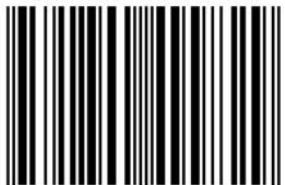




ISBN 978-1-80049-982-9



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SLAVERY

in the Age of
Revolution



AN EXHIBITION HELD AT
BALLIOL COLLEGE HISTORIC
COLLECTIONS CENTRE
ST CROSS CHURCH, OXFORD
MICHAELMAS TERM 2021



BALLIOL
COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE
BY BALLIOL COLLEGE

Marisa J. Fuentes

Presidential Term Chair in African American History
Associate Professor, Rutgers University
Oliver Smithies Visiting Fellow, Balliol College 2019/2020

Sudhir Hazareesingh

CUF Lecturer in Politics and Tutorial Fellow in Politics,
Balliol College

Aishah Olubaji

Early Career Librarian, Balliol College

Seamus Perry

Professor of English Literature, Massey Fellow,
Tutor in English, Balliol College

Naomi Tiley

Librarian, Balliol College

Original artwork concept produced by per stellas ltd
Paper art by Dobrowolski Designs
Photography by Laura Hinski
Supporting artists: Imani Grant and Amberlee Green
Researcher: Tamyah Jones

We are indebted to Balliol Honorary Fellow Oliver St Clair Franklin for the enthusiasm that sparked and sustained this project and for the loan from his collection; Ian Glick QC, Balliol Foundational Fellow Matthew Westerman, G.F. Smith, Ann Volgelmann, The Queen's Jubilee Education Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation, American Airlines and the Museum of the American Revolution whose support made all the elements of this project possible; Annie Connolly and the team at per stellas production company who made our exhibition film and in the process grew the project with their expertise and creativity; Diana Berruezo-Sánchez (Career Development Fellow Balliol College 2018–2021) for giving her time and her knowledge of the slave trade in early modern Iberia; Colette Hawes for loaning gold weights and scales from her collection; Josiah Senu (Balliol 2020) and Samuel Bailey (Balliol 2020) for their time and involvement; all those whose research we drew on to inform the exhibition; and last but not least, all our colleagues at Balliol College and the Oxford Conservation Consortium for their help and support.

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Published by Balliol College, University of Oxford

Catalogue design by Becky Clarke Design

Photography by and copyright of Laura Hinski,
ClickSka Photographer, except for button (Haiti),
late 18th century

Printed by Ciconi Ltd on Munken Polar Smooth Crisp
White 240gsm donated by G.F. Smith papers

ISBN: 9781800499829

Front cover: *The Revolution*, Interpretative Paper art,

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Right: *The Sugar Fields*, Interpretative Paper art,

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INTRODUCTION

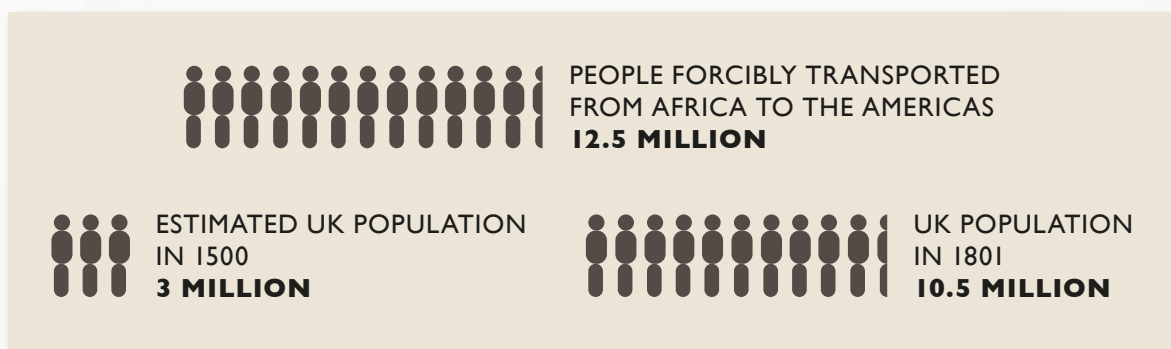
“ ONE DAY, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, tied our hands, and ran off with us into the nearest wood.

Olaudah Equiano¹

“ ALL SLAVES want to be free – to be free is very sweet.

Mary Prince²

IN THE 400 YEARS from the late 1400s to the late 1800s, over 12.5 million³ African people were forcibly shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to produce cash crops for European markets. Before they even reached the ships, they were taken from their homes, their communities, their daily routines, enslaved and transported many miles to the coast. The transatlantic slave trade, also known as Mafa from a Kiswahili word meaning “disaster”, was operated by European nations and, latterly, the newly independent United States of America.



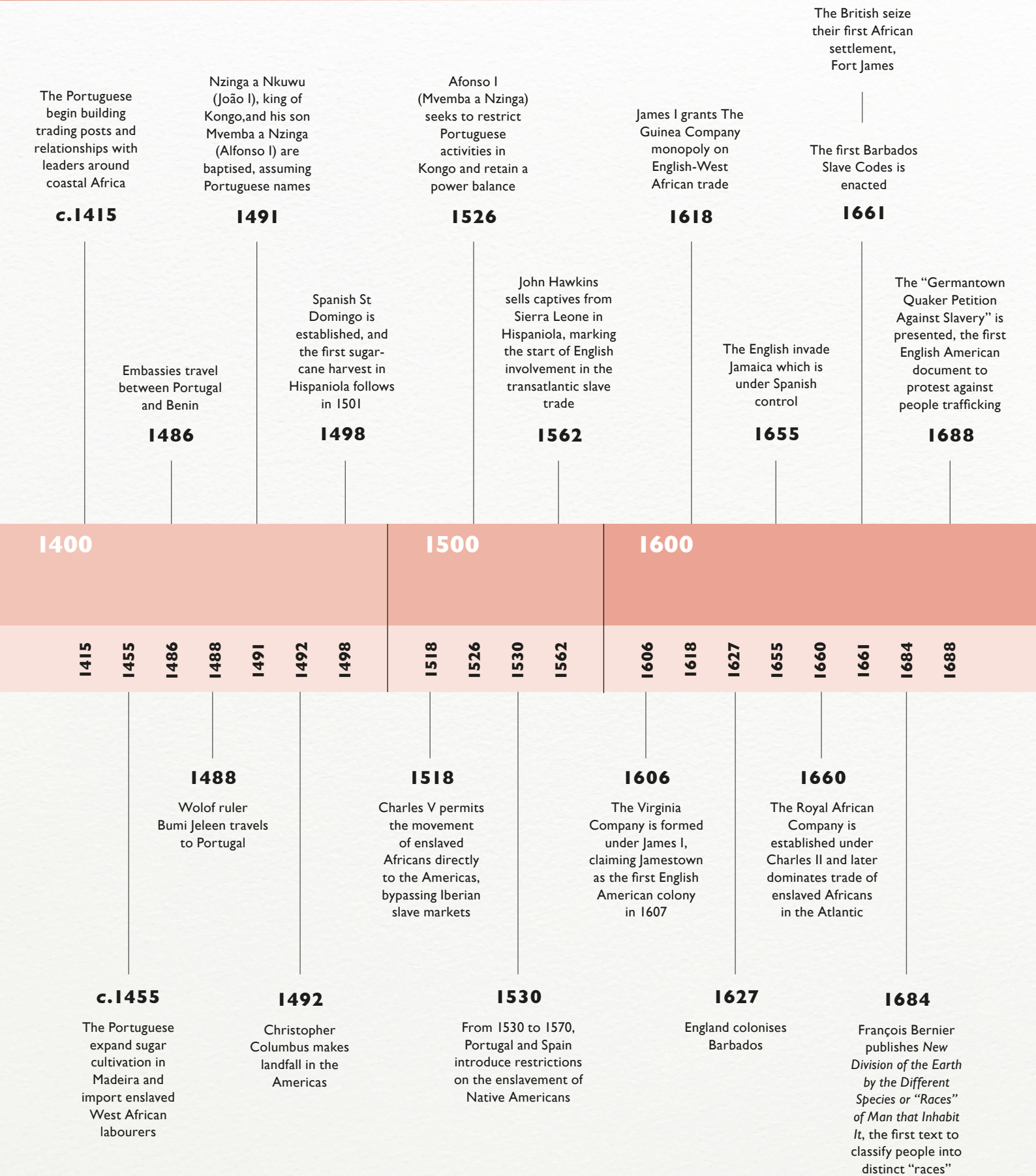
The 18th century saw the industrialisation of this trade in people: its scale and dehumanising violence distinguishing it from other contemporary forms of slavery. At the same time, around the Atlantic world there was a call for governance by the people, an age of revolutions, including the American Revolution (1775–1783), French Revolution (1789–1799) and the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). The former two revolutions neglected enslaved people who had to pursue their own struggles for freedom.

