



UNCHAINED VOICES

AN ANTHOLOGY
OF BLACK AUTHORS
IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
EXPANDED EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

Unchained Voices reproduces the major works published during the eighteenth century by authors of African birth or descent who wrote or dictated their stories in English. Non-aboriginal Americans born in the Americas were called Creoles during the eighteenth century. Some of the African and Creole authors included in *Unchained Voices* were born slaves; some had slavery thrust upon them; and some were never slaves. All the authors in *Unchained Voices* spent at least part of their lives in Britain or its colonies, and all were subjects of the British monarch before the American Revolution. Many of them chose to remain British subjects during and after the Revolution, continuing to identify themselves as African-Britons rather than embracing the new political identity of African-Americans subject to the government of the United States. Consequently, all these African or Creole authors had African-British identities before the official separation of the thirteen colonies from Britain in 1783. Phillis Wheatley, Belinda, Johnson Green, Benjamin Banneker, and Venture Smith, however, accepted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the new status of being African-Americans. Although the sixteen authors included here do not easily fit into a coherent group united by any organizing principle other than their African heritage, one theme can be identified in virtually all of their works: liberation from either physical or spiritual captivity, and often from both. The range of representations of the theme of liberation reflects the various geographical, social, and temporal settings in which the different eighteenth-century African-British and African-American authors produced their writings.

The theme of liberation these works share will not surprise readers familiar with the nineteenth-century North American model of slavery, Africa, slave (or escape) narratives by former slaves, and the abolition movement. But such readers may be surprised by the diversity of the authors, subjects, and forms of the writings produced by Blacks during the eighteenth century. The nineteenth-century model includes tobacco or cotton plantations worked by Creole Black slaves owned by Creole American Whites. Africa, when mentioned at all, is either a mythical past, a romanticized future, or the victim of present-day imperialist European powers. In this nineteenth-century model, slaves are all native-born in America and essentially undifferentiated from one another except by occupation. Slave owners and traders are all White (though in reality, some free Blacks owned Black slaves in the United States), and the whole economic institution of slavery is defended by assertions of the racial inferiority of the enslaved.

The eighteenth century presents a far more varied picture. Throughout the period, slaves were imported directly to the colonies from Africa, especially to the sugar-growing plantations of the West Indies, where the very high mortality rate meant that the native slave population was not self-sustaining. By 1750, most slaves in British North America, on the other hand, were native-born, with the population growing by natural increase. Cotton was not a major crop until the invention of the cotton gin in the last decade of the eighteenth century made large-scale production possible and profitable. Mainly because of disease, before the widespread use of quinine, Eu-

Europeans were restricted to factories (trading posts) on the coast of Africa, and were dependent on Africans for the maintenance of the slave trade.

Without the complicity of other Africans, very few Black slaves could have been exported to the Americas. Europeans were able to exploit this complicity because the concept of *Africa* was mainly geographic, not also social, political, or religious to the extent that the concept of *Europe* had become by the eighteenth century. Nor was the notion of *nation* or *state* equivalent in the two continents. The indigenous peoples of Africa did not think of themselves as *African*; they were Ashanti, Fante, Yoruba, or any one of a number of other ethnic groups with differing languages, religions, and political systems. Tending to see themselves as more dissimilar than alike, the various African peoples were willing to enslave and sell to Europeans those outside their own group because they did not identify with them. Only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century did some of the people removed from Africa as slaves begin to embrace a public social and political identity of *African*, calling themselves "Sons of Africa" in both Britain and America, for example. In a sense, *Africa* did not exist as an idea rather than a place until after the anti-slave trade and anti-slavery movements began. The evolving concept of *Africa* can be found in several of the works in *Unchained Voices*. Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, for example, traces the development of his expanding identity from Igbo, to "almost an Englishman," to a "Son of Africa," to the African-British figure who faces us in his frontispiece.

Before the end of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, Europeans made much of the alleged differing suitability of the various African peoples for enslavement: some African peoples were seen as too warlike, for example. Because many slaves, and most in the West Indies, knew from their own African experience that being Black was not equivalent to being enslaved, the fairly frequent West Indian slave revolts were almost always led by non-Creole Black Africans, for whom freedom was a memory of the recent past rather than a dream of the distant future. The sense of freedom lost is expressed by several of the authors in this anthology, of whom six claim African births, and a seventh was said to have been born on the passage from Africa to the West Indies. In the nineteenth-century model, however, slaves have been at least somewhat acculturated to slavery, having been born into it and knowing no other way of life.

For most of the eighteenth century, certainly the first half, slavery was perceived primarily as an economic concern, not a moral problem, and the initial basis of African slavery was predominantly financial rather than racial. When, in the 1740s, George Whitefield (whose religious teachings were to become so influential for some of the Black authors collected here) considered possessing slaves in Georgia, he saw the subject not in a moral context but as an economic necessity. The use of slaves on the rice-growing farm that supported Whitefield's Orphan House in Bethesda, Georgia, made the Countess of Huntingdon, patron of several of the authors in this anthology, a slave owner as well when she inherited Whitefield's Georgia holdings at his death in 1770. Like most evangelicals during the period, Huntingdon did not see slavery and Christianity as incompatible. Nowhere in the New Testament is slavery explicitly prohibited, and to those who believed that the afterlife was far more important than temporal existence, what mattered most was that pagan Africans be exposed to the truth of Christianity and be humanely treated in whatever social condition they were placed. Thus slavery could even be seen as a kind of fortunate fall, whereby the discomfort of the slaves' present life was overcompensated by the chance given

them of achieving eternal salvation. This notion of a fortunate fall is promoted by the African Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein in his Latin dissertation that justifies slavery as having biblical precedent in the past and serving evangelical ends in the present and future.¹ The fortunate fall into slavery is also the subject of Phillis Wheatley's short poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America."

