Introduction

It must have been quite a sight at the Court of King's Bench on 9 May 1820, when the infamous 'mulatto' revolutionary Robert Wedderburn, half-blind, dressed in rags, and covered in the accumulated filth of six months in gaol, stood up and began to lecture the judge on legal ethics. Wedderburn had been arrested the previous December for preaching blasphemy and sedition at his hayloft chapel on Hopkins Street in London. He was held without charge until February 1820 before he was allowed to stand trial. The jury found him guilty at the February hearing, but recommended him to leniency due to the extenuating circumstance of his being raised on a Jamaican slave plantation, without 'the benefit of parental care'. As Wedderburn himself had argued, how could the son of an enslaved black woman, with no access to education, who had been abandoned by his rapacious white father before he was even born, be expected to know any better? The presiding judge—no less a figure than the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Charles Abbot—declared that Wedderburn was to be sentenced at a separate hearing in May.[1]

At the sentencing, he was supposed to appear contrite and respectful, to acknowledge his guilt, to reiterate his unfortunate origins, and to throw himself on the mercy of the judge, Justice Bailey. In 1820, it was possible to 'diminish the quantum of punishment' for blasphemy, by proclaiming one's repentance and prostrating oneself before the court. If he chose, Bailey could then issue a fine, or perhaps a short custodial sentence, and thus demonstrate how merciful and fair-handed the British justice system could be, especially towards those who had been degraded by slavery. But contrition was never Wedderburn's style. Instead, he stood defiant, and read out a statement which laid the blame for his

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[1] Erasmus Perkins [pseud. George Cannon] (ed.), *The Trial of the Rev. Robt. Wedderburn, a Dissenting Minister of the Unitarian Persuasion, for Blasphemy* (London: W. Mason, 1820), 20.

notoriety on the authorities now charged with sentencing him. 'Those doctrines which would have been confined to my obscure chapel—to my small congregation,—are now by the fostering aid of my prosecutors, published to the whole world', he harangued. 'They have effectually advertised the very thing which they dislike. By preventing me from preaching, they have compelled me to become an author. They have dragged me from obscurity into public notice'. This line of reasoning could hardly have recommended him to Bailey's mercy—and he was not yet finished. '[S]ince they have made me a member of the Republic of Letters, I beg leave to recommend to their attention a critical, historical and admonitory letter, which I have just published, *"Addressed to the Right Reverend Father in God, his Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, on the Alarming Progress of Infidelity; and the means which ought immediately to be resorted to, to check its frightful career."'*[2] Given the opportunity to mitigate his legal punishment for blasphemy, Wedderburn had instead advertised a blasphemous publication to the court. Justice Bailey was clearly unimpressed by his entrepreneurial spirit; the revolutionary preacher got two years' hard labour in Dorchester Gaol.

Wedderburn's complaint, and his brazen advertisement of new writing, pose the two key questions this book sets out to answer. The first he mentioned directly: how did black celebrities, preachers and radicals in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Britain become authors? Wedderburn seemed to be suggesting that the decision to publish his work was never his at all, but that circumstances, helped on by a designing network of influential figures, gave him no choice. Even as he staked his claim to authority over his 'doctrines', he acknowledged that they would never have been put into print without 'the fostering aid' of a group of interacting individuals, who had come together to further their own interests. Black

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[2] Erasmus Perkins [pseud. George Cannon] (ed.), *The Address of the Rev. R. Wedderburn, to the Court of King's Bench at Westminster, on appearing to Receive Judgement for Blasphemy* (London: T. Davison, 1820), 15; 10-11.

authors during this period, perhaps more than any others, were likely to depend upon networks—of friends, coreligionists, conspirators, and even those we might think of as their enemies—for publication, financial support, or social prestige. Uncovering the composition of these networks, therefore, is essential to understanding how and why black writing came to be published in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain.

The second key question for this book is also raised by Wedderburn's mitigation plea, though it requires some hidden knowledge to access. Specifically, we must be aware that he did not write it. Or, at the very least, he alone was not responsible for its contents. George Cannon, a white, *déclassé*-radical, classically-educated amateur lawyer, and sometime pornographer, was the man chiefly responsible for Wedderburn's foolhardy courtroom speech. The two had met a couple of years earlier through their mutual involvement in London's ultra-radical scene, and perhaps Wedderburn entrusted Cannon with the task of composing the speech because of his superior education. In any case, it was misplaced trust. This is not to say that Wedderburn necessarily objected to its contents, much less its defiant overtones. But Cannon stood to gain, financially and professionally, from a sensational trial and an overly harsh sentence: he edited the published transcripts of Wedderburn's prosecution and sentencing hearing. He was also the true author and publisher of the 'critical, historical and admonitory letter' to which he'd had Wedderburn allude in court. (He was, of course, a ghost-writer; Wedderburn's name appeared on the cover of this scurrilous publication as author, again shielding Cannon from prosecution.)[3] It was Cannon who reaped the financial and reputational profits from the harsh sentence passed down to Wedderburn,

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[3] Robert Wedderburn [pseud. George Cannon], *A Critical, Historical, and Admonitory Letter to the Right Reverend Father in God, His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: W. Mason, 1820). Iain McCalman convincingly attributes this pamphlet to Cannon in *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 153-154.

and it was his speechwriting that ensured any such sentence could not be anything other than exemplary.

Our second question thus emerges. How did networks—whether social, professional, political, or religious—influence the *content* of early black writing, and to what extent did they affect how it was published, distributed and read? When we return to the published mitigation speech, aware that it was (in large part if not completely) written by Cannon, its true, mercenary purpose becomes clear. Moreover, we come to agree with scholars of early African-American writing: that evaluating the level of authority or control an author had over the work attributed to them is centrally important to understanding slavery-era black literature.[4] This does not mean that black intellectuals were the unwitting dupes of designing or self-interested networks of white intrigue; far from it. Black authors were respected comrades, beloved friends, and intellectual authorities in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain. In many cases, they were powerful and influential people. But, like all authors, they adjusted their writing according to the needs of patrons, publishers, editors and their likely readership. Like all of us, their world-view was affected by those around them. And like all published books, their work went through careful processes of revision and edition, passing through several pairs of hands before readers ever encountered it. When we read a text by an eighteenth-century black author such as Wedderburn, just as when we read one by Charles Dickens or Toni Morrison, we are never reading the work of just one person.

This book examines the lives and works of eight early black authors in Britain: Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Boston King, John Jea, Ottobah Cugoano and Robert Wedderburn. It uncovers the influential networks that

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[4] William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 34-37; John Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems', in Charles Davis and Henry Gates (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 78-98; Francis Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

surrounded them and their published works during the period falling roughly between 1770

and 1830. It demonstrates that black intellectuals, as literary celebrities, evangelical

preachers, and leaders of domestic political radicalism, participated in the full gamut of

British social, religious and political culture.

Of course, the black presence in Britain long predated the late eighteenth century.