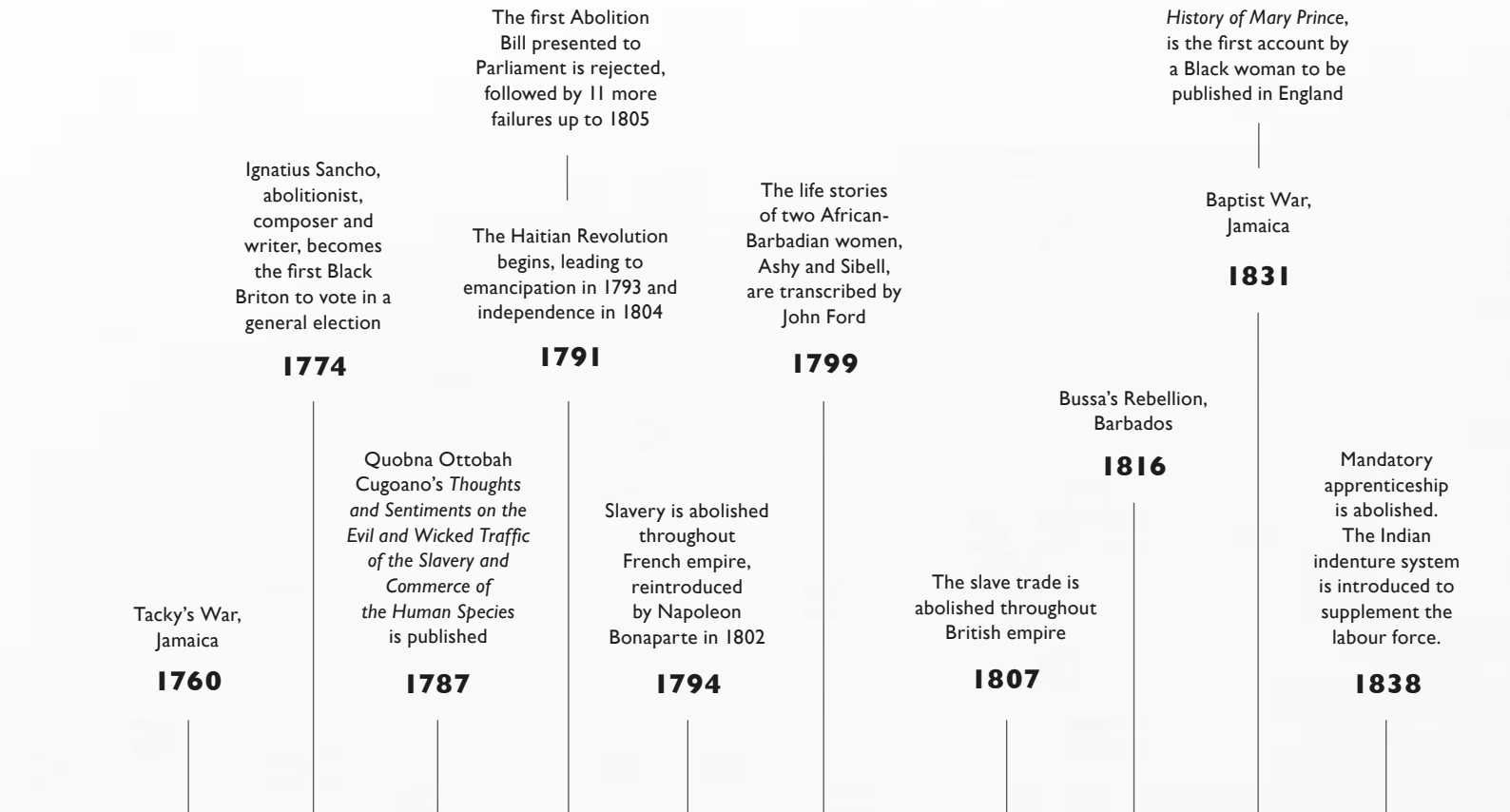
This exhibition takes a long view from 15th-century encounters between established African societies and emerging European nation states, to the legacies of transatlantic slavery in our present. Focusing on the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it examines how transatlantic slavery was viewed by those consuming its products, using Balliol College’s community as a case study. Histories of resistance to slavery on Jamaican plantations owned by benefactors of the College, and the work of Balliol Fellow Sudhir Hazareesingh on the Haitian Revolution, foreground the often-overlooked revolutions of this age.

The catalogue presents the text of the exhibition interspersed with three in-depth essays: “Interpreting Slavery in the British Colonial Archives”, “Politics, Abolition, and Undergraduate Life in the 1790s: The Case of Robert Southey” and “Brave Republican Warriors: Toussaint Louverture and the Revolution in Saint-Domingue”.

Left: *The Separation*, Interpretative Paper art, per stellas Ltd

PRE-ABOLITION TIMELINE: 1415–1838

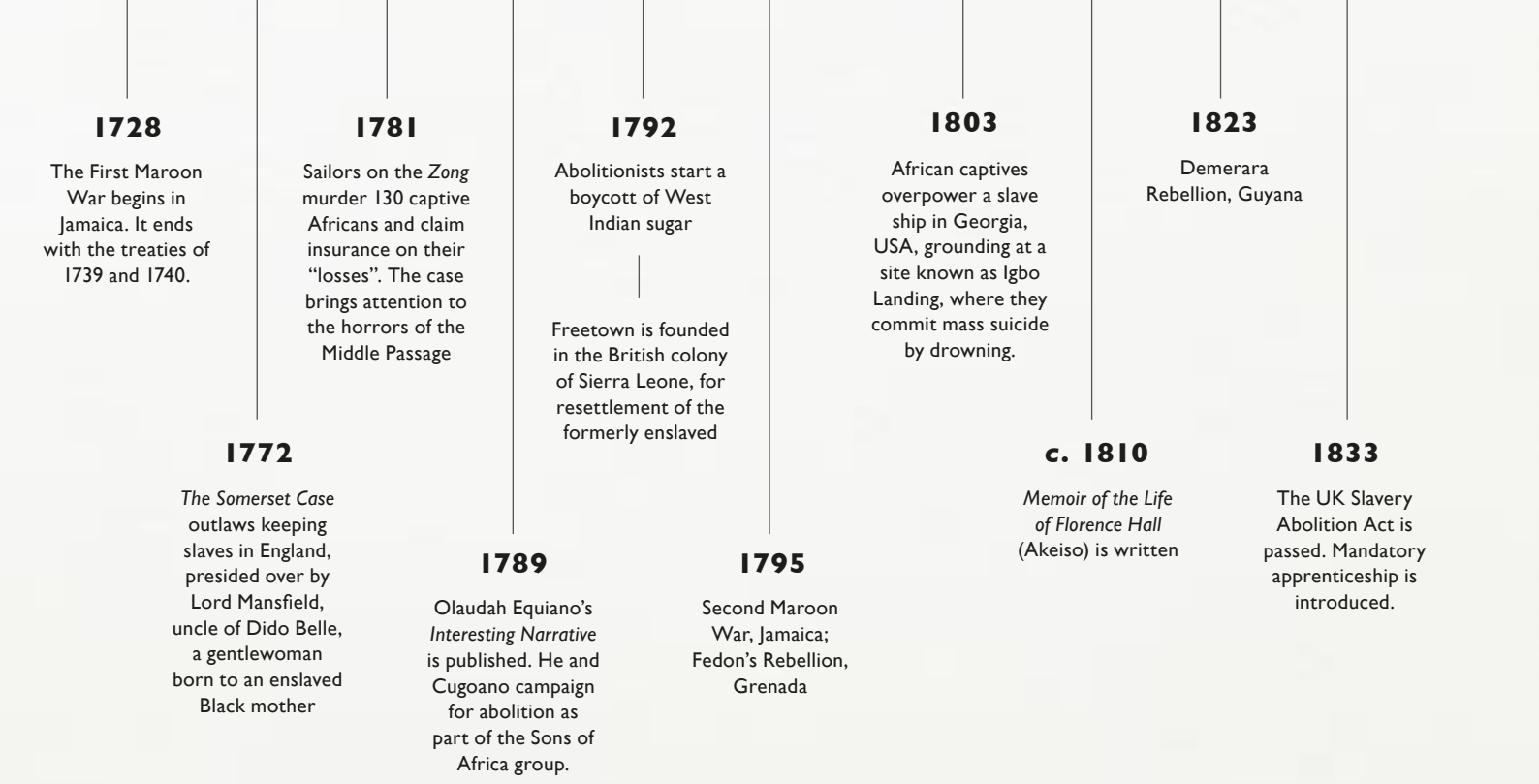




1700 1756–1763: Seven Years War
1775–1783: American Revolutionary War
1789–1799: French Revolution

1800

- 1728
- 1760
- 1772
- 1774
- 1781
- 1787
- 1789
- 1791
- 1792
- 1794
- 1795
- 1799
- 1803
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- 1816
- 1823
- 1831
- 1833
- 1838




2015 MAP OF THE WORLD: THE ATLANTIC



The distance from Lagos, Nigeria to Kingston, Jamaica is approximately 5,440 miles (8,755 km), which takes weeks to travel by sea.

Physical map of the world, January 2015. United States. Central Intelligence Agency. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.



Before reaching the coastal African ports, many captives would have been forced miles from their inland homes, then kept imprisoned in forts before being loaded onto ships.

There were slave trading ports along the west coast of Africa, from Senegal, where the Songhay Empire and Jolof kingdom reigned, down to Angola, once part of the kingdom of Kongo.

The Bight of Benin was a central hub of the trade, running across the coastlines of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and eastern Ghana. From the 17th century, this region, home to diverse communities from village chiefdoms to vast kingdoms, was referred to as the Slave Coast.



INTERPRETING SLAVERY IN THE BRITISH COLONIAL ARCHIVES

ESSAY BY MARISA J. FUENTES

The British colonial project in the Caribbean spanned more than three hundred and fifty years and fueled the rise of the modern British nation state. The Sugar Revolution, originating in 17th-century Barbados, directly correlated to the massive, forced removal and transportation of millions of people from west-central Africa to the Caribbean. Although the system of forced African (and Indigenous) labor existed in the Americas from the late 15th century with early Spanish mining ventures and *Ingenios* (sugar works or plantations), the explosion of English sugar production fueled the trajectory of profit and slavery well into the 19th century. Indeed, the experience of enslavement affected the vast majority of Caribbean island populations and a further century of colonial rule shaped unequal relations between Europeans and Afro-Caribbean people into the 21st century. The impact of this history on the region and its people is marked by the ongoing global economic marginalization of island-nation states, discrimination, and racism against people of African descent from these regions, and the silencing of their experiences and perspectives. This silencing pervades history, education, national memory, and identity.

Balliol College's *Slavery in the Age of Revolution* exhibition is a window into the history of slavery and the revolution(s) ignited and sustained by the enslaved to topple the system. Equally important, it illuminates how the uncompensated labor of Africans and their descendants enabled Britain to rise as a dominant global power. Indeed, the presentation of documents, texts, and artefacts here, show how revered institutions within the United Kingdom benefitted from the profit of slavery and the slave trade. But much of the traditional archive—the papers left behind by the powerful, the literate, the wealthy—do not foreground, illuminate, or record the humanity of enslaved people. Records such as bills of sale, slave ship logbooks, wills and deeds— show that Africans and their descendants were seen and held as property, inhuman, and exploitable. The enslaved were commodified, assessed, bought, sold, and violated. Their circulation as capital and labor evacuated their lives, reducing them to numbers, figures, and objects in the archives of the era.

