  
Rejoice in slaughter, as in slaughter nurs'd;  
Of restless, cruel, angry, iron soul,  
Take these, my friend, as samples of the whole;  
Black as the clouds that shade St. Kilda's\* shore,  
Wild as the winds that round her mountains roar;  
Their hearts with malice to our country swell,  
*Because in former days we us'd them well!*  
Ingratitude! no curse like thee is found,  
Throughout this jarring world's expanded round;  
But such a host of various ills are found,  
So many evils in these hulks abound;  
That on them all a poem to prolong,  
Would endless make the horrors of my song:

*Dives*: (Latin: rich, wealthy, pronounced dī-vez); Referring to the New Testament parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. The rich man does not heed the beggar's supplications for crumbs from his meals. When both die, the beggar goes to heaven and the rich man to hell. The rich man sees Abraham and Lazarus in heaven and pleads for water: ". . . send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'" Luke 16:19-26

\*A barren rocky and mountainous island on the west of Scotland. [Freneau note]"

Added lines In later edition:

Their hearts with malice to our country swell,  
Because in former days we us'd them well!  
This pierces deep, too deeply wounds the breast;  
Receiv'd their vagrants with an open hand,  
Bestow'd them buildings, privilege, and land;—  
Behold the change! — when angry Britain rose,  
These thankless tribes became our fiercest foes;  
By them devoted, plunder'd, and accurst,  
Stung by the serpents whom ourselves had nurs'd.

To what shall I their *ruin'd bread* compare,  
 Bak'd for old *Caesar's* armies you would swear;  
 So great its age, that hard and flinty grown,  
 You ask for bread, and they present a stone;  
 Why should I tell what putrid oil they deal,  
 Why the dread horrors of a scanty meal?  
 The rotten pork, the lumpy damag'd flour,  
 Soak'd in salt water, and with age grown sour;  
 Say, must I tell how famish'd *messes*\* join,  
 And on these offals of creation dine;—  
 For once a day we touch'd the *royal meat*,  
 Once and but once at the king's charges eat;  
 (Such hosts he feeds upon our ravag'd shore,  
 How cou'd the heartless, mean-soul'd wretch do more);  
 If from your purse the gold has run to waste,  
 At morn nor evening look for no repast;  
 Then 'ere you sail, your purse with gold supply,  
 For on the royal bounty you would die.

The *vigorous spirit*<sup>†</sup> that the *islands*<sup>§</sup> yield,  
 Was by these petty tyrants here withheld;  
 While yet they deign'd that healthy juice to lade,  
 The putrid water felt its powerful aid;  
 But when deny'd — to aggravate our pains,—  
 Then fevers rag'd and revel'd through our veins;—  
 Throughout my frame I felt its deadly heat,  
 A ghastly paleness o'er my face was spread,  
 Unusual pains attack my fainting head;—  
 No physic here — no doctor to assist,—  
 My name was enter'd on the sick man's list;—  
 Twelve wretches more the self same symptoms took,  
 And these were enter'd on the doctor's book;  
 The loathsome *Hunter* was our destin'd place,  
 The Hunter to all hospitals disgrace;  
 With soldiers sent to guard us on our road,  
 Joyful we left the *Scorpion's* dire abode;  
 Some tears we shed for the remaining crew,  
 Then curs'd the hulk, and from her sides withdrew.

#### CANTO IV.

### *The Hospital Prison Ship.*

**N**OW tow'rd the *Hunter's* gloomy sides we came,  
 A slaughter-house, yet hospital in name;  
 For none came there (to pass thro' all degrees),  
 Till half consum'd and dying with disease;—  
 But when too near with laboring oars we ply'd,  
 The mate with curses drove us from the side;  
 Ten thousand times to irritate our woe,  
 He wish'd us founder'd in the gulf below;  
 Ten thousand times he brandish'd high his stick,

\*The prisoners were divided into messes, each mess consisting of six men. [Freneau note] A *mess* in a military gathering space, primarily for meals.