But while Peter Fryer's famous pronouncement that there 'were Africans in Britain before the

English came here' is perfectly accurate in itself, he was referring to a largely transient

population of a few hundred Roman soldiers temporarily stationed here.[5] The earliest

evidence of a substantial resident black population dates back to the sixteenth century,

culminating in Elizabeth I's well-known declaration that 'there are of late divers

blackamoores brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are allready to manie'.[6]

As Jeremy Brotton has illustrated, the presence of black or 'Moor' populations in early-

modern Britain was related to crucial trade links with the Islamic world.[7] Accounts of black

individuals and families recurred throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the

Resonable family of Southwark, for instance, may have influenced Shakespeare's depiction

of his most famous black character, Othello.[8] However, it was not until the expansion of the

slave trade with its deregulation in 1712 and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, that the black

presence in Britain began, slowly, to expand.[9] To an unprecedented degree, black people

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[5] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), 1-32 (quotation at 1). For the early history of black people in Britain, see also Paul Edwards, 'The Early African Presence in the British Isles', in Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield, *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Macmillan, 2016), 29-76.

[6] Cited in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 10. For black people in early modern England, see Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: OneWorld, 2017); Onyeka, *Blackamoores: Africans in Tudor England, their Presence, Status and Origins* (London: Narrative Eye, 2013).

[7] Jeremy Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

[8] Imtiaz Habib and Duncan Salkeld, 'The Resonables of Boroughside, Southwark: An Elizabethan Black Family Near the Rose Theatre', *Shakespeare*, 11:2 (2015), 135-156.

[9] See William Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1678-1752* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 153-178.

became enmeshed in British culture during the eighteenth century. As immortalised in William Hogarth's chaotic paintings, young black serving boys became prized fashion accessories among Britain's fashionable elite.[10] Slave-trading African dignitaries Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and William Ansah Sessarakoo caused quite a stir in such circles when they visited the country after having themselves been mistakenly enslaved and subsequently 'rescued' by British traders.[11] At the other end of the social hierarchy, black sailors and soldiers, along with formerly-enslaved young men and women, firmly established themselves in working-class British society, much to the alarm and bemusement of some social commentators.[12]

The exact size of the black population during the eighteenth century is hard to gauge, partly because of the lack of reliable census information (the first national census was taken in 1801, but ethnicity was not recorded in any standardised way until as late as 1991). When they were noted, as an aside in ships' muster rolls, criminal proceedings, and local church and government documents, racial or ethnic groupings were recorded inconsistently.[13] In fact, the term 'black' as used in this book—that is, in reference exclusively to people of African descent—is something of a linguistic and conceptual anachronism. As Roxann Wheeler has pointed out, a number of different characteristics besides skin colour were used to define 'race' in the eighteenth century.[14] While comparative anatomy and pseudo-scientific attempts

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[10] For black people in Hogarth, see David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Catherine Molyneux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 178-218.

[11] See Ryan Hanley, 'The Royal Slave: Nobility, Diplomacy and the "African Prince" in Britain, 1748-1752, *Itinerario* 39:2 (2015), 329-347.

[12] See, for example, James Tobin's complaints about 'the great numbers of negroes at present in England' and 'the strange propensity shewn for them by the lower orders of women'. James Tobin, *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay* (London: James Phillips, 1785), 118.

[13] See Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales during the period of the British Slave Trade, c. 1660-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 22-23.

[14] Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 288-302.

to fix particular intellectual characteristics to certain races began to take hold in Britain towards the end of our period, thinking around human difference for most commentators remained characteristically muddled and contradictory.[15] Enlightenment climatic theory, stressing the influence of region and climate on civilizational development, retained currency, as did the ancient concept of the 'Great Chain of Being', whereby all living beings (including the supposedly separable races of man) could be placed in a linear hierarchy.[16] Stadial theories of civilizational progress, as propounded by Adam Smith and others, were also deeply imbricated in debates over race and heredity, and in turn impacted on moral discussions of slavery and Empire.[17] This unsettled theoretical and ideological landscape had ramifications as to how people saw, and chose to record, their encounters with African people and their descendants in Britain. One eighteenth-century recorder might see someone from South Asia and someone from Africa as equally 'black', by virtue of the fact that they were both equally not 'white'.[18] Another might take great care distinguishing a 'Negroe' from a 'Quadroon' or a 'Mustee'.[19] Another recorder might not see race as relevant and omit it from their record altogether, leaving us to speculate as to whether, for example, the 'Francis

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[15] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2013), 83–156; Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 247–70; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, 1996), 205–15; Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2003), Ryan Hanley, 'Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814-1833', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 103-123.

[16] Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23-44; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Britain, 1800-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 1-19.

[17] See Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 45-72.

[18] See Chater, *Untold Histories*, 22-23.

[19] Edward Long, one of the most outspoken and committed racist ideologues of the eighteenth century, outlined some of these perceived distinctions in his chapter on 'Creoles' in *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island,* 3 vols., (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), v.2, pp. 260-263; see Catherine Hall, 'Whose Memories? Edward Long and the Work of Re-remembering', in ed. Katie Donington, Ryan Hanley and Jessica Moody (eds.)*, Britain's History and Memory of Transatlantic Slavery: Local Nuances of a 'National Sin'* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 129–49.

Othello' who was indicted at the Old Bailey for theft in May 1786 was a member of London's black community or not.[20]

Despite these challenges, through careful and extensive archival work, scholars have been able to sketch some outlines of the approximate size and shape of the African diaspora in Britain. Historians very tentatively (and, some claim, rather conservatively) suggest that around ten thousand black people were resident in Britain between 1780 and 1830.[21] However, as demonstrated by the recent discovery of records pertaining to over 2,500 black prisoners of war held at Portchester Castle near Portsmouth during the late 1790s, this figure was prone to significant fluctuations over time.[22] As might be expected, the largest resident urban black population in Britain was in London (0.55 per cent of the total population in the late 1780s), with other significant concentrations in port towns around the coast, notably in the capital of the European slave trade, Liverpool.[23] In common with most migrant communities, and no doubt accentuated by regular replenishment of Royal Navy personnel in the Caribbean, the black British population was skewed significantly in favour of young men throughout the period.[24] For similar reasons, occupations often centred on maritime industries and military service, though domestic service, agricultural labour and even street arts have all been noted as ways black people made a living in eighteenth-century Britain.[25] Indeed, as Kathleen Chater has pointed out, within these broad brush-strokes, a key characteristic of the

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[20] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, s17860531-1, 'Punishment summary, 31 May 1786' [Online] Available from: http://www.oldbaileyonline.org (Accessed 20/10/2016).

[21] Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 35. Chater suggests this figure could be higher when rural populations are taken into account. Chater, *Untold Histories*, 29.

[22] At the time of writing, these archives were undergoing preservation and cataloguing, and were not available for consultation. See Abigail Crippins, 'Black Prisoners of War at Portchester Castle' [Online] Available from: http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/portchester-castle/history-and-stories/black-prisoners/ (Accessed 20/02/2018).

[23] Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past,* 29, 24.

[24] Chater, *Untold Histories*, 30-31.

[25] Well-known black street musicians during this period included the fiddlers Billy Waters and Shadrack Furman. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, 231.

black population in Britain during this period was diversity: diversity of experience, diversity of interest, and diversity of perspectives.[26] Accordingly, writings produced by black people during this period reflected not a homogenous 'black perspective', but a staggering *diversity* of views and experiences.