Enslaved people are rarely the *subjects* of such archival records and the dehumanizing conditions of slavery shaped how they appear in the archive. Their thoughts, sentiments, and experiences were not deemed equal, important, or worth recording or remembering. When scholars and institutions use these archives to reconstruct the everyday lives of those who were enslaved, we inevitably encounter the consequences of such erasures. Therefore, attention to enslaved people's lives and experiences in colonial records raises several important questions: How do we recount stories about enslaved people in the 17th and 18th century? How do we reconstruct their complete lives from an archive left by the powerful? Why must we try?

In recounting these histories, we, scholars and descendants, face a vast archive that includes letters, maps, account books, colonial administration reports, art, cultural productions, and material artefacts that predominantly and substantially illustrate the social and economic aspirations of European colonists. Yet, this historical material offers some of the only traces of enslaved life to which we have access. Therefore, reconstructing enslaved lives with colonial documents must be done critically and ethically in ways that do not necessarily reproduce European desires and interests. As the exhibit shows, the rare first-hand accounts from the enslaved themselves, are a vital aid to historians attempting to center African descended people who made up the majority of these island colonies. Scholars examine and mine the few documents where Black people were given a voice, like the works of enslaved authors Mary Prince, Olaudah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoana. Each author describes being bought, sold, and forced to work in terrifying and dangerous conditions. These critical testimonies offer an important challenge to the accounts, materials, and discourses of British colonists,

slave traders and enslavers. Still, the work of uncovering silences and the marginalized voices of the enslaved in colonial papers requires critical reading practices that raise questions about power, representation, and erasure.

What then, does reading archival documents and artefacts for enslaved perspectives look like? This necessary work requires that we question the words and images produced by Europeans and provide other context that more fully elaborates the views and realities of enslaved people. One example from the exhibit includes Agostino Brunias's 18th-century paintings of the Caribbean. In the image entitled, "A Negro Dance in the Island of Dominica" (1779) we see a group of African descended people gathered to socialize, enjoy music, and dance. Most of the people are depicted in colorful and substantial clothing though barefoot, and appear to be enjoying moments of community leisure without the presence of white Dominicans (owners, slave traders, overseers). This image, painted by an Italian visitor to the West Indies exists as a representation of Brunias's gaze onto the enslaved community. The anonymity of the unnamed people and their expressions of enjoyment minimize the complexity of enslaved lives. We know, due to the work of Black feminist cultural historians, how the violence of forced labor and punishment threatened even the most private, intimate

The Benin Kingdom, Interpretative Paper art, per stellas Ltd



spaces of enslaved communities. In Brunias's repertoire of "romantic" Caribbean paintings, both the violent aspects of plantation and urban environments and the intimate violence that created racial hierarchies are not represented. Indeed, the absence of such realities from Brunias's art continues to mislead and enchant the viewer with gentle images of slavery. It obfuscates the cruelty and trauma inherent to the system. The stakes of our archival encounters with such forms of art require critically interrogating dominant viewpoints that continue to shape our encounter with the histories of British Caribbean slavery.

History is both a production and an accounting of the past. Our ability to recount has much to do with the conditions under which we and our subjects lived. These conditions, often violent, render traditional historiographic methods inadequate to attend to enslaved people's lives. Instead, we must deploy critical methods and thinking when working with colonial archives. This careful work offers several vantage points from which to mitigate the problem of erasure and the silencing power of colonial authorities. These efforts invite Black historical perspectives, and also refuse the construction of histories of the past based on a single viewpoint. They make explicit the ways in which slavery was integral to Europe and the United States' financial trajectory, and most urgently acknowledges how this past informs our present.



ENCOUNTERS

“ INSTEAD OF wanting gold and silver and other things which are used as money everywhere else, the trade and currency here are slaves, who aren't made of gold or cloth but are creatures.”⁴

Garcia II of Kongo writing to the Rector of the Jesuits
in 1641 about Portuguese trade in Angola

WHEN THE EARLIEST known separate map of Africa was published in Milan in 1508, the great power and wealth of established West African kingdoms, in particular Songhay, came from trade across the Sahara to North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. The main export along this route was gold, some of which was used to decorate prestige objects in Europe. Materials such as copper from the Alps flowed the other way to be used by African artisans.⁵ Captive people were also traded across the Sahara, usually those convicted of crimes, prisoners of war or women sold for domestic work, but the outcomes for enslaved people in the Mediterranean and Islamic worlds were much more diverse than the fates of those forced into the transatlantic slave trade, and could even involve rising to positions of power.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, long-established West African societies sent diplomatic missions to emerging powers in Europe. Wolof ambassadors from Senegambia and emissaries from the kingdom of Benin had permanent residences in Portugal.⁶ In return, European governments and business leaders sent emissaries to look for potential opportunities for trade along the West African coast. From the late 15th-century merchants from the Iberian Peninsula, modern-day Spain and Portugal, transported many people enslaved in the Gulf of Guinea to Seville and Valencia in

Spain and Lisbon and Lagos in Portugal, where the slave markets were some of the largest in early modernity.⁷ At the same time, Iberian powers colonised the Canaries, Cabo Verde and Saõ Tomé. On these islands off the west coast of Africa, they formed economies based on enslaved labour. These Iberian colonies generated patterns and ideas which were borrowed wholesale by later Atlantic powers, including those about purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) which divided people hierarchically along racial lines.⁸

The first printed collection of travel narratives features the earliest known separate map of Africa (pictured). Its text covers Portuguese and Italian voyages to Africa and the Americas. It includes the first publication of Alvise da Cadamosto's account of his visits to West Africa on behalf of Portuguese Prince Henry in 1455 and 1456, describing the Jolof Empire in Senegal, the Mandinka people of the Gambia River and the Trans-Saharan gold trade. Cadamosto also traded Iberian horses with the Wolof for enslaved people to take back to Portugal.

Exhibited: *Itinerariu[m] Portugalle[n]siu[m] e Lusitania in India[m] [&] inde in occidentem [&] demum ad aquilonem, Milan, 1508 [580 c 11]*

Why do you think the west coast of Africa is disproportionately large on this map?

The scales and tiny weights pictured below were used to weigh the gold dust traded across the Sahara Desert from Africa to the Ottoman Empire and into Europe. Some, like those with geometric patterns, are contemporary with the trade. Others may be later replicas, as gold weights are rare and much copied.

Which different designs can you see?
Why do you think these designs have been chosen?

Exhibited: Gold weights and scales used in the Trans-Saharan trade [From the collection of Hugh and Colette Hawes]



The gold shining throughout the commercially produced prayer book below would almost certainly have come from West Africa. The book was made in the Low Countries for sale in England and was used for private worship. There are plenty of signs of its use as a religious object including the

disappearance of some saints' faces possibly worn away by devotional kissing.

Exhibited: 15th-century Flemish manuscript book of hours [MS 384]



COLONISATION

“ . . . THE GREAT and opulent banditti of slaveholders in the western part of the world . . . ”

Quobna Ottobah Cugoana⁹

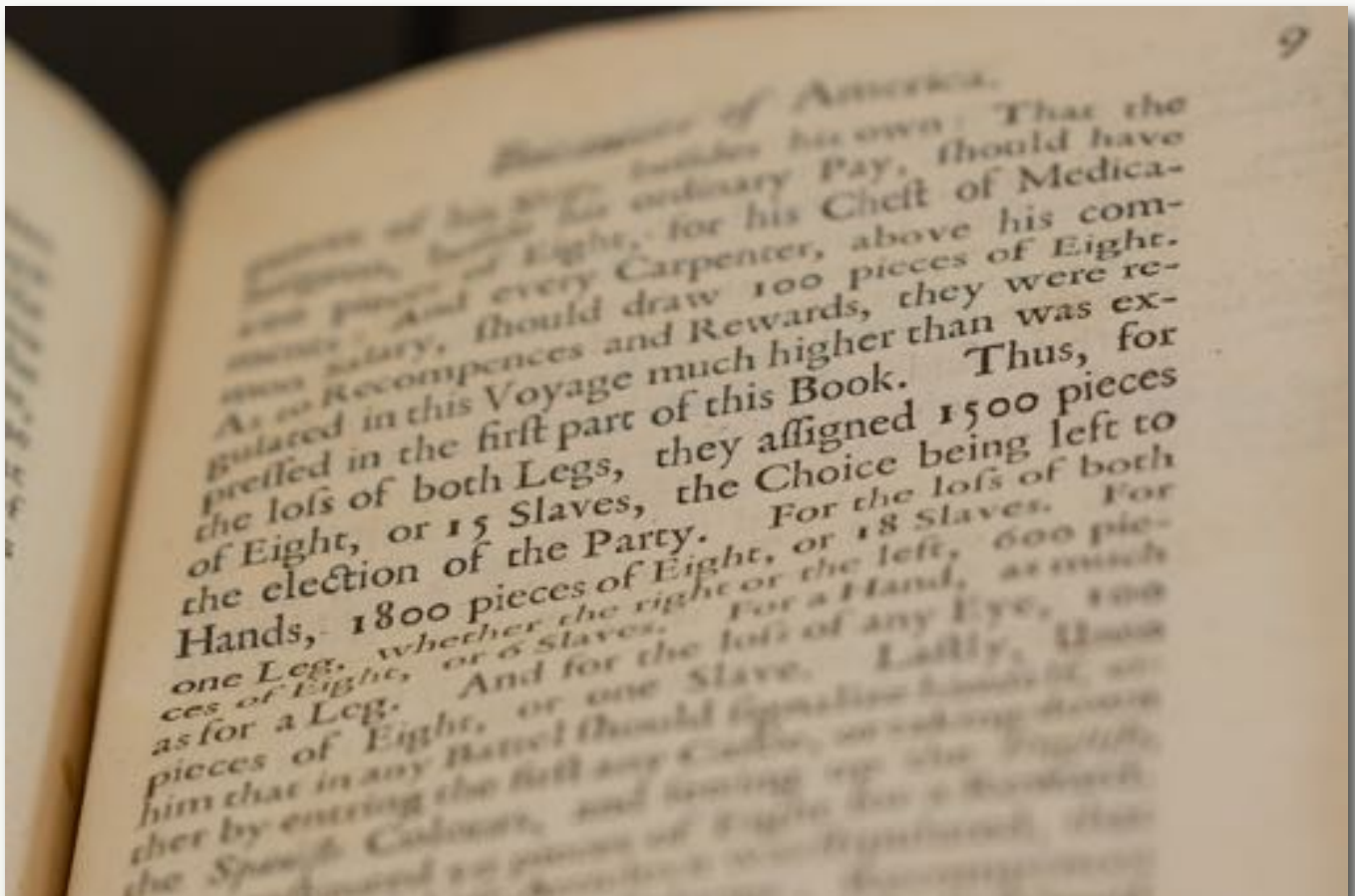
WHEN EUROPEAN PEOPLE sailed to the Americas at the end of the 15th century, they saw them as lands of opportunity to be colonised. In the 1490s, Spain claimed swathes of land across South and Central America and the Caribbean, settling first on the island they called Hispaniola. Other emerging nations such as England, France and the Netherlands followed suit, playing out their violent rivalries for land and wealth in this “New World”.