The actions as well as the words of some of the writers represented in this anthology demonstrate their acceptance of the institution of slavery at some points in their lives. Briton Hammon, probably a free Black, was willing to take employment on a slave-trading ship; Francis Williams certainly and John Marrant perhaps owned slaves; and Olaudah Equiano, as a free man, was a slave driver in the 1770s. Prior to 1770, slavery was usually accepted as one of the long-familiar statuses of the social and economic structure that formed the hierarchy of society. All recorded history, including the Bible, recognized the existence of slavery, and while some people called for the amelioration of the conditions of the enslaved, very few people imagined that slavery could, or perhaps even should, be eradicated. An idealized vision of a perfect society, like that found in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), could include slavery. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when the slave trade came under sustained religious, moral, and economic attack, supporters of slavery began to develop the racist defense that would become the now all-too-familiar justification of the institution in the next century. Even though Europeans brought a particularly virulent form of slavery—large-scale, hereditary, and race-restricted—they did not introduce the concept of slavery itself to the Americas, where small-scale, domestic slavery already existed. We should remember that from the perspective of history we are living in an unusually slave-free time. Slavery ended in Brazil barely one hundred years ago, and it was outlawed in Saudi Arabia only in 1970. But the evil has not yet been completely eradicated: anti-slavery societies still exist because of the estimated two hundred thousand slaves (mainly women and children) remaining in the world.

During the eighteenth century, slavery was not strictly defined by White ownership of Black workers. Throughout the century, writers remarked on the existence of White slaves, especially in eastern Europe, and the word *slave* itself comes from the word *Slav*. Slavery was not abolished in Muscovy (Russia) until 1723, when it was superseded by serfdom. The enslavement of Christian Europeans by Muslim African Whites on the Barbary Coast or by Muslim Turks in Asia was a major concern during the period, getting more treatment in print before 1770 than the condition of Black African slaves. As the performance and publication of Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Play Slaves in Algiers; Or, A Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia, 1794) indicate, the subject remained topical throughout the century. Indeed, Britain was not able to force North African Muslims to abolish the enslavement of Christians until 1816, nearly a decade after it had abolished its own trade in Black Africans. In his *Interesting Narrative* (London, 1789), Equiano comments on the brutal treatment of White galley slaves in Italy. Various forms of coerced labor existed in Britain itself, some of which were introduced into the American colonies. Scottish miners, although they were not chattels (personal possessions of an owner), belonged, like feudal serfs, to the mine in which they worked. This labor system did not legally end until the middle of the eighteenth century. Coerced labor of Whites in Britain and its colonies included indentured servants (and even apprentices), who signed away their freedom for a specified amount of time in exchange for room and board and a guaranteed job (or job training), in

effect becoming voluntary slaves. And, after the Transportation Act of 1718, at least fifty thousand convicts were transported from Britain, at the government's expense, to the colonies to be sold as servants to work out their sentences.²

Nor did Britons believe that to be Black necessarily meant that one was suited for slavery. Social status could supersede race as a defining category, as it does in the fictional accounts of Oronokoo by Aphra Behn (1688) and Thomas Southerne (1695), or in the historical cases of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo or Prince William Ansh Sessarakoo that found their way into print in the 1730s and 1740s. One of the cruel ironies of the "democratic" revolution in the thirteen colonies was that it also "democratized" slavery, making all people of African descent equally eligible for enslavement. Throughout the eighteenth century the more hierarchical Britons recognized slavery as an inappropriate status for at least some Africans.

The implicit acceptance of the institution of slavery is seen in what are perhaps the earliest African-British publications: Briton Hammon's *A Narrative of the Most Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (Boston, 1760), and (apparently no relation) Jupiter Hammon's *An Evening Thought, Salvation, by Christ, with Penitential Cries: Composed by Jupiter Hammon, a Negro Belonging to Mr. Lloyd* (New York, 1760). Neither Hammon seems to have been known to any of the succeeding African-British authors, probably because their works were published solely in the provinces of the British Empire and never reprinted in London. But the Hammons used the two primary forms employed by almost every one of the later writers: the autobiographical prose narrative with varying degrees of religious implications, and the religious poem. Had not Briton and Jupiter Hammon each identified himself in his title as "a Negro," nothing in either of these first two works would have enabled us with certainty to recognize them as African-Britons.

Both works are about captivity, liberation, and restoration. Briton is sold to the Governor of Spanish Cuba by the Caribbean Indians who have captured him. He is rescued by the captain of an English ship who refuses to "deliver up any *Englishman* under *English Colours*" (emphasis in original) to the pursuing Spaniards from whom Briton has escaped. Eventually, through the providence of God, he is reunited with his "Master" (probably employer rather than owner), and together they return to Massachusetts. Briton emphasizes his physical captivity; Jupiter focuses exclusively on his spiritual captivity by sin and his faith in liberation by Christ. Neither Hammon may have felt overly offended or oppressed by the reality of slavery because they were fortunate to live in colonies where the conditions of slavery were generally relatively mild (as compared, for example, with those in the West Indies) and in a period when the separate colonies had a great deal of latitude in the creation of internal legislation. From the perspective of African-Britons, one of the harshest ironies of the last half of the eighteenth century was the White colonists' fierce defense of local legislative control as the bulwark of freedom from political slavery imposed by the Mother Country. In effect, however, such local control meant that the colonies could pass far more repressive laws regulating slavery and free Blacks than were in force in England itself, where racial intermarriage was legal and relatively unremarkable, as the lives of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ottobah Cugoana, and Equiano demonstrate. And in Britain, being Black did not automatically disqualify one from voting, as the case of Ignatius Sancho demonstrates.