This study therefore contests the notion of black writing as concerned wholly, or even mostly, with slavery and abolition, and reintroduces some of the other concerns affecting the authors and their networks. These texts were never published in a social vacuum. Like all writers, black authors had to interact with the world around them, and not only with one or two issues. While the life stories of a few early black authors (especially Equiano and Prince) are now well-known, and their writings widely available, the specific circumstances surrounding the composition, production and dissemination of much of this corpus remain obscure or undiscussed. Early black British writing is often incorporated into the later, American tradition of the abolitionist 'slave narrative', denoting an assumption about these texts as confining themselves to the issues of slavery and race.[27] We should be clear: black intellectuals and enslaved people were fundamental to the abolition movements, and as Manisha Sinha has demonstrated so convincingly, the global antislavery cause could not have succeeded without them.[28] But while there is no doubt that black contributions were and are of central importance to these discussions, it must be acknowledged firstly that eighteenth-century black authors' work was produced with a much more diverse range of interests in mind, and secondly that early black British writing was not always uncomplicatedly abolitionist.

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[26] Chater, *Untold Histories*, 35-73.

[27] Writers as diverse as Jupiter Hammon, John Marrant, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Phillis Wheatley and Robert Wedderburn are all incorporated into the 'slave narrative' paradigm in Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 167-271.

[28] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

These two factors were often interrelated—for example, in the fourth chapter of this book I explore how Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's relationships with prominent slave-owning Calvinists helps to explain his autobiography's apparently ambivalent attitude towards slavery. More to the point, black authors were more likely to be poor or illiterate than their white contemporaries. Their texts therefore often underwent more direct forms of outside influence before publication—i.e. edition, transcription and censorship. In Gronniosaw's case, he himself, his amanuensis and his editor were all followers of his slave-owning patron, the Countess of Huntington. Author, editor, amanuensis and sponsor—each of them held dear, as a fundamental precept of their world, the Calvinist belief that corporeal freedom was not necessary to achieve spiritual salvation. We should not be surprised, then, to find that Gronniosaw's autobiography was not a radically abolitionist political tract.[29] We must use precisely this type of contextual detail if we are to gain a more complete understanding of early black writing, one rooted firmly in the historical realities in which it was produced. Joseph Miller has called for slavery to be understood 'through the lens of a rigorously historical epistemology', as something influenced by—indeed, *emerging from*—contexts specific to a particular time and place.[30] This should apply to black writing, too. Texts were produced in, and in a very significant sense created by, the specific social and cultural contexts of the author's life, experiences and associative networks.

Instrumental networks of association like these—'actor networks', as sociologist Bruno Latour calls them—are commonly visualised as consisting of 'nodes' and 'vertices'. In network analysis, nodes represent actors (for instance, people, organisations, or private companies), and vertices, which link nodes together, represent various types of relationship

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[29] See Chapter 4, below, and Ryan Hanley, 'Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw', *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:2 (2015), 360-381. For an opposing reading, see Jennifer Harris, 'Seeing the Light: Re-Reading James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw', *English Language Notes* 42:4 (2004), 43-57.

[30] Miller, 'The Biographical Turn', in Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 26.

(such as kinship, business ties, or epistolary exchanges).[31] Historians have traditionally

focussed on the individual attributes of the actors or nodes, such as personal wealth or area of

residence, as explanations for the extent of their personal influence.[32] But if social change, as

Latour suggests, is driven not by individual actors themselves, but the relationships between

them, then any node's social influence is not necessarily derived from its individual

attributes, but rather by the number and nature of its relationships with other actors within the

network. A node at the centre of a network, with many vertices linking it to other nodes, is

therefore more likely to exercise influence over it than one at the periphery. However, we

should always bear in mind that the number of relationships alone is not sufficient to explain

social influence. The nature and strength of the bonds themselves is also a significant factor

in determining influence. Blood is thicker than water: a strong bond carries greater influence

than a weak one.

 In an eighteenth-century context, 'networks' have most often been taken to mean

mercantile systems of exchange, distribution and information sharing, but scholars continue

to emphasise inter-actor relationships as galvanising social change.[33] For example, in her

study of the development of Liverpool business relationships, Sheryllnne Haggerty stresses

the importance of influence as 'the critical and defining feature of a network.' Haggerty

emphasises that 'we cannot […] simply say because a group of people know each other that

they belong to a network. There has to be something that binds them together, that makes

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[31]Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-18; Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 148-150.

[32] One of the best known examples of this type of network research is J. F. Padgett and C. K. Ansell, 'Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434', *American Journal of Sociology,* 98 (1993) 1259-1319. For an overview of this trend, see Bonnie H. Erickson, 'Social Networks and History: A Review Essay', *Historical Methods,* 30:3 (1997), 149-157.

[33] See, for example, Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011); Tilottama Mukherjee, *Political Culture and Economy in Eighteenth Century Bengal: Networks of Exchange, Consumption and Communication* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013).

them instrumental.'[34] Similarly, the networks of influence that concern this book are only defined as such when they were instrumental in the production and distribution of early black writing. Much of this book is dedicated to unpicking the exact nature of these relationships, and considering precisely how instrumental they were.

Importantly, we must be aware that sometimes the relationships that most influenced the contents of early black writing did not even involve the author directly. As I discuss in the fifth chapter of this book, for example, the affiliation between leading Methodists Thomas Coke and George Whitfield profoundly affected how Boston King's *Memoirs* were edited and distributed, despite the fact that King never even met Whitfield. Moreover, we should remember that the connections between actors were not always social. The people affecting (and sometimes effecting) the composition and distribution of early black autobiography were bound together by a variety of different types of tie. Of course, human relationships are complicated and resist static definition, and so a black author might have a patron who was also a friend, or know a fellow Unitarian who also attended the same radical political meetings. Finally, we should always bear in mind that relationships do not need to be positive or cordial to facilitate influence.

Understanding these networks is especially important for the study of early black writing. Unlike most authors, the majority of the writers that appear in this book—Gronniosaw, Cugoano, King, Jea, Wedderburn and Prince—had quite limited literacy. This meant they needed to use an amanuensis, an editor, or both. The role of these figures, and their implications for authorial independence and 'authenticity', has been discussed at length by scholars. Editorial interventions are often seen as unwelcome obfuscations of the 'true meaning' lying encoded within a compromised text. John Blassingame claimed that because

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[34] Sheryllynne Haggerty, *'Merely for Money'? Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012), 163; see also John Haggerty and Sheryllynne Haggerty, 'Visual Analytics of an Eighteenth-Century Business Network', *Enterprise and Society*, 11:1 (2010), 1-25.