Immigration to the Americas offered a fresh start to Europeans who had clashed with the authorities at home, whether through persecution for religious difference or prosecution by the law. At the same time, opportunists like John Hawkins, merchant seaman and privateer, capitalised on the new markets emerging in these colonies. From 1562, backed by London businessmen, and latterly Queen Elizabeth I, Hawkins made voyages from England, via West Africa to the Caribbean, trading enslaved people and English goods for tropical produce. This was an extension of a well-established English triangular trade in goods via

West Africa to Brazil. The difference was a new commodity – people – to a new location – the Caribbean.

In the 15th century, sugar was only available to the rich. Originally from Asia, Europeans colonising the Caribbean introduced it and used enslaved labour to grow the time-consuming crop commercially. With the growth of these plantation economies, by the 18th century sugar was an affordable luxury on which many people in Europe spent money.

Bucaniers of America, a book about the exploits of pirates in the Caribbean (pictured below) reveals how integral the trade in enslaved people became to the transatlantic economy. One page sets out the insurance that could be expected by sailors who joined Henry Morgan’s privateering attack on Spanish Panama City. For each loss, compensation is in pieces of eight or a commensurate number of enslaved people. Here, enslaved people are not just a commodity but an exchangeable currency.





Privateers were state-sponsored pirates who had permission to attack enemy ships and take them as prizes. Henry Morgan sued the publishers of English translations of this Dutch book for lumping his activities in with those of pirates and buccaneers. By the time of its publication, Henry Morgan was lieutenant-governor of the English colony of Jamaica. In these colonies far from their sovereign nations, the line between those at odds with authority and those in authority was thin.

The sea, sailing and, sometimes, piracy provided means of escape from slavery. Black abolitionist and seaman, Olaudah Equiano saved enough money from personal

trading on voyages whilst enslaved to buy his freedom. It was also through the seaways that revolutionary ideas and news of resistance to slavery travelled around the Atlantic world despite the authorities' attempts to contain them.¹⁰

Exhibited: Exquemelin, Alexandre Olivier. *Bucaniers of America: Or, A true account of the most remarkable assaults committed of late years upon the coasts of the West-Indies, by the bucaniers of Jamaica and Tortuga, both English and French. : Wherein are contained more especially the unparallel'd exploits of Sir Henry Morgan, our English Jamaican hero who sack'd Puerto Velo, burnt Panama, &c. London, 1684 [575 b 2 (1)]*

PLANTATION

“ MY EBOE NAME was Akeiso, the loss of which soon put an end to all recollections of my people – another name – a strange language, and a new master, confused my mind, and while ignorance of each, made my labour more troublesome, yet the dread of punishment compelled me to work. ”

Akeiso / Florence Hall¹¹

“ I FELT very sorry when I saw the other slaves come up from the hold of the ship daily, into the air, and heard their heartrending cries of anguish; fathers & mothers longing for their homes and children, and often would neither eat nor drink, and were so strictly watched and held in such rigid confinement. We reached Kingston, Jamaica safely, and here the sale of the slaves began. ”

Archibald John Monteith¹²

FROM THE 17TH CENTURY, the English Americas were dominated by plantation colonies, farming cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, coffee and sugar. The first permanent English settlements in the Americas were Virginia in 1607 and Bermuda in 1609, both claimed by the Virginia Company on behalf of the Crown. Like many colonies England would go on to establish, they began as proprietary colonies which were governed by companies and functioned as businesses. This structure bred plantocracies, in which power centred on planters, the land- and slave-owning elite. Over time, planters ploughed the wealth generated in their plantations into their own interests, investing in stately homes, museums, schools and universities, churches, art and literature, scientific research, banks, mining, legal firms, urban construction, shipping, lobbying groups, political campaigns and parties, influencing laws on trade, land ownership and personhood – forever changing the British landscape and economy.¹³

Balliol College, like many institutions across Europe, received money acquired through the sale and enforced labour of enslaved African people. Of the 379 benefactors who made financial or material contributions totalling more than £1,000 (when adjusted for purchasing power today) between 1600 and 1919, 39 came from individuals with substantive links to the proceeds of slavery. Taken together, these benefactions contributed a total of around £300,000 when adjusted for today's prices, or as much as £2m when adjusted for today's average incomes.¹⁴

BARBADOS AND THE SLAVE CODES

England colonised Barbados in the 1620s, first setting up trade in tobacco, indigo and cotton. Many of the first settlers were indentured servants from England and Ireland, required to serve for a set period before gaining freedom and financial dues in the form of goods, money or land. Some came voluntarily, while others, such as incriminated people or war captives, were coerced. Barbadian planters joined the sugar trade in 1640, and sought a larger, cheaper workforce, which they attained by participating in the trade of enslaved African people.

As the Black population grew, the planters became concerned about losing control, so they introduced a series of laws known as the Barbados Slave Code. Enacted in 1661, *An Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes* prescribed violent punishment and denial of rights:

[I]f any Negro man or woman shall offer any violence to any Christian as by striking or the like, the Negro shall [...] be severely whipped, his nose slit and be burned in face.¹⁵

[B]eing brutish Slaves [they] deserve not for the baseness of their Conditions to be tried by the legal trial of twelve Men of their appears or Neighbourhood which truly neither can be done as the Subjects of England are nor is Execution to be delayed towards them in the case of such horrid Crimes Committed.¹⁶

This inspired similar codes across American colonies, cementing the existing practice of slavery along pseudo-scientific lines of race, establishing Black people as real estate, or *chattel*, denying them basic human rights, encouraging their brutal treatment, and enforcing a law that children born to an enslaved mother would be born enslaved.¹⁷ In the Code, “Christian” referred to white Europeans. These laws use “Negro” and “Slave” interchangeably, equating being Black with being a slave regardless of actual status, creating societies where a person's opportunities and rights were determined by the colour of their skin.

A 1657 map of Barbados (page 18–19) depicts select scenes, animals and people amongst the hills and plantation names. Over the next 100 years, the landscape of Barbados would be marked with more names as more fortune-seekers arrived. Amongst them was William Perry, who owned Perry's Estate from 1748. Three of his sons studied at Balliol. The eldest, John, donated £10 when he matriculated in 1757, approximately £1,835 in today's money inflated by consumer price index or £19,650 inflated for value of average earnings.¹⁸



What do you think the creator of this map was trying to express about Barbados?

JAMAICA, THE BECKFORDS AND BALLIOL

England invaded Jamaica in 1655, seizing it from Spanish control. What began as a hub for piracy soon became one of the largest sugar producers in the world, creating some of the wealthiest and most influential planters. Among those planters were the Beckfords. Their dynasty began when Colonel Peter Beckford emigrated to Jamaica in the early 1660s, where he amassed land, wealth and political influence, becoming Chief Justice of Jamaica in 1703. His son, Peter junior, inherited and continued to accrue wealth and political power for the family. His children were educated in England; two of his sons and one grandson were students at Balliol College: Alderman William (Balliol 1725), Richard (Balliol 1728), and William of Somerley (Balliol 1762).

Alderman William became head of the family in 1767. He was an absentee planter based in London, where he continued his family's political legacy, becoming twice Lord Mayor of London, serving in the House of Commons, and standing as part of the West India Interest pro-slavery group. He married into aristocracy and built a mansion on Fonthill estate in Wiltshire, where he showcased a vast art collection. On his death in 1770, his nine-year-old son, William Thomas, inherited the Beckford family fortune including Fonthill estate, 13 plantations, and 3,000 enslaved people.

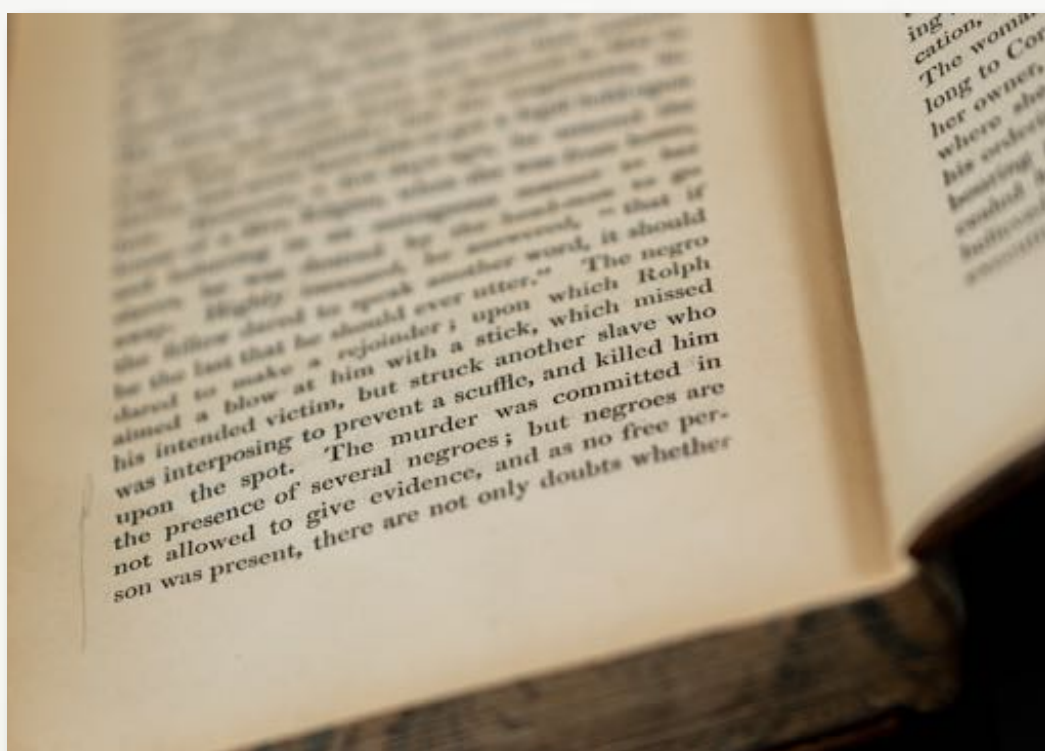
A man known as Buggaboo appears on the records for Beckford's estates in Clarendon parish in 1817,¹⁹ listed as 90 years old and Creole, meaning he was born in the Caribbean. In 1829, over 100 years old, he is listed again as a "Decrease", "cause thereof . . . death". His name is among nine other men who died by that year, including 21-year-old Jammy.²⁰ Both of these men lived their whole lives in

slavery, one barely an adult and the other a century old, and their deaths are recorded simply as stock decrease.