<sup>†</sup>Rum. <sup>§</sup> West Indies. [Freneau notes]

Freneau describes his transfer to the hospital ship *Hunter*:

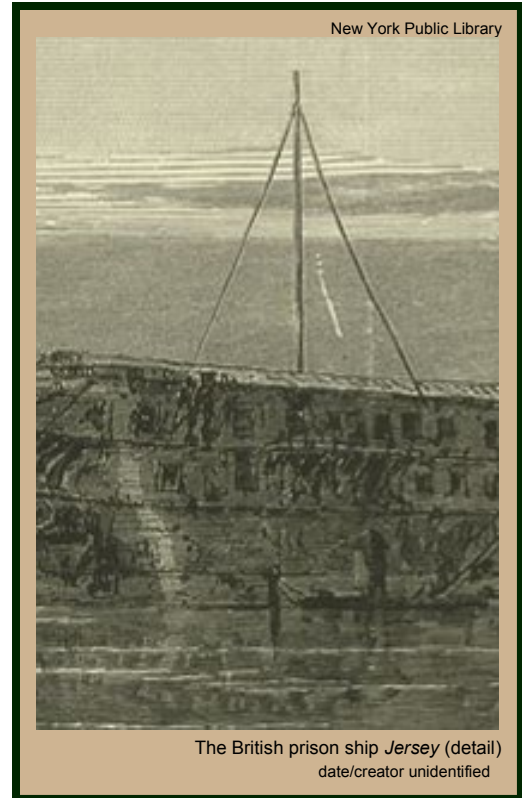
"When finding myself taken with a fever, I procured myself to be put on the sick list, and the same day was sent with a number of others to the *Hunter* hospital ship, lying in the East River. Here was a new scene opened. The *Hunter* had been very newly put to the use of a hospital ship. She was miserably dirty and cluttered. Her decks leaked to such a degree that the sick were deluged with every shower of rain. Between decks they lay along struggling in the agonies of death, dying with putrid and bilious fevers, lamenting their hard fate to die at such a fatal distance from their friends; others totally insensible, and yielding their last breath in all the horrors of light-headed frenzy."

Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, 1780, publ. 1899

And swore as often that we were not sick;—  
 —And yet so pale—that we were thought by some,  
 A freight of ghosts from death's dominions come;—  
 But calm'd at length, for who can always rage,  
 Or the fierce war of endless passion wage;  
 He pointed to the *stairs* that led below,  
 To damps, disease, and varied shapes of woe;—  
 Down to the gloom we took our pensive way,  
 Along the deck the dying captives lay;  
 Some struck with madness, some with scurvy pain'd,  
 But still of *putrid fevers* most complain'd;  
 On the hard floors these wasted objects laid,  
 There toss'd and tumbled in the dismal shade;  
 Of leaky decks I heard them much complain,  
 Drown'd as they were in deluges of rain;  
 Deny'd the comforts of a dying bed,  
 And not a pillow to support the head;  
 How could they else but pine and grieve and sigh,  
 Detest a wretched life and wish to die!

Soon as I came to this detested place,  
 A wasted *phantom* star'd me in the face;  
 “And art thou come (death heavy on his eyes),  
 And art thou come to these abodes, he cries;  
 Why didst thou leave the *Scorpion's* dark retreat,  
 And hither come, a surer death to meet;  
 Why didst thou leave thy damp infected cell,  
 If *that* was purgatory, *this* is hell;  
 Here wastes away *Autolycus* the brave,  
 Here young *Orestes* finds an early grave;  
 “Here gay *Alcander*, alas, no more,  
 Dies far sequester'd from his native shore;  
 Ah rest in peace, poor injur'd parted shade,  
 By cruel hands too soon in death array'd;  
 But happier climes where orbs unclouded shine,  
 Light undisturb'd and endless peace are thine”;—  
 He said and struggling in the pangs of death,  
 Gave his last groan and yielded his last breath.

A Hessian *Doctor* from *Long Island* came,  
 Not great his skill nor greater much his fame;  
 Fair *Science* never call'd the wretch her *son*,  
 And *Art* disdain'd the stupid man to own;—  
 Can you admire why *Science* was so coy,  
 Or *Art* refus'd his genius to employ?—  
 On rocky hills can Eden's blossoms blow?  
 Do *Trees of God* in barren deserts grow,  
 Are loaded vines to *Ætna's* summit known;  
 Or swells the *peach* beneath the frozen Zone?—  
 Yet still he puts his genius to the rack,  
 And as you may suppose, became a *quack*.