'slave narratives were frequently dictated to and written by whites, any study of such sources must begin with an assessment of the editors.'[35] William Andrews went further still, insisting that if one is to 'open such a narrative to discussion, one must recognise, in order to discount, the white influence informing and enforcing the putative meaning and purpose of that narrative.'[36] Clearly, an understanding of the relationships between nominal author and their amanuensis/editor is essential to the process of historicising and understanding them. However, the notion of a representative, 'authentic' black voice waiting to be excavated from these sources is less convincing. It seems to take for granted that a static, monolithic 'black perspective' is to be found in these texts, and again that it would be framed primarily by debates around slavery. Perversely, these readings tend to limit both the usefulness of the texts and the agency of the authors. For example, they discount the very notion of proslavery black writing from the outset. Apparently proslavery texts nominally written by black authors are read as having been hopelessly compromised by self-interested white editors, who overwrote the underlying antislavery 'black perspective'. Andrews makes this point quite explicitly about Gronniosaw's *Narrative* when he advises readers to 'pay special regard to the seams or cuts in these enclosed narratives when facts are revealed—made tellable—in a way subversive to the text'.[37] But, as we will explore in detail later in this book, a close examination of the networks surrounding both Gronniosaw and the production of his text indicate that he had every reason to produce an autobiography which appeared to support the idea that enslavement could be a kindness, so long as African slaves were converted to Christianity. Indeed, he would have actively endangered himself and his family by doing

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[35] John Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems', in David and Gates (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative*, 79.

[36] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 35.

[37] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 36.

otherwise, since their survival depended upon financial assistance from a slave-owning patron.[38]

Clearly, the networks of influence mapped out in this book were not always benign, and the power dynamics between author, editor, amanuensis and patron were not often stacked in favour of the author. This book does not purport to recover an 'uncontaminated' black perspective from archival sources, or through close interpretive reading. It is concerned rather with how the texts came to be as they are. As Lyn Innes perceptively notes, 'the age did not demand or expect an essential self to be revealed, nor did it use the criteria of authenticity and sincerity, and it is as post-Romantic critics that we judge by such criteria.'[39] This study therefore accepts and celebrates that early black writing never sought to reveal an 'essential self', nor a definitive expression of individual political, religious or intellectual genius. It understands the production of these texts as a consisting of pragmatic, often collaborative processes with identifiable goals. Black authors, whether operating in networks of celebrity, evangelicalism, or radicalism, were seen as key allies in these movements.

In approaching the study of the historic black presence in Britain through the lives of a few individuals, this book contributes to the ongoing project of re-casting British and Atlantic world history. Historians, influenced by postcolonial theory, are increasingly interested in the 'connectedness' of Britain, reframing it not as the centre of the world's affairs but just one of many global sites of exchange, dominance and resistance.[40] While this

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[38] Laura Browder has acknowledged that, for nineteenth-century antebellum black autobiography, 'authenticity depended on a strict adherence to a set of generic conventions.' Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 20-21.

[39] Lyn Innes, 'Eighteenth-Century Men of Letters: Ignatius Sancho and Sake Dean Mahomed', in Susheila Nasta (ed.), *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000), 24.

[40] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-26; Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

has galvanised a welcome move away from the traditional focus on the wealthy and powerful in British history, the huge scale at which these histories operate can run the risk of losing sight of the individuals who ultimately comprised these global systems. In other words, by focusing exclusively on structures and systems, we lose sight of the human element. As Linda Colley puts it, global histories 'sometimes seem as aggressively impersonal as globalization can itself.'[41] This is an especially important consideration when we think about the lives of the people caught up in the transatlantic slave system: the intended victims of a specifically dehumanising, deindividuating regime. Historians of slavery and the Atlantic world more generally (notably Colley, Cassandra Pybus, and Randy Sparks), have responded with a wave of studies seeking to reconstruct individual stories in detail.[42] Their findings have cast new light on global-scale systems from the perspective of those who were caught up in them. The effect of this 'biographical turn', as Miller has termed it, has been to reinstate the individual and their network as a key scale of historiographical analysis, especially in relation to the black Atlantic world.[43]

However, examining the lives of black individuals in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain *exclusively* in reference to histories of slavery and abolition, as has most commonly been done, profoundly limits our understanding of them. It tends to 'flatten' the black intellectual contribution to British and Atlantic culture. This book therefore moves to embrace the inherent 'messiness' of these writings, their refusal to adhere perfectly to established explanations for the proliferation of antislavery thought, or indeed to offer a straightforwardly authentic 'black perspective'. An investigation into *how* these complicated

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[41] Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London: HarperCollins, 2007)*,* xxxi.

[42] Colley, *Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006); Randy Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); see also the contributions in Lindsay and Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic.*

[43] Miller, 'The Biographical Turn', 26.

perspectives were forged enables a fundamental reconsideration of these texts as historical, literary, commercial and politically discursive artefacts, and puts black authors back into the 'mainstream' narratives of British cultural and social history.

Before we embark on such a revaluation, it is important to take stock of the historical contexts in which black writing has traditionally been read. It bears reiteration that this book does not seek to divorce black intellectuals from the antislavery movements they so profoundly affected.[44] Rather, it prompts a broader view of their personal interactions as a means of better understanding both their work, and their roles in facilitating links between abolitionism and other contemporaneous movements. We will return to the specific interactions between slavery, abolition and the authors' networks in more detail throughout the chapters of this book. However, situating them in broad terms within the now familiar history of British abolitionism—that is, outlining how historians and literary critics have traditionally tended to see them—is an important first step in our exploration of their links to other movements and interests.

Black Writing, Slavery and Abolition in Britain

Black writing was first published in Britain amidst a controversy over slavery. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince* appeared in Bath in December 1772, a few months after the first key legal victory in the long campaign against slavery was won, in the Somerset ruling.[45] The case of

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[44] For black leadership of the antislavery movements in Britain and America during this period, see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 9-191.

[45] For British abolitionism before 1772, see Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 33-101; 90-95. For the Somerset case, see Brown, *Moral Capital,* 90-101; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 474-479; James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 13-17; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99-104; Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005), 48-53.

James Somerset, an enslaved man who had run away in Britain, and whose former owner had attempted to forcibly deport back into bonded servitude in the Caribbean, captured the imagination of the public. Crowds of black people (among them a fifteen-year-old Ottobah Cugoano, who would go on to publish two books of his own), gathered around the Court of King's Bench each day to follow the proceedings. After months of deliberation, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield delivered his verdict. 'No master ever was allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad […] therefore [Somerset] must be discharged'.[46] This was an equivocal ruling: Mansfield had never suggested that Somerset was no longer a slave—only that his former owner could not compel him to leave Britain. Regardless of its limited legal impact, the case brought debates over slavery into the mainstream of political consciousness, and generated a new market for texts by black authors.

On first reading, the earliest black British writing seemed to have conscientiously divorced itself from the political questions that emerged as a result of the Somerset case. Gronniosaw's *Narrative* was first and foremost a piece of devotional literature. This it bore in common with what little Anglophone black writing had already been published—a short autobiographical pamphlet by Briton Hammon released in Boston in 1760, and a single poem by Jupiter Hammon published in New York the same year.[47] Similarly, when the black epistolarian Ignatius Sancho died in December 1780, his letters were collected and then published in 1782 with the view (then still more or less politically unobjectionable) of 'shewing that an untutored African may possess abilities equal to an European.'[48] Though this would prove a key issue in the abolition debates that were to follow, in 1782 it had more

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[46] *London Evening Post*, 23 June, 1772; 'Substance of Lord Mansfield's Speech on the Cause between Mr. Stuart and Somerset the Black', *The London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer,* 41 (1772), 268.