The irony of fighting for the freedom to enslave was highlighted in 1772. In

June of that year, the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, Lord Mansfield, declared in the Somerset case that a slave owner could not legally force his slave to return from England to the West Indies. Many observers believed that Mansfield's ruling confirmed that a slave was free as soon as he or she set foot on English soil.³ Following the precedent Mansfield set, the Scottish court declared slavery illegal in 1778. The legality of slavery in England, disputed since the Cartwright case of 1569, which concerned the status of a Russian slave, and long ignored *de facto* (in practice), was now apparently rejected *de jure* (by law) as well. Advertisements for sales of slaves, notices of runaway slaves, and attempts to enforce colonial slave laws in Britain—all already rare in England—disappeared after the Mansfield ruling.⁴ Although the great jurist Sir William Blackstone qualified his statement in later editions in light of the Mansfield judgment, the first edition of his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (London, 1765) declared "that a slave or negro, the instant he lands in England, becomes a freeman."⁵ And the magistrate Sir John Fielding was already complaining in 1768 that slaves brought to London from the West Indies "no sooner arrive here, than they put themselves on a Footing with other Servants, become intoxicated with Liberty, grow refractory, and either by Persuasion of others, or from their own Inclinations, begin to expect Wages according to their own Opinion of their Merits" (*Extracts from Such of the Laws, as Particularly Relate to the Peace and Good Order of this Metropolis* [London, 1768]).

As Fielding's comment indicates, even before the ruling of June 1772, African-Britons saw England as the promised land of social and economic liberation. The Mansfield decision was popularly received as a virtual emancipation proclamation for the approximately fourteen to twenty thousand Blacks living in Britain, about 0.2 percent of the national population, but perhaps as much as 2 percent of London's population.⁶ By comparison, the Declaration of Independence, signed four years later in Philadelphia, offered nothing to the nearly five hundred thousand Blacks in North America, or 20 percent of the total population. (The five hundred thousand Blacks in the British West Indies, more than 90 percent of the population, were unaffected by either the Mansfield ruling or the Declaration of Independence.) The Mansfield judgment brought to public attention the legal status of the people like Equiano, Cugoana, and Sancho who were British yet not English. Their political status became a subject for public argument in light of the ideological conflict during the American Revolution, and their status as human beings was disputed during the crusade in the 1790s to end British involvement in the slave trade with Africa.

Moreover, the Mansfield decision arguably played a measurable role in the development of African-British writing. At the end of 1772, Gronniosaw's *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of . . . an African Prince, as Related by Himself* was published in Bath, capitalizing on the attention brought to the existence and status of African-Britons by the Mansfield decision. Phillis Wheatley, unable to find a publisher in Boston, published her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in London in 1773. Wheatley shared Gronniosaw's patron, the Methodist Countess of Huntingdon, and acknowledged Gronniosaw's work in a letter to the Countess.⁷ England was obviously a far more receptive environment than North America for African-British writers, and publication there almost guaranteed distribution if not reprinting throughout the British Empire. Thus, although Jupiter Hammon's previous work was very probably unknown to Wheatley, hers became the subject of one

of his poems. Significantly, Hammon chose to respond in his *Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess* (Hartford, 1778) to her "On Being Brought from Africa to America," a poem about her paradoxical deliverance from the spiritual slavery of Africa to her physically enslaved but spiritually liberated condition in America. The Mansfield decision could also affect the lives of African-Britons quite directly. Wheatley, who came to England as a slave, returned to Boston a slave, but with the promise of freedom. No doubt knowing that she could not be legally forced to return, she probably maneuvered her master into agreeing before witnesses that he would emancipate her if she returned with him.⁸ The attention Mansfield brought to the subject of British slavery may also be at least partially responsible for the publication of Francis Williams's "Ode" in Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (London, 1774). As a defender of slavery, particularly in the West Indies, Long translated and reproduced Williams's poem in hopes of disproving arguments that African-Britons were capable of creating literature, even when given the benefit of education. But Long's attempt to discredit Williams, and by extension all Black writers, backfired almost completely. Without Long's attack, we would know virtually nothing of Williams and have no certain example of his work.⁹

The contrast between the legal statuses of African-Britons in the Mother Country and the colonies was underscored by the hypocrisy of the White North American colonists' demanding liberty for themselves while enslaving others. This hypocrisy prompted criticism by Granville Sharp and Samuel Johnson, among others on both sides of the Atlantic. The White Americans' position gave their English opponents an easy opportunity to demonstrate moral and political superiority. Thus, in a letter written in 1776 (though not published until 1784) to an American correspondent, Thomas Day observes:

Slavery . . . is a crime so monstrous against the human species that all those who practise it deserve to be extirpated from the earth. . . .

If men would be consistent, they must admit all the consequences of their own principles; and you and your countrymen are reduced to the dilemma of either acknowledging the rights of your Negroes, or of surrendering your own. — If there be certain natural and universal rights, as the declarations of your Congress [including the Declaration of Independence] so repeatedly affirm, I wonder how the unfortunate Africans have incurred their forfeiture. — Is it the antiquity, or the virtues, or the great qualities of the English Americans, which constitutes the difference, and entitles them to rights from which they totally exclude more than a fourth part of the species? — Or do you choose to make use of that argument, which the great Montesquieu has thrown out as the severest ridicule, that they are black, and you white; that you have lank, long hair, while theirs is short and woolly?