The British prison ship *Jersey* (detail)  
 date/creator unidentified

*Autolycus, Orestes, Alcander*: in classical literature, strong warriors or athletes who performed deeds that were punished or worthy of punishment

*Hessians*: German (Prussian) soldiers hired to fight in the British army

He on his charge the healing work begun,  
 With *antimonial* mixtures by the ton;  
*Ten minutes* was the *time* he deign'd to stay,  
 The *time of grace* allotted once a day;  
 He drench'd us well with bitter drafts, I know,  
 Peruvian Barks and Cremor Tartar too;  
 On those refusing he bestow'd a kick,  
 Or menac'd vengeance with his walking stick;——  
 Hence came our deaths: by his defective skill,  
 By sending, one, another's purge or pill;  
 By frequent blows we from his cane endure'd,  
 He kill'd at least as many as he cur'd:  
 Some did not seem obedient to his will,  
 And swore he mingled poison with his pill;——  
 But I acquit him by a fair confession,  
 He was no Englishman, he was a Hessian;——  
 Although a dunce he had some sense of sin,  
 Or else the Lord knows where we now had been;  
 Doubtless in that far country sent to range,  
 Where never prisoner meets with an exchange;—  
 Then had we all been banish'd out of time,  
 Nor I return'd to plague the world with rhyme.

Our doctor has a master, chief physician,  
 To all the hospitals in their possession;  
 Once and but once by some strange fortune led,  
 He came to see the dying and the dead;  
 He came —— but anger so deform'd his eye,  
 And such a falchion glitter'd on his thigh;  
 And such a gloom his visage darken'd o'er,  
 And two such pistols in his hands he bore;——  
 That *by the Gods* —— with such a load of steel,  
 He came, we thought, to murder, not to heal;  
 Had he so dar'd — but fate withheld his hand,—  
 He came — blasphem'd — and turn'd again to land.

From this poor vessel and her sickly crew,  
 An English ruffian all his titles drew;  
*Captain, esquire*, commander, too, in chief,  
 And hence he gain'd his *bread* and hence his *beef*;—  
 But, sir, you might have search'd creation round,  
 'Ere such another devil could be found;  
 Tho' unprovok'd, an angry face he bore,  
 We stood astonish'd at the oaths he swore;  
 He swore —— till every mortal stood aghast,  
 And thought him Satan in a brimstone blast;  
 He wish'd us banish'd from the public light,  
 He wish'd us bury'd in eternal night;  
 That were *he* king, no mercy would he show,  
 But drive all rebels to the *world below*;  
 That if we scoundrels did not scrub the decks,

*antimonial mixtures*: very strong emetic treatments (to induce vomiting and empty the stomach), used in premodern medicine

*time of grace*: i.e., the doctor's daily visits; a sardonic comment that the doctor's visits are not physically healing as a clergyman's visit would be spiritually healing

*Peruvian bark*: herbal medicine containing quinine; used as a treatment of fever

*cremor tartar*: cream of tartar, used as an emetic

*falchion*: a short broadsword

Freneau described the verbal abuse of the "English ruffian":

"One, Gauzoo, was steward of the ship—one of the most brutal of mankind, who abused us continually. It is impossible for words to give his character. It seemed as though he could not give any of us a civil word upon the most indifferent occasion. When he was not cursing us, he kept in his cabin in gloomy reserve, the most vile and detestable of mortals."

Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, 1780, publ. 1899



His staff should break our damn'd rebellious necks;  
He swore besides, not waiting for his turn,  
That if the ship took fire, we too should burn;  
And meant it so —— this monster I engage,  
Had lost his post to gratify his rage.——

*lost his post*: lost his breath

If where he stood a loathsome carcass lay,  
Not alter'd was the language of the day; ——  
He call'd us *dogs* —— and would have us'd us so,  
But *vengeance* check'd the meditated blow;  
The vengeance from our injur'd nation due,  
To him and all the base unmanly crew.

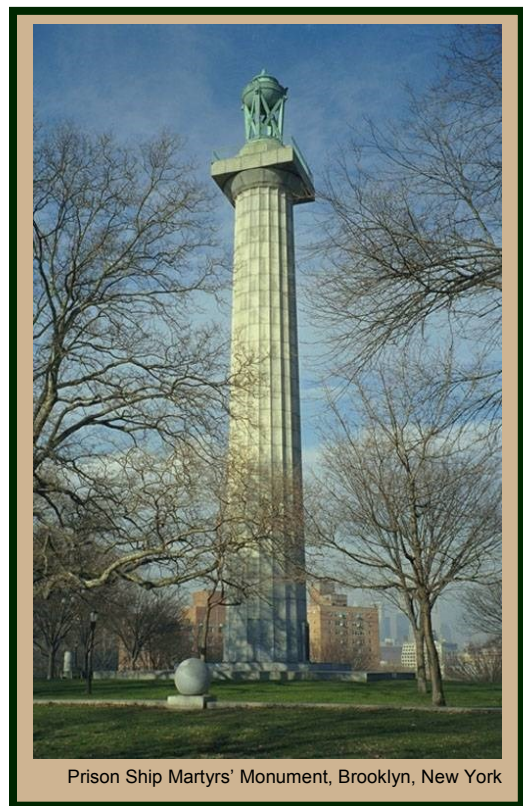
Each DAY at least three carcasses we bore,  
And scratch'd them graves along the sandy shore;\*  
By feeble hands the shallow tombs were made,  
No stone memorial o'er the corpses laid;  
In barren sands and far from home they lie,  
No friend to shed a tear when passing by;  
O'er the slight graves insulting Britons tread,  
Spurn at the sand and curse the rebel dead.