[47] Briton Hammon, *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon* (Boston: J. Green and J. Russell, 1760); Jupiter Hammon, *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penetential Cries* (New York: n.p., 1760).

[48] Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African*, 2 vols. (London: J. Nichols et al, 1782), 1:ii.

to do with notions of sensibility, charity, and class than slavery. The work of Gronniosaw and Sancho laid the foundations for a popular strand of antislavery humanitarianism, which insisted that black and white people were capable of the same level of intellectual refinement and spiritual worth. Whether it was intended as such or not—and both of these positions have their advocates—black writing in the 1770s and early 1780s quickly became seen as part of the broader antislavery movement of the late eighteenth century.

The end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783 generated the conditions in which both abolitionism and black writing flourished in Britain.[49] Not least of these was a marked increase in the black population. British strategies to win the war in America had included offering freedom to any slaves who would fight for them. Many (such as the author Boston King) had taken them up on the offer, and when Royal Navy ships returned in defeat after the Peace of 1783, they brought thousands of black people with them.[50] These black loyalist immigrants tested Britons' self-perception as a humane and charitable people, since there was little opportunity for them to find work, and as foreigners they were ineligible for parish poor relief. This new immigrant group also had ethnic prejudice to contend with. One day labourer who took out an advertisement in the *Morning Herald* in 1792 was clearly aware of what he was up against, and adjusted his expectations accordingly: 'AS

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[49] The reasons behind this transformation are contested. Christopher Brown, in agreement with earlier work by David Brion Davis, argues that the final loss of the American colonies in 1783 created a sense of shock and a period of national reflection in Britain, leading to widespread support for a number of charitable and humanitarian causes, including abolition. Conversely, Seymour Drescher suggests that British abolitionism only flourished in a moment of 'national optimism', once the uncertainties of war had been resolved. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 105-153; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 343-468; Seymour Drescher, 'The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism', *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:4 (2012), 571-593.

[50] See Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 116-176; Philip Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming Slaves in the American Revolution', in Christopher Brown and Philip Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 180-208; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), 3-20; Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005), 26-251. Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 75-121; Stephen Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 63-129.

FOOTMAN, or Porter in a Warehouse, a Black man, who lived upwards of three years in his last place […] His colour and appearance not being in his favour, he would be content with moderate wages.'[51] Matters came to a head over the winter of 1787, and measures were put in place to relocate London's 'black poor' to the new West African settlement of Sierra Leone.[52]

The Sierra Leone resettlement projects coincided with the crystallisation of widespread antislavery sentiment into a formalised abolitionist movement in 1787. That year, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST) was formed. Abolitionism's new, mainstream status precipitated a new wave of black writing. For the first time, black authors began explicitly encouraging popular support for abolishing the slave trade. Ottobah Cugoano published his radical *Thoughts and Sentiments* in 1787, in which he suggested abolishing not only the slave trade but the system of slavery itself. No white author had been so daring. A second, edited-down edition of Cugoano's work appeared in 1791.[53] In the intervening years, another black abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, had published his own antislavery autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative*. Partly because of Equiano's tireless promotional work, and partly because of its compelling, eloquent and powerful accounts of slavery and freedom, *The Interesting Narrative* was a tremendous commercial success, catapulting its author into celebrity status. By the time of his death in 1797, Equiano had

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[51] *Morning Herald*, 10 May 1792. The expatriation of the 'black poor' is dealt with in detail in Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*; see also James Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

[52] For Sierra Leone, see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Suzanne Schwarz, 'Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company', in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 252-277; Suzanne Schwarz, 'Reconstructing to Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century', *History in Africa*, 39:1 (2012), 175-207; Michael Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the "African Question", c. 1780-1820', *English Historical Review*, 112:446 (1997), 319-357.

[53] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human* Species (London: [n.p.], 1787); Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (London: Kirkby et. al., 1791).

become a reasonably well-heeled man thanks to the popularity of his book. It remains the

single best-known work published by a black author in pre-abolition Britain.[54]

Equiano's success also owed something to the broader political climate in Britain

during the early years of the French Revolution. Through the early 1790s, support for

abolition was widespread. Indeed, the ideals of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity', adopted

enthusiastically in radical British popular politics, for most people extended quite naturally to

the enslaved in the West Indies. The moderate-radical connections of SEAST members

including Thomas Clarkson, Thomas Walker, and even Granville Sharp, who had

championed Somerset's cause in 1772, proved beneficial when enthusiasm for these

egalitarian ideals was widespread in Britain. The ideological relationship between radicalism

and antislavery was underscored after 1792, when news began to come in from across the

Atlantic of a slave-led revolution in the French colony of St. Domingue.[55] However, popular

zeal for reform did not extend to the Houses of Parliament. When William Wilberforce—

both the most politically conservative of the leading British abolitionists and the one most

deeply embedded in the Westminster establishment—introduced two motions for abolishing

the slave trade in 1791 and 1792, they both proved ultimately unsuccessful.[56]

When the formal antislavery movement stalled between 1794 and 1804, it was in

some measure because of its associations with contemporaneous ideas about reforming the

British political system. In the context of the anti-Jacobin backlash of the French

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[54] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London: 1789); John Bugg, 'The Other Intersting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano's Public Book Tour', *PMLA*, 121:5, 1424-1442. Equiano's daughter received £950 in his will. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 366.

[55] See, for example, Anon., *A Particular Account of the Insurrection of the Negroes of St. Domingo* (London: Assemblée Générale, 1792).

[56] The 1791 motion was voted down (narrowly) in the Commons. The 1792 motion passed in Commons was stalled in the House of Lords, and in 1793 the Commons voted not to revisit the issue. Stephen Tomkins, *William Wilberforce: A Biography* (London: Lion, 2007), 86-120; William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 169-198.

Revolutionary War years, associations between high-profile abolitionists and domestic radicalism became toxic. After 1794, when reportage from St. Domingue began to relay stories of impaled infants and massacres of whites, proslavery arguments that British abolitionism led to violent slave rebellions gained greater traction.[57] During the same year, the National Convention in Paris voted to abolish slavery throughout the French Empire. British people began to seriously question exactly which type of liberty the antislavery movement represented. Was it truly British—restrained, moderate, and honourable—or was it 'Jacobin'—extravagant, corrupt, and bloodthirsty? Even leaving the ideological context aside, in mere practical terms the antiradical Two Acts of 1795 made generating the type of popular support hitherto associated with abolitionism appear tantamount to an act of sedition. The Seditious Meetings Act, limiting public assemblies to 50 people or fewer, prevented mass rallies for non-religious purposes. This included abolitionist mass meetings, for example the one Clarkson had organised in Manchester in 1788, which had led to the largest popular petition in parliamentary history. Meanwhile, the Treason Act essentially rendered the language of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', which had played so naturally into abolitionism, subversive and potentially dangerous.