Given African-Britons' association of England with potential liberation, King George III, represented in the Declaration of Independence as a tyrant to colonial American Whites, was often seen by their slaves as a potential savior. Hence, in her *Poems* Wheatley includes a panegyric addressed "To the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1768." Not surprisingly then, given the opportunity, most of the eighteenth-century Blacks whose voices we can recover, either directly or through intermediaries,

chose a British rather than an American identity, taking advantage of the British promises of emancipation for refugee slaves of the colonial rebels (but not for refugees from Loyalist masters). For every Johnson Green, or the more famous Crispus Attucks, who identified with the Rebel cause, many more Blacks chose the other side: for example, the freeman John Marrant; George Liele, the slave of a Loyalist; and David George and Boston King, slaves of rebels. Of the half-million Blacks in the thirteen colonies, the overwhelming majority of whom were slaves, approximately five thousand served the colonists' cause while tens of thousands, perhaps as many as one hundred thousand, were lost to the British, though many of those remained as slaves under Loyalist masters. After the war, Britain and not the new United States continued to serve as the promised land of freedom for present and former slaves in the British Empire, such as Equiano, who had spent about five years of his life as a slave in the West Indies, as well as about a month in Virginia. Not surprisingly, in his posthumously published *Letters* (London, 1782), Sancho never questions the validity of the British cause in the war he supported against the Americans led by the man he mockingly calls "Washintub."¹⁰ In 1789, Equiano referred to "England, where my heart had always been," and in 1793, writing from the Sierra Leone settlement in Africa, David George, who had been born and raised in South Carolina, considered England to be "home."¹¹

Not all eighteenth-century Black writers, of course, chose to retain a British identity. As Wheatley's poem "To His Excellency General Washington" (1775) demonstrates, some free Blacks chose the new African-American identity now available. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the period known as the "first emancipation," the anti-slavery movement grew, especially in the North. The petition of the ex-slave Belinda to the Massachusetts legislature and Banneker's letter to Thomas Jefferson indicate how optimistic some African-Americans were about the possibility of achieving universal freedom and justice based on Revolution principles. The choice of identities was possible because both British and American identities were recent political constructions invented in the eighteenth century, rather than the traditional ethnic or religious categories, which they subsumed. Thus one could be (after the Union of 1707) a Scots-Briton, a Welsh-Briton, and (in the nineteenth century) an Irish-Briton, as well as an English-Briton. Or an African-Briton.¹²

Calling attention to one's loyalty to Britain was conventional in the works by almost all the African-British writers. As Briton Hammon had first identified himself, Gronniosaw and Marrant represent themselves as loyal British subjects by speaking of their military service in the British army and navy; Sancho does so by commenting on the conduct of the war against the North American colonists; and Williams and Wheatley write poems praising, respectively, the Governor of Jamaica and the King of Great Britain. The military careers of most of the African-British men are understandable, given that the British army and navy were open to all talents in ways that most occupations were not. Competence mattered more than color, as Equiano's own service record demonstrates.

Another way of displaying British values was through the endorsement of Christianity expressed by almost all the African-British writers, many of whom were Methodist members of the Church of England, embracing the predeterminist Calvinism preached by George Whitefield and the clergymen associated with his aristocratic patron, the Countess of Huntingdon.¹³ As the satiric representation of a Black member of the congregation in William Hogarth's print *Credulity, Superstition and Fa-*

naticism (London, 1762) indicates, Marrant and Equiano were not the only African-Britons influenced by Whitefield's doctrine and preaching. Sancho's dismissive image of "a Methodist preacher" as "flat, dull, and tedious" may have been ironic: he at least occasionally attended a Methodist chapel.¹³ The beliefs that salvation was freely granted by God rather than earned by humans and that particular people were predestined to be saved may have appealed to so many African-Britons for several reasons. The evangelical Methodists took religion to the people, rather than waiting for the people to come to church, and they saw all levels of society, including slaves, as having the potential to share in salvation. When physical liberation from enslavement in the present seemed impossible, spiritual freedom and equality in the afterlife offered some solace. And a faith that depends on predestination for salvation rather than on spiritual rewards for good works may have been especially attractive to those whose ability to perform good works was severely limited by their social condition.

Undoubtedly underlying the emphasis on religion in the narratives of eighteenth-century Black authors was the long-standing belief that conversion to Christianity merited emancipation from slavery; a belief so strong that it led to colonial statutes denying its validity. The assumption that conversion would, or at least should, guarantee freedom is understandable. Societies that practiced slavery traditionally enslaved outsiders, and one of the most common indicators of an outsider was religious difference. For example, ancient Hebrews and eighteenth-century Muslims reserved the condition of chattel slavery for unbelievers. As the rate of slave conversions to Christianity grew, defenders of slavery found themselves under increasing pressure to find other measures of difference by which to distinguish their slaves from themselves. Ethnicity, color, and law became the principal means to render alien those who had become religiously assimilated, and thus likely to claim to have become social equals.

By 1706 the British colonies of the Carolinas, New Jersey, and New York all had declared conversion and baptism irrelevant to a slave's status. But faith in the effects of conversion abided, especially in England itself, where no positive (formulated and passed by Parliament) laws specifically addressed the issue of slavery. Sir John Fielding complained in 1768 about the continuing belief in the equation of Christianity and freedom and its disruptive social effects:

There are already a great Number of black Men and Women who have made themselves so troublesome and dangerous to the Families who brought them over [to England from the American colonies] as to get themselves discharged; they enter into Societies, and make it their Business to corrupt and dissatisfy the Mind of every fresh black Servant that comes to *England*; first, by getting them christened or married, which they inform them makes them free (tho' it has been adjudged by our most able Lawyers, that neither of these Circumstances alter the Master's Property in a Slave). (*Extracts from Such of the Laws*)¹⁴

Even after the 1772 Mansfield ruling, as Cugoana's case demonstrates, Blacks continued to see baptism as a rite of passage to freedom in England. The slaves' association of Christianity and emancipation was reinforced by the leading role played in the

anti-slave-trade movement by the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and evangelical Anglicans like Equiano's friend James Ramsay.