William Thomas never visited Jamaica, so his estates and records were managed by his attorney, William Jackson. Much of the recorded material that marks the lives of the millions of enslaved people obscures their personhood and identity. The 1820 Clarendon parish records list the death of a 52-year-old African man, registering his name as William Jackson,²¹ his identity entirely controlled and erased by Beckford's attorney. In the 1817 accounts for Westmoreland, on one page alone, there are three people listed with only the name Beckford.²² When emancipation came, thousands of people still bore the name of men they had never even seen.

William Thomas managed his plantations poorly, lost properties and accrued debt. He spent money with abandon, collecting art and building a folly known as Fonthill Abbey. Ultimately, most of his estates were sold off and the Abbey was destroyed when its tower collapsed. After slavery was abolished in the British Empire, Parliament passed the Slave Compensation Act in 1837, which entitled planters to payment for their lost labour force. A total of £20 million was paid to slave owners, billions of pounds in modern terms, with funds recovered through taxes until 2015. William used the money to add to his possessions, and continued to squander his money until he died. His other building project, Beckford Tower, still stands in Bath as a museum to his life and collections.²³

Both Williams gave £10 to Balliol the year they matriculated, in 1727 and 1762. In modern terms, they gave an approximate total of £4,187 inflated by consumer price index or £40,650 inflated for value of average earnings.²⁴



Exhibited: Lewis, M.G., *Journal of a West India Proprietor, Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica, 1834* [1075 b 1]



Button (Haiti), late 18th century; Attributed to Agostino Brunias (Italian, ca. 1730–1796); gouache paint on tin verre fixé, ivory (backing), glass, gilt metal; H x diam.: 1 x 3.7 cm (3/8 x 1 7/16 in.); Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, image public domain, <http://cprhw.tt/o/2CdHa/>

Two accounts on facing pages of *Journal of a West India Proprietor* illustrate the racialised power structures in Jamaica, and the consequent precariousness of life for Black people. The first account shows the neglect of Black people by the law, rendered inhuman and therefore unworthy of legal recognition, freely murdered without any right to acknowledgement or justice. The second account demonstrates three lives held at the whim of two men's wallets. Nicholas, who has repeatedly had freedom dangled before him, but snatched away, is responsible for finding another enslaved person to replace him. The woman he finds reclaims some control over her life by threatening suicide, which would be an economic loss to the planters, defying their cruelty in willfully separating her from her child.

The journal is that of an absentee planter visiting Jamaica for the first time. The author, Matthew Lewis, inherited his estates in 1812, then visited in 1815. Early in his account, he directly addresses William Wilberforce and the British abolition movement, claiming, "I believe [the slaves'] condition to be much more comfortable than that of the labourers of Great Britain." By the end of his visit, Lewis committed to improve conditions for the enslaved people on his properties. However, he did not believe that slavery could reasonably be abolished and maintained the necessity of plantation labour. Lewis died in 1818; his journal was

published 16 years later, in 1834, the year the Slavery Abolition Act took effect.

How do you think the lives recorded in these journal passages changed by 1834? Nicholas had faced uncertain freedom so many times, how could he be sure abolition was certain?

Agostino Brunias was an Italian painter in the 18th century. He travelled and worked in the Caribbean under the patronage of Sir William Young, a plantation owner and politician, primarily based in Dominica. Much of Brunias' work in the Caribbean depicted his interpretation of the daily lives of African-descended people, both enslaved and free, often showing their communities and joy, rather than labour and suffering. The painting above appeared in miniature, in one of 18 picture buttons thought to have adorned the uniform of Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint Louverture.²⁵

Why do you think Brunias chose to paint enslaved people dancing? How do we interpret the everyday lives of enslaved people through the gaze of a European artist?

Exhibited: Agostino Brunias' painting in Parry, J.H. and Sherlock, P.M. *A Short History of the West Indies*, London, 1956 [445 c 21]



POLITICS, ABOLITION, AND UNDERGRADUATE LIFE IN THE 1790S: THE CASE OF ROBERT SOUTHEY

ESSAY BY SEAMUS PERRY

The dominant political culture of the Fellowship for much of the 18th century had been robustly Jacobite, presided over for almost sixty years by Theophilus Leigh, “a Tory of the soundest kind” as one of the College’s historians put it:¹ such an affiliation naturally did the place no favours in Hanoverian England and it sank into debt as student numbers dropped away alarmingly and the estate fell into disrepair.² It has become something of a cliché to say that 18th century Oxford wasn’t as idle, self-indulgent, and academically moribund as an earlier cliché would have had you think; but Balliol certainly seems to have come very close, its main activities being “hunting, riding, and shooting”, and its nickname “*Belial*, for I believe it should be so spelt”, as one moralist ponderously joked, “since they are wicked enough to deserve that title”.³ “Believe me, Sir”, says a colourful lady in George Colman’s play *The Oxonian in Town*, “we scorn to look or speak to an Under-graduate, when engag’d in a Pleasure-Boat with the Fellows of *Baliol*; there’s glorious living . . .”⁴

If elements of that reputation persisted down to 1792 it is perhaps unsurprising that the College was not the first choice of Robert Southey, a high-minded young man from Westminster School, an enthusiast for revolutionary France and with a head full of Rousseau and Gibbon. His name was entered at Christ Church, but the Headmaster William Vincent intervened, as Southey complained to a friend, “with his accustomed generosity and liberality, virtues which he praises so much and practises so little”.⁵ Vincent regarded Southey as a trouble-maker, chiefly because of his co-authorship of a student publication called *The Flagellant*, in one number of which, under the name of “Gualbertus”, Southey had attributed the practice of corporal punishment to followers of Satan. Vincent, who had already taken Southey to task for writing disrespectfully about Edmund Burke in a school exercise, promptly expelled him and contacted the Dean of Christ Church, an old Westminster boy, to warn the college off.⁶ Southey cast around for an alternative. Balliol proved altogether less picky and he travelled up to Oxford to matriculate in November, reconciling himself to the prospect as best he could: “At Baliol I have no acquaintance and I conceive the different Colleges much like different boarding houses”.⁷

Southey felt himself a victim of grave injustice (“I am not quite eighteen and few men of eighty have been more persecuted”) and he was not slow to connect his mistreatment with the more general injustice of the established order.⁸ Still, there were encouraging developments: “1792 is expiring – good god how many events have transpired”, he wrote to a school friend on Boxing Day, “from the fall of Gualbertus to that of Louis! from my libel upon rod to Paines upon sceptres”.⁹ (The second part of Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man*, with its vigorous attack on the institution of monarchy, had appeared in February of that year, and the French royal family had been imprisoned in August.) As Southey settled into his rooms in late January 1793 he must have been acutely conscious of living in exciting times: Louis was executed on 21 January and eleven days later France had declared war. Having a brother in the navy did not moderate radical zeal: “He is going to fight for England”, Southey wrote grimly, “I wish I could wish him success”.¹⁰

“Is it not rather disgraceful, at the moment when Europe is on fire with freedom – when man and monarch are contending – to sit and study Euclid or Hugo Grotius?” He did not expect much of Balliol: “My prepossessions are not very favourable”, he reported to an old school-friend, “I expect to meet with pedantry, prejudice, and aristocracy, from all which good Lord deliver poor Robert Southey”.¹¹ The first outrage was a College rule that students were not to wear boots: “What matters it whether I study in shoes or boots? folly so ridiculous puts me out of conceit with the whole”.¹² His first public act of rebellion

1 H.W. Carless Davis, *A History of Balliol College*, rev. R.H.C. Davis and Richard Hunt (Oxford, 1963), 163.

2 John Jones, *Balliol College. A History 1263-1939* (1988; second edition, Oxford, 2005), 174. James Wyatt had been engaged to do some repair-work on the Hall and the Library in 1791-4 but his more ambitious plans were not pursued.

3 Davis, 167.

4 George Colman, *The Oxonian in Town* (1769); quoted in Graham Midgley, *University Life in Eighteenth-Century Oxford* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 77.

5 *Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. John Wood Warter (4 vols.; 1856), i.6.

6 Jack Simmons, *Southey* (1945), 26; 28.

7 *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry (2 vols.; New York, 1965), i.11.

8 Bodleian, Eng. Lett. c.22 f.1; quoted in W.A. Speck, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (New Haven, CT., 2006), 23.

9 *New Letters*, i.14.

10 Simmons, 31.

11 *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Cuthbert Southey (4 vols.; 1849-50), i.169.