During this period, black writing by and large receded back into the pulpits of dissenting Christian groups. Evangelical authors such as Boston King recast their antislavery rhetoric as a part of a broader move towards establishment respectability by divorcing it from calls for abolition. Black writing had returned to its strictly religious roots, shifting away from a confrontational and galvanising mode and back to promoting Christian forbearance

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[57] John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-Slavery, c. 1787-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104-109; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 148-161; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 4; Ada Ferrer, 'Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic, *American Historical Review*, 117:1 (2012), 40-66; James Walvin, 'The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1838', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences,* 292, (1977), 343-355; Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32-33.

and the idea of post-corporeal liberation. Even though the only networks that could safely

publish black writing in the paranoiac atmosphere of the late 1790s and early 1800s were

religious ones, they were still under pressure from the government (not least by Wilberforce

himself) to ensure that their activities were depoliticised.[58] Black writers such as King could

only be published in this kind of environment when their visions of freedom were sufficiently

divorced from the 'liberty' of radical discourse.

Napoleon Bonaparte's re-introduction of slavery in the French colonies in 1804

helped make abolitionism more palatable to conservative interests in Britain, and the

parliamentary abolitionist machine, led by the irreproachably loyal Wilberforce, creaked back

into action. But the difficult issue of St. Domingue—now independent Haiti—still had to be

handled sensitively. Black evangelicals such as King and John Jea continued to restrict

themselves to spreading antislavery sentiment, rather than advocating emancipation. They

kept their activities to a local scale. It was absolutely essential that their message not be

confused with the type of 'black violence' arising from the Haitian revolution. Even after the

Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807, black writers' antislavery rhetoric

remained tethered to patriotic identity narratives. Abolishing slavery itself, of course,

remained out of the question; it was seen as potentially endangering to Britain's beleaguered

wartime economy. Plans for emancipating Britain's slaves were not seriously countenanced

until 1823, well after the Napoleonic wars had been won. Wartime antislavery writing instead

emphasised the Royal Navy's role in suppressing the slave trade, contrasting Britain's

attempts to diminish the horrors of slavery with France's active pursuance of it. This patriotic

rhetoric received a blow at the end of the wars in 1815, since one of the conditions of the

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[58] See, for example, David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) 68-69.

peace negotiations allowed France to continue transporting slaves to their Caribbean colonies for five years without harassment from the Royal Navy.[59]

There was an outcry. Demobbed sailors and soldiers felt betrayed and let down by their government. Their commitment to the dangerous, terrifying task of waging war had been fostered in part by a belief that Britain was a humane as well as powerful nation that would not tolerate slave-trading. During the War of 1812, they had been joined by thousands of formerly enslaved people, just as they had during the American War of Independence. Allowing Britain's biggest commercial and military rival to continue its slave trade with impunity after the war was seen as a betrayal of these new friends and allies. Haiti once again became an important political bone of contention in British popular politics. During the wars, Britain had reopened trade with independent Haiti, and even officially recognised its neutrality, allowing badly-needed commercial revenues to flow into the war effort. Despite this, the 1815 treaty offered no protection whatsoever for Haiti. As one commentator put it, 'for the last ten years we have enjoyed this lucrative branch of trade, and have maintained with the people of St. Domingo the relations of peace and amity […] we have now left them to the exterminating sword of France, without a single provision in their favour.'[60] It seemed that the much-lauded humanitarian principles supposedly embodied in Britain's abolition of the slave trade were being abandoned in an over-generous peace settlement. In this context, abolitionists from outside the political and social elite again came to embrace notions of political reform, and some black authors were keen to associate themselves with both of these movements.

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[59] See Davis, *Age of Emancipation,* 74-82; Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 251-253; David Turley, 'Antislavery Activists and Officials: "Influence", Lobbying and the Slave Trade, 1807-1850', in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds.), *Slavery, Democracy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2009), 81-92; Paul Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 22-55.

[60] Anon., *Observations on that Part of the Late Treaty of Peace with France, which Relates to the African Slave Trade* (London: Fillerton and Henderson, 1815), 3.

Wedderburn, whose speech at his sentencing hearing at King's Bench in May 1820 was just one of a long line of anti-establishment stunts, was one of the most charismatic of these new 'radical abolitionists'.[61] In stark contrast to the cautiousness of the evangelical black writers of the preceding ten-year period, he presented uncompromising plans for universal slave emancipation outlined in his periodical *The Axe Laid to the Root*, published in 1817.[62] His descriptions of the day-to-day brutality and sexual abuse inherent in the slave system itself, published as part of his 1824 autobiography, *The Horrors of Slavery*, were similarly shocking.[63] Uniquely for any major British writer, Wedderburn actively encouraged violent slave resistance in his writings and speeches. What made his work particularly concerning for the political elite, and especially for absentee planters and slave-owners, was their timing: his texts were published in the aftermath of the large-scale slave rebellions in 1816 in Barbados ('Bussa's Rebellion') and in 1823 in Demerara.[64]

Wedderburn's calls for immediate emancipation indicated that popular abolitionism had split down the middle when it emerged from the wilderness after the wars with France. On one side were working-class radicals such as Wedderburn, joined by dissenters and Unitarians such as Elizabeth Heyrick.[65] For these people, the only way to prevent further slave insurrections was the total and immediate abolition of slavery. On the other side stood a

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[61] For ultra-radicalism and antislavery during this period, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets Revolutionaries and Pornograhers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Iain McCalman, 'Introduction', in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. McCalman, 1-40.

[62] Robert Wedderburn, *The Axe Laid to the Root,* (London: A. Seale, 1816), vols. 1-6.

[63] Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery* (London: R. Wedderburn, 1824); Robert Wedderburn, *An Address to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux* (London: John Ascham, 1831).

[64] Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 254-266; Drescher, *Abolition*, 232-3; Hilary Beckles, 'Emancipation by Law or War? Wilberforce and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion', in David Richardson (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath: The Historical Context* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 80-104; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), 302-305.

[65] For Elizabeth Heyrick's radicalism, see Claire Midgley, 'The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick: An Exploration of the Links Between Gender, Religious Dissent, and Anti-Slavery Radicalism', in: Elizabeth Clapp and Julie Jeffrey (eds.), *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 88-110.

new generation of parliamentary gradualists led by Thomas Fowell Buxton, who relied on

support and patronage from the respectable old guard of the 1780s and '90s. These figures

sought to gain support in Commons, and thought the only way to achieve this was with a

more moderate agenda. The combination (though certainly not co-operation) of parliamentary

and grass-roots antislavery activism ultimately succeeded in obtaining a slew of restrictive

and ameliorative legislation in the latter half of the 1820s.[66]

At the onset of the 1830s, the gap between the radical and parliamentary abolitionists

began to close from both sides at once. Emboldened by their successes (and evidently

impressed by the popularity of a series of sugar and cotton boycotts in the late 1820s),

parliamentary activists began pushing for immediate abolition from 1829. Meanwhile, amidst

a broader move towards respectability, radicals began to reconcile their vision for

emancipation to more moderate, 'establishment' views.[67] Even Wedderburn eventually came

around to the moderatist agenda—his 1831 plan for emancipation, *An Address to Lord

Brougham and Vaux* was, by his standards, shockingly modest in ambition and scope.[68] Just

as in the early 1790s, mass petitions began to flow into parliament, this time demanding the

end of slavery itself. Women's antislavery societies resumed their key role in the movement,

spurred on in 1831 by Mary Prince's accounts of the torture and sexual abuse of enslaved

women in the Caribbean. Parliament, already in crisis over domestic reform, stalled as it had

before, passing yet more restriction laws in 1830.