Most of the writers represented in this collection were also beneficiaries and/or agents of the evangelical Christian movement, led by Methodist and Baptist missionaries, that pervaded the eighteenth-century British Empire. The earliest Protestant missionary sent from England to Africa, however, was a non-Methodist Anglican, Philip Quaque and two other Fante boys were brought from present-day Ghana to England in 1754 to be trained to become missionaries to their native countrymen. Baptized in 1759 and ordained a priest by the Church of England in 1765, Quaque and his English wife, Catherine Blunt, left for his homeland in 1766, where he served as "Missionary, School Master, and Catechist to the Negroes on the Gold Coast in Africa" until his death there in 1816. The opportunity to preach gave Jupiter Hammon, Marrant, Liele, George, and King influence and agency rarely experienced by Blacks in the period. Whites recognized that Black preachers could threaten the status quo. Belief in the equality of souls might be taken to imply belief in the equality of bodies and civil rights. Hence, though eventually acquitted, the Black Baptist missionary Liele was arrested in Jamaica on a charge of preaching sedition in the wake of slave uprisings in the Caribbean during the 1790s. As the texts by Liele and Marrant in this anthology show, members of the White ruling class were not certain whether spreading Christianity encouraged submission or insubordination among the converted slaves.

For most of the Black writers, Protestant Christianity with its emphasis on direct knowledge of the Bible was the primary motive for literacy. Virtually all the African-British publications in prose took the form of spiritual autobiographies that trace the transition from pagan beliefs to the Christianity shared with the authors' British and American readers. In each case, men and women escape from some type of physical captivity, whether it be slavery or the capture by Indians suffered by the free Black Marrant in *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (London, 1785). Although not constructed as a conversion narrative, Sancho's post-humously published letters repeatedly attest to his faith in Christianity. Even Green's *Life and Confession* (Worcester, 1786), sensationalist though it is as a cautionary criminal tale, is a spiritual autobiography. The pointedly nonconversion *Narrative of Venture Smith* may reflect in its form Smith's disillusion at the end of the century with the failed promises of the "first emancipation" and the bitter irony of his being a subject of the United States of America, mentioned on his title page. Smith is pointedly only a "resident" of the country. As Elisha Niles reminds us in the preface, Smith had been denied the citizenship and thus the opportunities that might have allowed him to rival the achievements of Benjamin Franklin or George Washington. Smith's text is the only example of a work written or dictated by a Black during the period that is entitled a "narrative" but is not a story of conversion, and his reference to the "christian land" in which he lives is clearly ironic.

Equiano asserts his identity as a Briton more fully than any of his predecessors. Although he claims an African identity, he is British by acculturation and choice.¹⁵ He can, of course, never be *English*, in the ethnic sense in which that word was used during the period, as his White wife is *English*. He adopts, however, the cultural, political, religious, and social values that enable him to be accepted as *British*. Yet he always retains his perspective as an African who has been deracinated and thus has the advantage of knowing his adopted British culture from both the inside and the

outside, a perspective that W.E.B. Du Bois calls the double consciousness of the Black person in a predominantly White society. This double consciousness is reflected in the use of dual identities by Olaudah Equiano/Gustavus Vassa and Ottobah Cugoano/John Stewart, as well as in the comment by Sancho, a voting British citizen, in a letter to his friend Rush (7 September 1779), that he saw himself as "only a lodger [in England]—and hardly that."

Although the sustained political struggle to end the slave trade (and later slavery itself) in the British Empire did not begin until 1787, slavery was a topic of public discussion throughout the century. Many of these discussions, however, did not directly treat the subject of abolishing the trade in slaves, let alone the abolition of the institution of slavery itself. We should note that *abolition* in the eighteenth-century British context almost always refers to abolition of the trade in slaves from Africa to the remaining British colonies in the West Indies, not to the abolition of the institution of slavery itself. Many of the slave-trade abolitionists no doubt saw slavery as the ultimate target, but they recognized that calls for the immediate end of slavery and emancipation of the slaves was too radical a position for the public to support.

The Reverend James Ramsay's public position was typical of those of many other abolitionists. His *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies*, published in London in 1784, can justly be called the opening salvo in the war over the slave trade. Writing in 1786 about his *Essay*, Ramsay comments: "Though I sincerely hope, that some plan will be devised for the future gradual abolition of slavery; and though I am convinced that this may, without any prejudice to the planter, or injury to commerce, be brought about by some such progressive method as is pointed out in the *Essay*; yet this was not the first, or immediate object of that book." Such circumspection reappears in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, where he concentrates on the evils of the slave trade. Equiano states his opposition to slavery far more directly and forcefully in some of his letters to the newspapers. Even by the end of the century, when we speak of the British abolitionist movement we are almost always referring to the movement to abolish the trade, not the institution of slavery itself. Some advocates of the abolition of the trade no doubt saw that as the first step toward total emancipation of the slaves in the British Empire, but they were usually careful not to diminish the size of their potential audience by appearing too radical, Cugoano being the most notable exception.