12 *Life and Correspondence*, i.170.

was to refuse to adopt the normal practice of wearing powdered hair at dinner: Southey declined the services of the astonished College barber and went into dinner with his curly locks untreated. This gesture was more than just habitual recalcitrance: leaving your hair undressed was a gesture of defiance against Pitt, who had introduced a tax on hair-powder.¹³ Southey remained utterly disenchanted with the University at large, his opinion being that “there is little good learnt at Oxford, and much evil”, and that “[w]ith respect to its superiors, Oxford only exhibits waste of wigs and want of wisdom; with respect to undergraduates, every species of abandoned excess”.¹⁴ He later claimed, or so his son recalled, that all he had managed to learn was how to row and how to swim.¹⁵ In fact the last decade of the 18th century was the period when the College began to take teaching more seriously, thanks to the growing influence of John Parsons (elected Master in 1798); but the dons do not seem to have troubled Southey unduly. “Mr. Southey, you won’t learn any thing by my lectures, Sir”, he was told by his tutor Thomas How, “so, if you have any studies of your own, you had better pursue them”. Southey was evidently ready to take him at his word, even though How was in some ways a kindred spirit who supported the new American republic, opposed the war against France, and was, in Southey’s phrase, “half a democrat”.¹⁶ Southey himself aspired to be the full thing, of course, and busied himself with an epic about Joan of Arc whom he cast, anachronistically, as “a great democrat”.¹⁷ There was no Junior Common Room: Parsons had squashed that proposal, no doubt considering it an encouragement to the frivolous;¹⁸ so the students tended to gather in one another’s rooms, and within his own small circle of similarly minded associates Southey seems to have led a life of diligent clean living, reading a good deal of classical literature and history and stoic philosophy, rising early and taking long walks, and nurturing in a slightly self-aggrandising way a strain of anti-hierarchical moralism. “I have seen the destined pillars of the church wallowing in the filth of debauchery”, he rather priggishly announced, proudly declaring himself “a republican”, even if the increasingly turbulent events in France did not provide quite the encouragement they once had:¹⁹ “I can condemn the crimes of the French and yet be a republican”, he said defensively.²⁰ He even came to think that the ampler and more patrician life of Christ Church wouldn’t have suited him after all: “I should have been a grave owl set amongst a set of chattering jays—here at Balliol I am as happy as—I ever can be at Oxford”.²¹

An opposition to the slave trade naturally fell into place alongside Southey’s other progressive beliefs, although abolitionism was not necessarily a marker of anti-establishment sentiment. William Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), which had quickly established itself as a standard university textbook, set itself unambiguously against the “abominable tyranny” of the “odious institution” of the slave trade;²² and while some churchmen concocted apologies for slavery that relied on the Bible’s apparent reluctance to condemn it, others, such as Shute Barrington, Bishop of Durham, elected Visitor to Balliol in 1805, were outspoken opponents. Barrington, an ally of Wilberforce, described the slave trade as “a traffic as inhuman in the mode of carrying it on, as it is unjustifiable in its principle”.²³ *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), a harrowing autobiographical account of life under slavery and a passionate advocacy for the abolition of the trade, was one of the best-selling new books, going through nine editions in five years:²⁴ the first came with a long list of subscribers, featuring the vocal abolitionists one would expect (Thomas Clarkson, Josiah Wedgwood, John Wesley) but also including senior clergy and numerous aristocrats with the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York at the top;²⁵ and the list of such supporters grew with every edition. The success of Equiano’s book coincided with the growth of organised opposition, which began in 1787 with the establishment of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, after which the volume of petitions made to Parliament grew and grew until reaching a crescendo in 1792 when, it is estimated, between a quarter and a third of the male adult population in some parts of the country had put their names

13 L.G. Mitchell says Southey was “the first man to wear unpowdered hair”: “Politics and Revolution 1772-1800”; *The History of the University of Oxford. The Eighteenth Century*, ed. L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell (Oxford, 1986) 163-90, 187. Southey’s son reports that others soon followed his father’s example (*Life and Correspondence*, i.171). In his own account Southey remembered his unpowdered entrance, not into Hall (which was being repaired) but into another room where “Liberty and Equality are prevalent” – meaning, presumably, a room of sympathetic students but without Fellows present at high table (Simmons, 33).

14 *Selections*, i.19; *Life and Correspondence*, i.177.

15 *Life and Correspondence*, i.176, n..

16 *Life and Correspondence*, i.215.

17 *New Letters*, i.29.

18 Charles Edward Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford* (3 vols.; 1927), iii.179.

19 *New Letters*, i.31.

20 Bodleian, Eng Lett c.22 f.71; quoted in Speck, 37.

21 *New Letters*, i.20.

22 *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, foreword by D.L. Le Mahieu (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 137; 138.

23 *A Sermon preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (1775), xxii.

24 James Green, “The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*”, *Slavery and Abolition* 16 (1995) 362-75, 363.

25 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1995; rev. edn., 2003), 317-22. Not that exposure to abolitionist writings always had the desired effect. In his history of Methodism Southey told the story of Thomas Coke, a founding American Methodist, who encountered a well-disposed but obdurate owner of slaves. “I could not beat into the head of that poor man the evil of keeping them in slavery”, Coke recalled, “although he had read Mr. Wesley’s *Thoughts on Slavery* (I think he said) three times over”: *The Life of Wesley, and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (2 vols.; 1820), ii.452.

to the campaign:²⁶ no other cause, says Linda Colley, attracted such broad support or crossed so many social barriers.²⁷ Individual petitions had been submitted to Parliament before that, mostly from Quakers, although in 1785 a petition had arrived from Bridgwater in Somerset expressing “a just abhorrence of a system of oppression, which no prospect of private gain, no consideration of public advantage, no plea of political expediency, can sufficiently justify or excuse”.²⁸ One of the principal instigators of that petition was one George White, formerly a Fellow of Balliol, who had taken up the nearby College living at Huntspill;²⁹ whether he enjoyed any lingering radical celebrity among the students at his old college is unknown.

Southey’s own opposition was certainly sharpened as result of growing up in Bristol, a centre for the trade and hence, by reaction, a centre for abolitionism.³⁰ He would certainly have known the writing of Olaudah Equiano and was probably aware of the visit that Equiano seems to have paid to Bristol in the autumn of 1793 as part of what has been described as “the first modern-style author tour in British history”.³¹ (Southey was there, having stayed in Bristol rather than returning to Balliol that Michaelmas.)³² Equiano was understandably nervous about coming to the city where, as he wrote to Josiah Wedgwood, he was bound to have “enemys” given his “Public spirit to put an end to Slavery—or reather [sic] in being active to have the Slave Trade Abolished”;³³ but the next edition of his book had 91 new subscribers specifically identified as Bristol residents, so it seems he successfully overcame his fears.³⁴ Equiano’s descriptions of the maltreatment of slaves are often appallingly vivid, and Southey may well have been drawing on them in the striking sequence of sonnets about the slave trade which he published in his *Poems* of 1797: the poems were first written, he later recalled, in 1794, his second year at Balliol, although scholarship has established that at least one of them was first drafted in 1792.³⁵ Like much abolitionist writing, the sonnets combine a duly vehement appeal to the pity of the cultivated reader with a no less vehement voice of moral injunction:

Oh he is worn with toil! the big drops run
Down his dark cheek; hold – hold thy merciless hand,
Pale tyrant! for beneath thy hard command
O’er wearied Nature sinks . . .

Southey’s reproachful turn to the heedless consumer of the produce of slavery strikes an effective note of honest outrage, without entirely avoiding the trap of self-congratulation:

Oh ye who at your ease
Sip the blood-sweeten’d beverage! thoughts like these
Haply ye scorn: I thank thee Gracious God!
That I do feel upon my cheek the glow
Of indignation, when beneath the rod
A sable brother writhes in silent woe.³⁶

The blood-sweetener was a recurrent element in abolitionist writing, a figure of provocatively revolting vividness, its ugliness reflecting an ethical ugliness: the nicety of refinement that appreciated the taste of sugar in tea was so grotesquely at odds with the utter failure of judgment before the reality of those practices that produced that sugar in the first place. As another Bristolian abolitionist writer put it: “the fine lady’s nerves are not shattered by the shrieks! She sips a beverage sweetened with human blood, even while she is weeping over the refined sorrows of Werter or Clementina”. And what further heightened the outrage was that sweetening one’s tea was so manifestly inessential: of all the things imported from the West Indies, as that same polemicist said, none was necessary, almost none was even useful, and, furthermore, “not one of them is at present attainable by the poor and labouring part of Society”.³⁷

26 J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* (1995; 1998), 114.

27 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT, 1992), 355.

28 Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (2 vols.; 1808), i.106.

29 Fellow, 1766 (Jones, 328). See “Huntspill”, Balliol Formal Archives, C.17.25.

30 For the culture of abolitionism in Bristol see G.M. Best, *Slavery and Bristol* (Bristol, 2020), 301-89.

31 John Bugg, “The Other Interesting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano’s Public Book Tour”, *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America* 121 (2006) 1424-42, 1424.

32 Simmons, 35.

33 21 August 1793: *Interesting Narrative*, ed. Carretta, 364.

34 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (seventh edition; 1793), xxviii-xxix. See Green, “Publishing History”, 365.

35 *Poetical Works 1793-1810*, ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (5 vols.; 2004), v.49. His early interest in the subject is evident in the dramatic monologue “Zimri” (1788) in which the enslaved speaker heroically commits suicide to escape the oppression of the Europeans: “Their horrid deeds disgrace the human kind” (1.55; *Poetical Works*, v.447).

36 *Poetical Works*, 51-2.

37 *The Watchman* IV (25 March 1796), 108; 102.