It was the slaves themselves who finally forced the issue. In 1831, the Baptist War—

another huge slave uprising, this time in Jamaica—and its brutal suppression stimulated

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[66] For amelioration legislation, see for example the restrictive treaties with Brazil and Sweden in 1827, and the acts in 1824 and 1828 preventing slaves from being forcibly transported between colonies.

[67] See Aruna Krishnamurthy, 'Coffeehouse vs. Alehouse: Notes on the Making of the Eighteenth-Century Working-Class Intellectual', in Aruna Krishnamurthy (ed.), *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 85-108; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 181-203.

[68] Robert Wedderburn, *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux* (London: J. Ascham, 1831).

widespread press attention in Britain on the question of slavery.[69] The economic conditions surrounding abolition have been at the centre of historiographical debate for decades, but in any case the social unrest caused by Britain's continuing investment in the institution was untenable.[70] By 1833 it was obvious that, in Seymour Drescher's words, slavery 'could no longer be sustained without continuous agitation at home and abroad.'[71] The Slavery Abolition Act was passed that year, and on 1 August 1834, around 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies—and more elsewhere in the British Empire—became, if only nominally, free.

Celebrities, Evangelicals, Radicals

If we are to expand our view of early black British writers beyond these now-familiar histories, we require an in-depth understanding of their relationships, and the relationships that influenced the production of their texts. A key task of this book, then, is to map some of the web-like structures of social relations that surrounded black writers and their work. Examining three distinct types of network—those which helped to generate celebrity, those that sought to promote their chosen interpretation of Christianity, and those that fought for radical political change—and how they each affected early black writing, allows us to see precisely how these authors fit in to British society and culture more broadly. By shifting focus, and fully recognising their contributions to areas beyond slavery and race, this

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[69] For the Baptist War, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (London, Cornell University Press, 1982), 291-322.

[70] For the famous historiographical debate over the economics of slave emancipation, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977). Recent work has focused on the economics of the compensation paid out to former slave owners. See Catherine Hall et al, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[71] Drescher, *Abolition,* 263.

approach enables us to see that eighteenth-century black intellectuals were important actors in the development of modern British society.

Why is such a shift in focus necessary? After all, some black authors became famous in eighteenth-century Britain explicitly *because* of their public and near exclusive association with the issues of race, slavery and abolition. Part I of this book investigates how these associations were forged by exploring the networks surrounding 'celebrity' black authors and their texts. Histories of celebrity culture in eighteenth-century Britain have traditionally focussed on either the stage or the page, concerning themselves primarily with the 'art' of promoting and disseminating an essential, authentic 'self' for public consumption through either theatre or the writing of fiction.[72] Felicity Nussbaum, Tom Mole, Claire Brock and other scholars have argued that celebrities were important to the development of personal identity in Britain because they simultaneously defined and subverted an idealised and essential personal 'self', in a way that could be widely reproduced and marketed.[73] Whereas these studies have most often focused on the identitive and performative category of gender, this book demonstrates that some black authors became famous through the exploitation (and in some cases subversion) of expectations about them as being uniquely situated to talk about slavery and racial prejudice.

Black Writing in Britain breaks somewhat from convention in suggesting that we consider some black authors celebrities. While they were well-known, and undeniably

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[72] A foundational text in the study of historical celebrity is Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For the significance of essential 'selfhood' in this period, see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

[73] David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Tom Mole (ed.), *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Claire Brook, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2006).

talented, they were certainly not universally *celebrated*, and they were seldom beset by adoring admirers (although, as Hannah Rose Murray has demonstrated, the African-American author and abolitionist Frederick Douglass was during his visit to Britain in the mid-1840s).[74] Yet, as the numerous and well-publicised sex scandals of the period show, celebrity status was as often as not conferred by prurient interest, controversy or sympathy as it was by breathless adoration.[75] The precise definition of a celebrity in eighteenth-century Britain is still the subject of debate, but Mole's model, in which celebrity is substantiated in an individual, an audience, and an industry, is certainly a useful starting point.[76] In the case of black celebrity writers, the 'industry' was provided by popular print culture, the 'audience' was provided by the rise in popular antislavery sentiment, and the 'individual' took the form of an antislavery or abolitionist authorial 'self', generated in negotiation with each writer's production and distribution networks. Understanding the practicalities of producing a marketable and supposedly 'authentic' identity within such well-defined associative networks allows us to see the mechanisms of celebrity culture and the role of media in constructing eighteenth-century British political identity—that is, the intersection of politics and popular culture—more clearly.

For Ignatius Sancho, his fame as an antislavery writer was unintentional, since it mostly came to him after his death. Sancho had been a servant and shopkeeper as well as a masterful letter-writer, but after he died, his former correspondents, editor, and biographer took great pains to represent him as an 'extraordinary negro', whose literary skills disproved proslavery arguments for the supposed intellectual inferiority of Africans. In contrast, Olaudah Equiano, the most famous black writer of this period, made himself into a public

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[74] Hannah-Rose Murray, 'A "Negro Hercules": Frederick Douglass' Celebrity in Britain, *Celebrity Studies*, 7:2 (2016), 264-279.

[75] See Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[76] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, 3-10.

intellectual by navigating abolitionist networks and promoting his work as part of an emerging canon of antislavery writing. By the time Mary Prince's *Life* was published in 1831, abolitionists recognised the value of celebrity in promoting popular antislavery sentiment. Prince's network, centred upon members of the Anti-Slavery Society, deliberately engineered for her a form of celebrity that was contingent on a gendered perception of her victimhood as a female slave. They hoped to create in Prince a representative female victim of the inhumanity of slavery, thus appealing to popular abolitionism's substantial female contingent. In each of these examples, black writing that was marketed as being about slavery or ethnicity became more popular than black writing about anything else. Black authors became famous in proportion to the extent that their work reflected the interests of the abolitionist movement. In modern historical and critical studies, as well as in popular culture, this remains the case.

Yet these were not the only stories black authors in eighteenth-century Britain wanted to tell. For some, faith was the most important thing in their lives, and this sometimes led them into opposition against their antislavery contemporaries. Part II of this book explores how evangelical networks influenced how black writing was written, published, sold and read. Traditionally, Britain has rarely been seen as a part of the black evangelical world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[77] While historians have taken a renewed interest in the role of black evangelicals in the Atlantic world, they usually restrict their attentions to North America and the Caribbean.[78] Meanwhile, scholars of eighteenth and early nineteenth-

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[77] See, for example, Cedrick May, *Evangelicalism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), which only mentions Britain in passing in the context of the American Revolution.