The Americans' victory in the civil war that we now call the American Revolution led to a great and very visible increase after 1783 in the number of free Blacks accompanying their Loyalist former masters as they left the former thirteen colonies for Canada and London, along with the many slaves who had emancipated themselves by joining the British forces in the war. The sight of unemployed and impoverished Blacks in London prompted the formation in 1786 of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, which promoted the project for resettlement in Sierra Leone, in which Equiano played a major role. According to a report in the newspaper *The Public Advertiser* (6 January 1787), sympathy for the Black Poor was so widespread that White beggars disguised themselves as Blacks to increase their incomes. The aftermath of the defeat by the colonists was a time for national reassessment in Britain, a time well suited for the potentially spiritually regenerating moral crusade initiated by the publication in 1784 of Ramsay's *Essay*, the first attack on slavery by a former West Indian slave owner. At the same time, the loss of the thirteen colonies both

weakened the political base of slavery in Parliament and concentrated attention on the slave trade, without which West Indian slavery seemed unable to survive. The Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, most of whose members were Quakers, was created in London in 1787 and began distributing anti-slave-trade pamphlets throughout the country at the peak of the African trade, when approximately eighty thousand Africans, more than half of them in British ships, were being brought annually to the Americas in the late 1780s. The Committee, allied with other dissenting sects as well as with the evangelical Methodists of the Anglican Church, formed the base for the wider movement that exploited the extraparliamentary methods of political pressure and petitioning that had been developed during the 1760s. Between 1788 and 1792, hundreds of petitions from around the country were presented to Parliament in support of the abolition of the African slave trade.

In 1787, Equiano's friend and sometime collaborator Cugoano published in London his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa*.¹⁶ *Thoughts and Sentiments* remains the most overt African-British challenge to the slave trade and slavery ever published. The title of Cugoano's book, which may have been revised for publication by Equiano, clearly alludes to *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African* (London, 1786), written by another friend of Equiano, Thomas Clarkson. The body of Cugoano's work, full of acknowledged and unacknowledged debts to the writings of others, like his title, demonstrates that he saw the struggle against the trade as a kind of group project. Similarly, Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* often relies on the evidence, examples, and arguments of others (usually acknowledged).

Against this background, Equiano offered his *Interesting Narrative* to his readers as the first full account of the slave trade and slavery published by a former African slave. Equiano's work, which went through nine British editions between 1789 and 1794, is the longest and most significant publication by an African-Briton in the century. Appearing amid the mass national petitioning movement that began in 1788 against the African slave trade,¹⁷ the *Interesting Narrative*, as published in 1789, was structured as a petition against the trade, beginning with an address to the members of both Houses of Parliament and virtually ending with a petition to Queen Charlotte. Like Sancho's *Letters* (1782) and the abbreviated version of Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* (1791), the *Interesting Narrative* was sold by subscription. Equiano convinced his buyers to commit themselves to purchase copies of the book prior to its publication, requiring at least partial payment in advance to cover his living and production costs. Equiano's list of subscribers, headed by the Prince of Wales, acts as an additional catalogue of petitioners. Each succeeding edition included further numbers of subscribers. Publication by subscription, with its attendant lists, was a form of self-promotion. An increasing number of people clearly wanted to be publicly associated with the *Interesting Narrative* and its author, whose credibility and stature were enhanced by the presence of the names of royalty, members of the aristocracy, and other socially and politically prominent figures. The lists also served to link Equiano with the larger movement against the slave trade by including names of others who had already attacked in print or from the pulpit the invidious practice.

By 1789 a recognized tradition of African-British authors had been established, with new writers aware of the works of their predecessors. Jupiter Hammon and Sancho

acknowledge and praise the poetry of Wheatley, and Cugoana refers explicitly to the works of Gronniosaw and Marrant. The subscription lists for Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* connect the author and his work explicitly and implicitly with the African-British writers of the preceding fifteen years, whose works had already been reprinted. Cugoana's name appears; Sancho appears via his son William; Gronniosaw and Wheatley by association with the Countess of Huntingdon; and Marrant by association with his editor, the Reverend William Aldridge. Less directly, the presence of the name of the successor to his alleged patron, the Duke of Montagu, recalls the poem by Francis Williams.

Although Wheatley, Williams, and Sancho rarely address the issues of the abolition of the slave trade or of slavery itself, all to some extent were invoked in the arguments of the 1780s and later about the literary and intellectual capacities of Africans. Having had obvious pretensions to literary achievement while remaining apparently politically disinterested, Wheatley, Williams, and Sancho were frequently placed at the center of the late-eighteenth-century debate over the innate intelligence and even humanity of the African. Unlike Cugoana and Equiano, they were safely dead and thus unable to engage in the controversy themselves. Thomas Jefferson's comments in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787) exemplify the kind of attacks defenders of the slave trade made on the achievements of African-Britons: "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whatley [sic]; but it could not produce a poet. . . . [Ignatius Sancho] has approached nearer to merit in composition. . . . [T]hough we admit him to the first place among those of his own colour who have presented themselves to the public judgment, yet when we compare him with the writers of the race among whom he lived, and particularly with the epistolary class, in which he has taken his own stand, we are compelled to enroll him at the bottom of the column."¹⁸

Many White abolitionists defended the accomplishments of the African-British authors and used them as evidence of their shared humanity. For example, in his *Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London, 1788), the Reverend Robert Boucher Nikkols [Nichols], one of Equiano's subscribers, writes:

The stupidity of negroes is . . . urged by the friends of slavery as a plea for using them as brutes; for they represent the negroes as little removed above the monkey, or the oran-outang, with regard to intellects. But I am very certain, nothing has been written by the late defenders of slavery, that discovers [displays] half the literary merit or ability of two negro writers. Phillis Wheatley wrote correct English poetry within a few years after her arrival in Boston from Africa; and there is a Latin ode of considerable length written in classic language by Francis Williams. . . . I never heard of poems by a monkey, or of Latin odes by an oran-outang.