The writer of those stirring words was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom Southey had a life-changing encounter in the summer of 1794. The charismatic Cambridge undergraduate came through Oxford on his way to a walking tour in Wales and he was taken round to Balliol to meet Southey by a common friend, Robert Allen, a similarly minded student at University College with whom, as Southey fondly recalled, he had “democratised gloriously”.³⁸ Southey had returned to Oxford in Hilary of that year fired up by the words of William Godwin: he had checked *Political Justice* (and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women*) out of the Bristol public library at the end of 1793 and absorbed its philosophical implications into his general sense of social protest and his personal sense of disgruntlement.³⁹ Godwin’s book recurrently champions the power of the autonomous human intelligence to discern the right course of action and, concomitantly, deplures all the structures of power that work to hinder that mental liberty: the practice of colonial slavery, appalling in itself, is not an isolated atrocity but the most extreme form of a ubiquitous system of enforced mental servitude. “It can only be by the most deplorable perversion of reason, that we can be induced to believe any species of slavery, from the slavery of the school boy to that of the most unfortunate negro in our West India plantations, favourable to virtue”, Godwin wrote;⁴⁰ and Southey evidently seized on the idea that such wrongs were, as Godwin put it, the “iniquitous effects of the unequal distribution of property”.⁴¹ “Whence arise the various vices and misfortunes that disgrace human nature and destroy human happiness?” Southey impressively questioned one of his old friends, providing at once the answer: “From individual property”.⁴² Just as these ideas were churning in his mind, Coleridge turned up: he was not a Godwinian, but he had arrived at a similar view of the evils of private property inspired mostly by the example of the first Christians: “all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2.44). Nothing could more dreadfully represent the Satanic triumph of property as the basis of society than the institution of slavery: for slavery converts a person into property, something as objectionable to Christian as to Godwinian ethics. As Coleridge would later say, “a slave is a *Person* perverted into a *Thing*: Slavery, therefore, is not so properly a deviation from Justice, as an absolute subversion of all Morality”.⁴³ Excited at the apparent coincidence of their views, the two young men promptly devised a utopian settlement based on such communistic principles; it was to be founded in America, and they began to seek recruits to the cause. Escaping to America had long been part of Southey’s fantasy life: “fancy only me in America”, he had written to a school friend shortly before going up to Oxford, “imagine my ground uncultivated since the creation, and see me wielding the axe, now to cut down the tree, and now the snakes that nestled in it . . . my only companion some poor negro whom I have bought on purpose to emancipate”.⁴⁴ Their new society never materialised and it was not long before, having come into an annuity, Southey re-thought his principled line on the demerits of private property;⁴⁵ but by this time life had moved on, he was married, and busy establishing himself as a productive man of letters. He never returned to Balliol.

Slavery remained in his thoughts as he began his migration to the emphatically conservative side of things. He reprinted his sonnets on the slave trade in successive editions, evidently pleased to acknowledge their attempt at a public poetry but also to endorse the sentiments they articulated. Not all of his later writing could be described as enlightened on matters of race;⁴⁶ but in his odd, late work *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829) his spokesman, Montesinos, offers an important generalisation which retains a continuity with the beliefs of the spiky young undergraduate: “Slavery, wherever it exists, is a sure cause of corruption, and of the worst kind”.⁴⁷ That slavery is not only terrible for the enslaved but morally ruinous for everyone implicated in it was a Godwinian lesson that Southey had effectively voiced long before in one of his most striking poems, “The Sailor who has served in the Slave Trade”, based on a true story of an encounter in Bristol: it was written in the autumn of 1798 and first published in his *Poems* of 1799. The poem is Southey’s version of “The Ancient Mariner”, but where Coleridge imagines the terrible story of his sailor in religious terms of transgression, repentance, and possible redemption, the guilt of Southey’s stricken subject is understood more politically, his mental ruin the product of his participation in something that is cruel and grotesquely unjust. “Oh I have done a wicked thing! / It haunts me night and day”, cries the sailor. The whole effort of his life is to put such wrongs behind him, but he finds that such things are in truth hard to put to rest: “Oh tell me where to fly – / And bid me hope, if there be hope, / For one so lost as I”.

38 National Library of Scotland MS 845, f.101; quoted in Speck, 40.

39 George Whalley, “The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8”, *The Library* IV (1949) 114-32, 116-17.

40 *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (2 vols.; 1793), ii.755-6.

41 *Political Justice*, ii.795.

42 *New Letters*, i.70.

43 *Essays on his Times*, ed. David V. Erdman (3 vols.; Princeton, NJ, 1978), iii.235.

44 *Life and Correspondence*, i.196.

45 Speck, 57.

46 See Mark Storey, *Robert Southey. A Life* (Oxford, 1997), 235.

47 *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829; second edition, 2 vols.; 1831), ii.182.

CONSUMERISM

“ . . . VEN ME GO in de ship me find my country woman Mimbo, my country man Dublin, my Country woman Sally, and some more, but dey sell dem all about and me no savvy where now – Here she burst into tears and could say no more.

Sibell, transcribed by John Ford²⁶

“ I WAS SOON surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words – as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up to sale.

Mary Prince²⁷



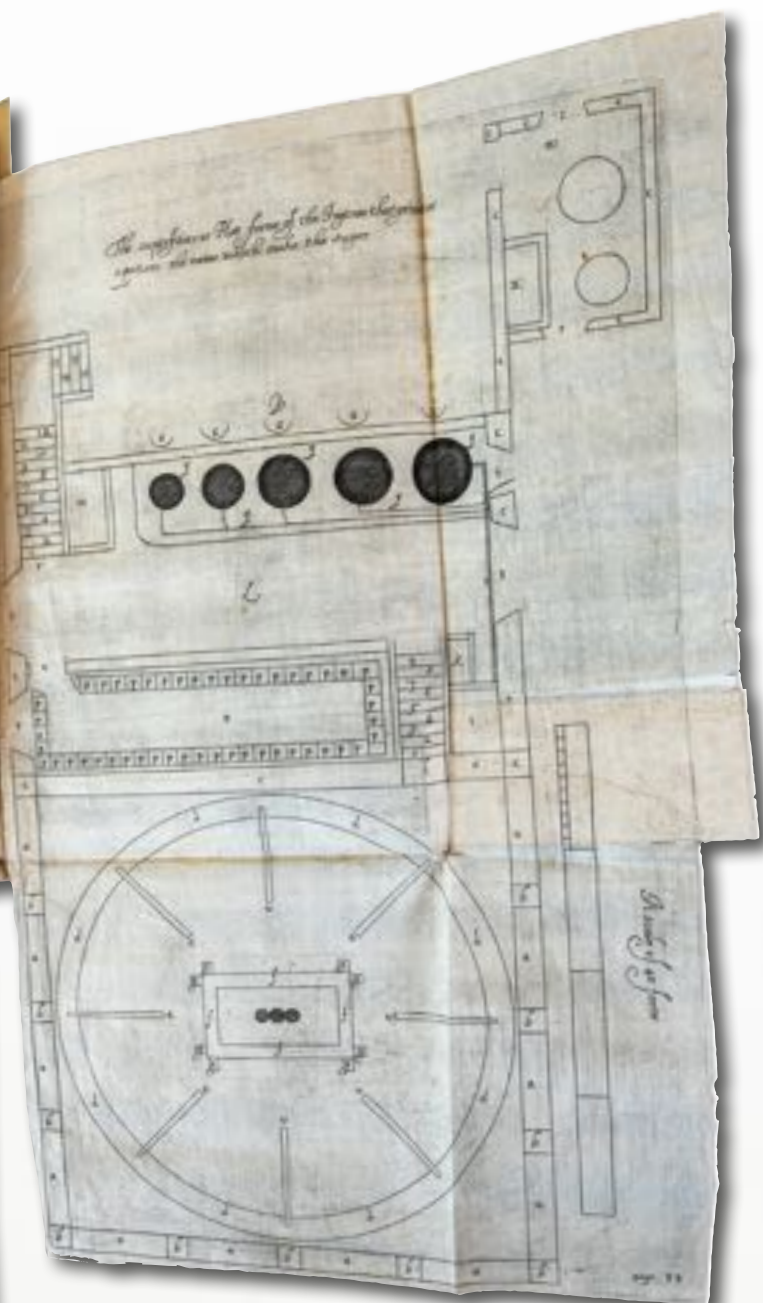
**The Sugar Press,
Interpretative Paper
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AN 18TH-CENTURY MEMBER of Balliol College interested in sugar production on the plantations could have visited the College Library and seen images of the process in either Willem Piso’s work on the natural history of Brazil or Richard Ligon’s history of Barbados. The woodcuts in Piso’s book are by way of general illustrations in a text that discusses sugar production globally. The enslaved Black people working the processing plant are generic figures, but nevertheless it is clear they are a central part of the operation. By contrast, Ligon’s later diagrams elide the people and put the emphasis on technology.

In the explanatory text the sugar seems to put itself through the machinery. Ligon’s work exemplifies the “violence of abstraction”²⁸ that surrounded the transatlantic slave trade in which the systematic exploitation of people was rendered in diagrams, balance sheets and blank spaces on maps, the humans involved reduced to the status of possessions or erased completely.

Further elision is seen in the romantic image of sailing ships from the period like those depicted in James Justinian Morier’s sketch of New York Harbour (pictured on page 32). Thomas Clarkson’s famous diagram of 482 enslaved people packed below deck on the slave ship *Brooks* was part of an abolitionist tactic to shock the public into opposing the slave trade by reinserting enslaved people, or at least their bodies, into the narrative.

It is debatable though whether many members of the College would have gone as far as consulting a book on sugar production. Whilst some undergraduates, such as Robert Southey (Balliol 1792), actively opposed the transatlantic slave trade, most of the University supported the status quo. There is little evidence that Balliol members gave a second thought to how the sugar they stirred into their tea or coffee was produced.



An Index to the Platforme or Superficies of an Ingenio, that grinds or squeezes the Sugar.

The ground-plot, upon which the Posts or Pillars stand, that bear up the house, or the Intercommunication between those Pillars.

1 The Pillars or Posts themselves.

2 The wall between the Mill house and Boiling house.

3 The Circle or Circumference, where the Horses and Cattle go, which draw the Rollers about.

4 The Sweep, to which the Horses and Cattle are fastned, that draw about the Rollers.

5 The Frame of the Loggia.

6 The Buckets or Buttresses, that support that Frame.

7 The Dore, that goes down stairs to the Boiling house.

8 The Cistern, into which the Liqueur runs from the Loggia, immediately after it is ground, and is carried in a Pipe under ground to this Cistern, where it remains not above a day at most.

9 The Cistern that holds the Temper, which is a Liqueur made with alices, steeped in water, and is no other than the Lye we wash withal in England. This Temper, we throw in the three last Coppers, as the Sugar boyles, without which it would never come, or be any thing but a Symples, but the salt and tartarousness of this Temper, causes it to turn, as Milk does, when any foule or that Liqueur is put into it, and a very small quantity does the work.