\*After the deaths became more frequent the corpses were thrown overboard. [Freneau note.]

When to your arms these fatal *islands* fall,  
(For first or last, they must be conquer'd all);  
Americans! to rites sepulchral just,  
With gentle footstep press this kindred dust;  
And o'er the tombs, if tombs can then be found,  
Place the green turf, and plant the myrtle round.

These all in freedom's sacred cause ally'd,  
For freedom ventur'd and for freedom died;  
To base subjection they were never broke,  
They could not bend beneath a tyrant's yoke;  
Had these surviv'd, perhaps in thralldom held,  
To serve proud Britain they had been compell'd;  
Ungenerous deed —— can she the charge deny? ——  
In such a case to triumph was to die.

Americans, a just resentment show,  
And let your minds with indignation glow;  
While the warm blood shall swell each glowing vein,  
Let fierce resentment in your bosoms reign;  
Can you forget the vengeful Briton's ire,  
Your fields in ruin and your domes on fire;  
No age, no sex, from lust and murder free,  
And black as night the hell-born refugee;  
Must York forever see your sons expire,  
In ships, in prisons, and in dungeons dire;  
How long shall foes that trading city keep,  
Built, like old Tyre, for commerce, or the deep?  
Rouse from your sleep and crush the thievish band,  
Defeat, destroy, and sweep them from the land;  
Ally'd like you, what madness to despair,



Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument, Brooklyn, New York

*York*: New York.

*Tyre*: ancient Phoenician port city on the Mediterranean Sea.

Destroy the ruffians while they linger there;  
There Tryon sits, a monster all complete,  
See Clinton there with vile Knyphausen meet;  
And every wretch whom *virtue* should detest,  
*There* finds a home — and *Arnold* with the rest;  
Ah! monsters, lost to every sense of shame,  
Unjust supporters of a tyrant's claim;  
Foes to the rights of freedom and of men,  
Stain'd with the blood of thousands you have slain;  
To the just doom the righteous skies decree,  
We leave you toiling still in cruelty;  
The years approach that shall to ruin bring,  
Your lords, your chiefs, your monster of a *king*;  
Whose boldest deeds but crown his arms with shame,  
And vice itself shall execrate his name.

### *The End*

*Clinton*: General Sir Henry Clinton, commander in chief of British forces in America.

*Knyphausen*: Wilhelm von Knyphausen: Hessian (German) general in the British army; commander of New York City during Clinton's absence.

*Arnold*: Benedict Arnold, the most maligned traitor of the Revolution. An American general, he defected to the British after his plot to deliver West Point to the enemy was exposed. He became a brigadier general in the British army and after the war went to England to live.

Freneau was released on the twelfth of July, 1780, and returned to his home in New Jersey.

"At length, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, the flag [British flagship] came alongside and cleared the hospital ship. But the miseries we endured in getting to Elizabeth Town were many. Those that were very bad, of which the proportion was great, naturally took possession of the hold [of the flagship]. No prisoner was allowed to go in the cabin, so that I with twenty or thirty others were obliged to sleep out all the night, which was uncommonly cold for the season. About ten next morning we arrived at Elizabeth Town Point [NJ], where we were kept in the burning sun several hours, till the Commissary came to discharge us.

I was afflicted with such pains in my joints, I could scarcely walk, and besides, was weakened with a raging fever. Nevertheless, I walked the two miles to Elizabeth Town . . . . Next morning, having breakfasted on some bread and milk I set homeward. When I came to Obadiah Budleigh's corner, I turned to the right and came home round about through the woods for fear of terrifying the neighbors with my ghastly looks had I gone through Mount Pleasant."

Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora*, 1780, publ. 1899