One need not have been an abolitionist to admit the merit of some Black writers, as John Gabriel Stedman does in his *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796):

That these people are neither divested of a good ear, nor poetical genius, has been frequently proved, when they had the advantages of a good education.

Amongst others, *Phillis Wheatley*, who was a slave at *Boston* in New England, learned the Latin language, and wrote thirty-eight elegant pieces of poetry on different subjects, which were published in 1773. . . .

Ignatius Sancho, a negro, many years servant to the Duke of Montagu, whose sentimental letters, so generally known, would not disgrace the pen of an European, may also be mentioned on this occasion.

Equiano's placing himself centrally in the context of eighteenth-century writings against the slave trade by Whites as well as African-Britons again serves to assert his British identity. Reading his *Interesting Narrative* in light of other abolitionist publications, one gets the impression that what James Field Stanfield later says of accounts of slave-trade voyages can be applied as well to the writings of Equiano and his immediate contemporaries and predecessors:

The principles of the Slave trade. . . are alike, in all the cases I have met with, whether from actual knowledge, or well-attested information. Publications therefore of this kind must grow tiresome, and be necessarily marked with an unfavourable degree of sameness; unfavourable, I mean, with regard to the patience of cold, dispassionate readers: for, taken in another point of view, it seems to give additional strength to the cause. Is it not a strong presumptive proof of the veracity of the circumstances that have been offered, that a number of men, unknown to each other, from different parts of the kingdom, dating their facts so long asunder, bringing their scenes of destruction from different places and vessels, without an invitation, without interest to serve, without any other purpose than that of supporting the cause of humanity, should concur, in such a wonderful degree. (*The Guinea Voyage, a Poem* [Edinburgh, 1807])

Spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, travel book, adventure tale, narrative of slavery, economic treatise, and *apologia* (justification and vindication of one's life), among other things, Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* marks the culmination of the African-British tradition of the eighteenth century.

In response to the growing public interest in the controversy over the African slave trade, in February 1788 King George III ordered the Privy Council Committee for Trade and Plantations to begin an investigation of British commercial relations with Africa and the nature of the slave trade. The Committee, as well as the House of Commons from 1789 to 1792, heard evidence for and against the trade. From 1789 William Wilberforce led attempts in the House of Commons to pass an abolition bill, only to see it either fail by narrow margins or be blocked in the House of Lords in 1792, after the Commons had voted in that year to end the trade in 1796. The outbreak of the French Revolution and the subsequent Terror during the period from 1789 to 1794 made Britons reluctant to pursue any major social reforms lest they lead to revolutionary results, and the slave revolts in the West Indies during the 1790s seemed to justify conservative fears. The British government's attempt to suppress dissident voices may help to account for Equiano's apparent public silence after 1794, when his former landlord and friend Thomas Hardy, Secretary of the London Corresponding Society, was tried and acquitted on a charge of treason. Among the papers

the government seized at Hardy's arrest was a letter to him from Equiano. Contributing to Equiano's silence after 1794, however, may have been the economic independence he had earned through the publication of his *Interesting Narrative*, an independence he felt justified the claim he makes in his will to the status of "Gentleman."¹⁹ Later in the decade, the threat posed by Napoleonic France to national survival eclipsed all other issues until 1804, when the agitation for abolition, relatively quiescent since 1796, revived.

The texts from the 1790s in this anthology appeared during a relative lull in the anti-slave-trade agitation and only implicitly comment on the trade. But the three African-British texts demonstrate that people of African descent could succeed as free British subjects and good Christians, even after the dehumanizing experiences of slavery. All three recount the escape of North American slaves who sought refuge with the British during the American Revolution and found freedom in new homelands. The letters and biography of Liele tell the story of a slave evacuated from Savannah, Georgia, by the retreating British and brought to Jamaica, and the autobiographies by George and King tell of former slaves who settled in Sierra Leone after having been evacuated from the American South to Nova Scotia. The written lives of Liele, George, and King anticipate more directly than those of any of their African-British predecessors the narrative storylines of African-American fugitive slave narratives of the nineteenth century, exemplified by the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston, 1845).

Of the African-British writers included in this anthology, only David George and George Liele lived to see the legal abolition in 1807 of the British slave trade. But all the authors in *Unchained Voices* arguably played a part in that partial success on the way to the abolition of non-indigenous slavery itself in the British Empire in 1838.

NOTES

1. Capitein (1717-1747), one of the most celebrated and learned Blacks in the eighteenth century, had been brought from present-day Ghana, where the Dutch had a slave-trading factory at Elmina, to Holland, where he studied theology from 1726 to 1742, when he was ordained. He was returned to Elmina as a missionary, but he soon grew disillusioned with his fellow Christians and gave up his ministry to pursue an unsuccessful career in trade.

2. Before 1718, convicts like Benjamin Banneker's English grandmother, Molly Welsh, who arrived in Maryland around 1683, frequently received pardons on the condition that they would either pay for their own passage to America, or go at the expense of merchants who then sold them as indentured servants in the colonies.

3. On the disputed meaning of the Mansfield decision and its implications, see William R. Cotter, "The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England," *History* 79 (1994): 31-56; Ruth Paley, "After Somerset: Mansfield, Slavery and the Law in England," in *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1840*, ed. Donna Andrew and Norma Landau (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

4. In addition to Cotter and Paley, see Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 25-49.

5. The development of the legal assault on British slavery is told in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), 469-522.