[78] See, for example, John Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2016); Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert Elder, *The Sacred Mirror: Evangelicalism, Honor, and Identity in the Deep South, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Sylvia Frey and Betty

century British protestantism have never taken seriously the role of black preachers in helping to facilitate links between evangelical groups and mainstream political culture.[79] As a result, accepted historiographical narratives of black Atlantic evangelicalism currently lack a British perspective, while accepted narratives of British evangelicalism lack a black perspective.

This is a curious omission, since, as E. P. Thompson famously suggested, evangelicalism (and Methodism in particular) was an essential component in the emergence of new egalitarian discourses in Britain during this period.[80] David Hempton has highlighted that the 'conservative instincts' of the Methodist movement (which Thompson found so obnoxious) actually helped to reconcile leading preachers to the abolitionist cause, generating much-needed platforms for popular support during the anti-radical years of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.[81] The role of evangelical movements in promoting proslavery discourse, meanwhile, is evidently a source of discomfort for some historians of popular religion, and it is often dealt with rather perfunctorily.[82] Nevertheless, just as they did in the Americas, black authors provided a crucial link between pro-and antislavery discourses and the evolving cultures of evangelicalism in Britain.[83] They effectively acted as translators between the moral lexicon of the slavery debates and those of the evangelical movements of

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Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[79] See, for example, Joseph Stubenrauch, *The Evangelical Age of Ingenuity in Industrial Britain* (OxfordL Oxford University Press, 2016); James Schwenk, *Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2008); Grayson Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: UCL Press, 1998); David Hempton: *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[80] E. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1968), 385-440.

[81] Hempton, *Religion of the People*, 162-179

[82] See, for example, Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntington's Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 209n219, the only mention of Hastings' consistent proslavery position.

[83] See Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

which they were a part. By focusing on the specific textures of this process, and by centring

black agency in the spread of evangelical religion in Britain during this period, we arrive at a

new understanding of how international nonconforming religious movements reconciled

protest with loyalty, ensuring their own survival and expansion well into the nineteenth

century.

I have already alluded to how Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's proslavery Calvinist friends

contributed to his autobiography, ensuring that his voice be understood as a counter-argument

to emerging antislavery rhetoric propagated by their Arminian rivals. In Boston King's case,

important Wesleyan Methodists, working in collaboration with Wilberforce, encouraged him

to write an autobiography that emphasised the possibilities of evangelical Christianity, while

carefully avoiding any criticism of the Pitt administration's foreign or domestic policies,

including on slavery. When the African-American preacher John Jea came to Britain, he too

worked within existing Methodist networks, this time organised spatially around the

working-class districts of Liverpool, Bolton, Portsmouth and Winchester. Jea's associations

with these networks enabled him to remain sensitive to local identity narratives when he

composed and published an autobiography and book of hymns in Portsmouth between 1815

and 1816. Nonconformist evangelical networks thus provided rare and valuable opportunities

for black authors to write and publish their life stories during the eighteenth century.

However, because of denominational politics, conditional patronage, and an increasing desire

for establishment respectability, these opportunities often came with strings attached—

usually relating to how slavery was represented.

Not so with politically radical networks. As Part III of this book shows, radicalism

offered black authors unparalleled autonomy and intellectual freedom. Scholars of working-

class culture in this period, notably Emma Griffin, have recently returned to autobiography as

a key source on the radical movements.[84] This is related to a broader desire to understand how considerations of class and class consciousness intersected with other identitive categories such as race and gender. Life-writing not only offers arresting and immediate detail about how popular politics affected people at the individual level, but has in many instances also enabled us to fully 'see' members of the emergent working class who, by dint of their gender or ethnicity, were even more marginalised than their white male peers.[85] Increasingly, studies of working people's autobiographies highlight just how intellectually and personally diverse British plebeian radicalism was during this crucial period in the formation of working-class identity.

What happens to our view of radicalism when we look at it through the lens of black leadership? Iain McCalman's seminal work on Wedderburn and London's 'radical underworld' has demonstrated that black intellectuals were indeed key players in the movements for political reform in Britain.[86] Yet by placing such figures at the very centre of our investigations, we can begin to highlight the interconnectedness of domestic reform and contemporaneous debates over empire, migration and slavery. This reminds us that British radicals were not completely parochial in their concerns; indeed, like all serious political thinkers of the period, they kept a close eye on how British interests unfolded around the globe. Formerly-enslaved black radicals represented a crucial link between the struggle for political and personal liberty at home with that of the oppressed in other parts of the globe—

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[84] Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); see also David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981); David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[85] Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); James Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic During the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 156-184; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 50-72; Mike Sanders, *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[86] McCalman, *Radical Underworld,* and Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Iain McCalman (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 1991).

principally in Africa and the Americas.[87] This is not to overlook the fact that the domestic

reform movements became increasingly nationalist (and indeed racist) from the late 1820s

onwards.[88] Rather, by centralising black radical perspectives, and exploring the networks that

influenced and helped to forge them, it encourages us to view working-class culture as

encompassing views on global and imperial, as well as national politics.

In Ottobah Cugoano's case, the most influential network for him consisted of the new

black immigrant community arriving in Britain after the American Revolutionary War.

Cugoano served as a link between black radicalism, which resisted state-sponsored

oppression of black people—for example, discouraging compliance with the Sierra Leone

resettlement project of 1787—and white radicalism, which sought parliamentary reform. This

nascent black radicalism was carried forward into the nineteenth century by Robert

Wedderburn. Making use of an extensive network of radical collaborators, publishers and

conspirators, he was able to produce a visionary rhetoric of global freedom, in which an

idealised, post-revolutionary British liberty was inextricably linked to freedom from slavery

and tyranny for all enslaved people. While Wedderburn's dependence on his interpersonal

network eventually proved to be his downfall, his story epitomises how black writing was

produced in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain: as collaborative artefacts that

emerged not from individual geniuses but from relationships between several actors.

In concentrating on how these tensions played out, this book examines discourses—

constellations of ideas, texts, statements, shared values and assumptions, quirks of language,

etcetera—as much as it does interpersonal networks. It is no coincidence that discourses of

celebrity, evangelicalism and radicalism in particular were undergoing significant shifts just

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[87] For the 'transatlantic proletariat', see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), esp. 287-326.

[88] Ryan Hanley, 'Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814-1833', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 103-123.

as black writing was first being published in Britain. It rather indicates that black writing helped to constitute these changes. Black intellectuals were, in other words, highly significant actors in the emergence of radically new and persistent discourses of modernity. They were interested in matters well beyond the purview of slavery and abolition, even if that has always been the main frame of reference in which they are read.

Early black authors have been bound to slavery and abolition in this way. But by looking at their other bonds—to family, colleagues, patrons, students, employers, comrades and even, more abstractly, to discourses—we can begin to see the true extent of their contributions to British society and culture. By understanding how and why their work was written, published, sold, and read, we can see that they used their own experiences to reach out, and make readers care—of course, about the horrors of slavery, but just as much about freedom, faith, equality and friendship. And by revisiting their work mindful of these different types of bindings, we can begin the work of returning these authors to their rightful place, not at the margins, but at the centre of British and Atlantic history.