6. The most reliable general history of African-Britons is Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

7. I believe that Wheatley refers to Gronniosaw as the "African so worthy to be honored with your Ladship's approbation & Friendship . . . him whom you call your Brother," in an undated letter Wheatley sent to the Countess while she was in England in 1773. See Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 2001).

8. See my "Phillis Wheatley, the Mansfield Decision of 1772, and the Choice of Identity," in *Early America Re-Explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture*, ed. Klaus H. Schmidt and Fritz Fleischmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 201-23.

9. For evidence that much of Long's account of Francis Williams is unreliable, see my "Who Was Francis Williams?" *Early American Literature* 38, no. 1 (2003).

10. In a letter sent on 5 November 1777 to Mrs. C[locksedge]. See *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998).

11. On the construction of the British identity, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992).

12. Whitefield (1714-1770) preached the doctrine of John Calvin (1509-1564), who taught that very few Christians were the elect, predestined, or elected, by the grace of God to be saved. Everyone else was a reprobate, doomed to eternal damnation, despite faith or acts of charity. Grace could only be freely given by God and could not be earned by the good works of professed believers. Whitefield's position was consistent with Article 17, the most Calvinistic of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England that loosely constituted the Church's Creed.

But other Articles allowed for a more liberal, or Arminian, interpretation of the requirements for salvation. Named after Jacobus Arminius (Jakob Hermandszoon) (1560-1609), one of Calvin's earliest theological opponents, this doctrine held that all who believed and repented of their sins could be saved. Being omniscient, God of course knew who would be saved, but had not arbitrarily predetermined and restricted their number. John Wesley (1703-1791), along with his brother Charles (1707-1788) and Whitefield, a co-founder of Methodism, subscribed to the Arminian doctrine and published *The Arminian Magazine* (renamed *The Methodist Magazine* after John Wesley's death). The most significant Wesleyan, or Arminian, Methodist in this anthology is Boston King.

Arminians and Calvinists agreed in their emphasis on personal salvation gained in the process of recognizing that one was a sinner undeserving of redemption, who, by submitting oneself completely to God, might be granted grace, whereby one experienced the joy of the new birth through the revelation of one's personal salvation.

13. Sancho's presumably ironic comment appears in his letter of 9 October 1779 to John Meheux, 1st Clerk in the Board of Control. In his letter of 20 October 1769 to Mr. Kisby, Simon, he declares himself "half a Methodist"; in his 15 September 1770 letter to Mr. (1739-1805) preach (Middleton, with five other students, had been expelled from Oxford in 1768 for praying and preaching in public); and by 1 November 1773 (letter to Mrs. H—), he was regularly attending services conducted by William Dodd (1729-1777) at the Charlotte Chapel in Pimlico.

14. For a wider discussion of what actions were believed to entitle slaves to freedom in England, see Seymour Drescher, "Manumission in a Society without Slave Law: Eighteenth-Century England," *Slavery and Abolition* 10 (1989): 85-101.

15. For evidence that Equiano may have invented his African nativity, see my "Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa: More New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003). Equiano's claim to an African birth was challenged in his lifetime. His baptismal record and naval record from his Arctic expedition list him as a native of South Carolina. He rarely used the name Olaudah Equiano in public or private writings outside *The Interesting Narrative* before, during, or after its publication. He may have invented an African identity for rhetorical and/or marketing ends. For the challenge to his claim, and his other writings, see my edition of *Olaudah Equiano's Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2003).

16. Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999).

17. On the national petitioning movement, see Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 50-66.

18. Unlike the pamphlet literature, the slave trade debates in Parliament from 1788 to 1807 were notably free of race-based arguments. On the development of such arguments in Britain during the last half of the eighteenth century, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1965), and Anthony J. Barker, *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1978).

19. For evidence that Equiano was a very successful businessman, see my "Property of Author": Olaudah Equiano's Place in the History of the Book," in *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 130-50. See my "Defining a Gentleman: The Status of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa," *Language Sciences* 22 (2000): 385-99, for an argument that Equiano sought to establish himself as a gentleman. Equiano's will is included in *Olaudah Equiano's Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS AND EDITORIAL POLICY

I have intentionally not included literary analyses of the works in this anthology in order to avoid, as much as possible, the appearance of trying to direct the ways they are read and interpreted. My goal has been to give an accurate introductory historical context for a collection of reliably edited and annotated primary texts, many of which have been hitherto unavailable. In the notes, documents in the Public Records Office (PRO) are cited by their class codes and piece numbers. The following class codes are used: ADM (Admiralty); PC (Privy Council Office); PRIS (King's Bench Prison); PROB (Prerogative Court of Canterbury); and T (Treasury).

Except where indicated, I have chosen first editions as copy-texts. Spelling (including the various spellings of proper names) and punctuation have not been modernized unless the original usage would confuse or mislead a twentieth-century reader. The eighteenth-century long "s" has been replaced throughout. Obvious errors in printing, such as dropped or inverted letters, have been silently corrected.

The copy-text of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* is that of the ninth edition (London, 1794) in the Marylandia and Rare Books Collection of the University of Maryland at College Park. I chose this edition because it incorporates Equiano's final substantive changes in his autobiography, whose production and distribution he oversaw through all its British editions. I am very grateful to Timothy D. Pyatt, Curator of the Collection, for his aid in making the text available for publication. I am equally grateful to Dr. Sidney E. Berger, Head of Special Collections at the University of California at Riverside for enabling me to reproduce the frontispiece of the 1794 edition.