10 The Boiling house.

11 The five black Roundes are the Coppers, in which the Sugar is boyled, of which, the largest is called the Clarifying Copper, and the least, the Tatch.

12 The Cooling Cistern, which the Sugar is put into, presently after it is taken off the fire, and then kept till it be Milk warm; and then it is to be put into Pots, made of boards, sixteen inches square above, and in grow taper to a point downwards, the Pot is commonly about thirty inches long, and will hold thirty or thirty five pounds of Sugar.

13 The Dore of the Filling room.

14 The Room is filled, into which the Pots are set, being fill'd, till the Sugar grow cold and hard, which will be in two daies and two nights, and then they are carried away to the Curing house.

15 The tops of the Pots, of fifteen inches square, and stand between two stations of timber, which are girded together in severall places, with wood or iron, and are thirteen or fourteen inches asunder; so that the tops of the Pots being fifteen inches, cannot slip between, but are held up four foot from the ground.

16 The Frame where the Coppers stand, which is rais'd above the floor or level of the room, about a foot and a halfe, and is made of Dutch Bricks, which they call Klinckers, and plaister of Paris. And besides the Coppers, there are made small Gutters, which convey the skimmings of the three lesser Coppers, down to the Still-house, whereof the strong Spirit is made, which they call *bril de still*, and the skimmings of the two greater Coppers are convey'd another way, as wastefull and good for nothing.

17 The Dore that goes down the stairs to the fire-rooms, where the Furnaces are, which cause the Coppers to boyle, and though they cannot be express'd here, by reason they are under the Coppers; yet, I have made small semi-circles, to let you see where they are, behinde the partition-wall, which divides the fire-rooms from the boiling-houses; which wall goes to the top of the house, and is marked with the Letter (c) as the other walls are.

18 A little Gutter made in the wall, from the Cistern that holds the first Liqueur, to the clarifying Copper, and from thence is convey'd to the other Coppers, with Ladles that hold a gallon a piece, by the hands of Negroes that attend that work day and night, sitting both Negroes and Cattle every four hours, who also convey the skimmings of the three lesser Coppers down to the Still-house, there to be twice distill'd; the first time it comes over the helme, it is but small, and is called Low-wines; but the second time, it comes off the strongest Spirit or Liqueur that is potable.

19 All Windows.

20 The Fire-room, where the Furnaces are, that make the Coppers boyle.

21 The Still-house.

22 The Cistern that holds the skimmings, till it begin to be foule, till when, it will not come over the helme.

23 The two Stills in the Still-house.

24 The semi-circles, that shew where about the Furnaces stand.

Place this after Folio 24.

Diagram of "Ingenio that makes the sugar" and key from Ligon, Richard. *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, London, 1657 [580 c 10]



**The Boiling Room,
 Interpretative Paper
 art, per stellas Ltd**

The woodcuts in Piso's 17th-century natural history of Brazil show enslaved people with specialist skills in the sugar-making process, first milling and then boiling and distilling the sugar cane. What they do not convey is the deafening noise of the mills and the intense heat of the boiling house. Nor do they show the ever-present peril for those forced to work 20-hour shifts with heavy machinery and large ladles over vats of superheated liquid, which could not be quickly stopped in an emergency.²⁹

Populations of enslaved people on sugar estates declined more markedly than those made to work in other

activities.³⁰ Poor nutrition, strenuous working demands imposed by sugar growing and overseer brutality led not only to high mortality but also to a low birth rate: in the mid-18th century around half the enslaved female population of the British Caribbean remained childless compared with 10 per cent of enslaved women in the United States.³¹

What dangers do you think enslaved people faced in sugar-making?

Exhibited: Piso, Willem. *De Indiæ utriusque re naturali et medica*, Amsterdam, 1658 [580 d 7]

Tacumarum sive Arunde Saccharifera.

Probisum videretur hujus Canevorum in India Occidentali partem, quae nunc vulgo Brasilia dicitur, terra duas flumines, Marañon & de la Plata, sive, quae quae Caput accedunt à Vesputo Emmanuelle Regis Portugalliae inspectis, quibus ab orientis usque circiter 1500 estis explorata, Litorij, terra praevalens cum altissimis arboribus & insulam Ameris, primam latissimam orientis septentrionalis partem, in rupibus solum Brasilianorum superis conspicitis, ad terram appenderunt, & de hinc ne loci solliciti, quantum potuerunt inquirunt, Parambour, hoc est, mare praeteritum vocant, à barbaris respositum narrant. Unde hinc quoque, insulam Brasiliam fructuram felicissima, idem nomen obtinet. Cetera recitum cum aliis exploratis, indigiam existerent, ligno rubra, licet maxime proceritas ad imperium parvas, acquirere: praeterquam cum parum consuetis montes & saltus inaccessibiles, immo Dei beneficio, longe lateque partem in planities sitonem, partem in montibus affurgens terras conspicerent, nam & praefatis insulam mirabilibus, fructibus & fragibus Europae invidis, mirabili proceritate ex proceritate & barbareta penetrant. Tandem fructum hoc solum Canev Sacchariferae appellationem habuerunt: easque à campestribus quondam hominibus detritas in insula Formosa, hinc detulerunt, quae ob suavitatem sicuti quasi ad manum tradita, etiam quae proceritate, etiam silvestres, muscivora & domestica, tam sine proceritate hinc proceritate etiam etiam hoc dicitur, Artico melle multo paribus proceritate, etiam melle fieri utandibus, hinc repositis imperis conciliata sit, à quibus non separantur, tam bonis indefesso labore agitata, dulcissima liquor expositus, in altera parte queritur, quomodo hinc hinc imaginem expectant videri.



Mulae hodie hujus generis machinae conficiuntur. Nec ulla hujus nominis machina ex qua plus loci & evolutum ad operationes redolent. Nam Sacchariferae insulae Brasiliae olim colligebatur *Arundo* decies centies mille, usque quotiens, usque Insularum deventu certissimo compendo dissolubantur.

In Aegypto *Juncus Arabicus* (unde Saccharum insularum dicitur) in hinc & exigua planta, insulae crystalli vi Solis coagulatur. In India vero Orientali, in insula arboris arundinis (vide Garc. ab Orta cap. 111.) & modesta, populo insigni, insula melle, *Juncus Arabicus*, quem *Talaxir* appellant, viscosum albicansque liquoris proceritate consistit, ut Avicenna, Rhazo, & Serapio tribuatur. In Provinciae *Juncus Arabicus* Canev Sacchariferae sponte nascitur, adoleveritque in arboris proceritatem, usque crystalli Saccharum melle Solis exsolatur, consistit. Tamen alteritatem vel insulae qualiam, vel insulae hinc dexteriorum adoperari hinc arundinis proceritate, tunc credit. Planta insigni

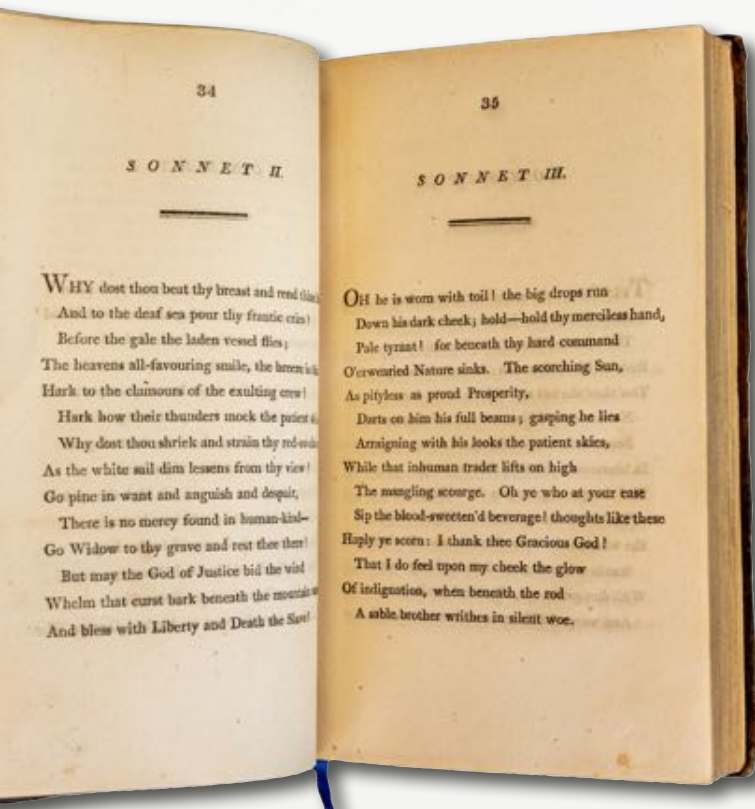


In a description of the English port of Bristol, Daniel Defoe admired “the most romantic view especially of shipping passing”.³² The sketch of New York Harbour in 1826 pictured above shows similarly peaceful and majestic sailing ships. It was made by diplomat, James Justinian Morier on his return from his time as special commissioner in Mexico.

Such placid images mask the dark reality: ocean-going cargo ships were the technology that allowed the forced transportation of millions of African people. The ships

acted as factories, taking in people as raw material, and producing slavery and race. Before the voyage from West Africa to the Americas, known as the Middle Passage, the people forced on board came from many distinct societies, with different languages and cultures. The hierarchy on the ships, predominantly white people in charge, Black people below the decks, replaced this diversity with stark racial distinctions.³³

Exhibited: New York Harbour, 1826 from James Justinian Morier’s sketchbook [Morier Papers N3.5.36]



In Sonnet III of his sequence of poems against the slave trade, Robert Southey juxtaposes the image of an enslaved Black man being whipped, with an English tea or coffee drinker, addressing the drinker, “Oh ye who at your ease / Sip the blood-sweeten’d beverage!”. Implicating consumers of sugar, which ate up people in its production, in an act of cannibalism was one of the shock tactics used by abolitionists to make the British public take action by boycotting crops produced by enslaved labour.

Southey’s introduction to his poems expresses disappointment at the short-lived public enthusiasm for a boycott. He argues that the government will not end the slave trade on their own as their interests lie in “the continuance of this traffic in human flesh”. His view was borne out by events as the first abolition bill failed in 1791, followed by 11 more failures up to 1805. Southey saw only two alternatives to unforthcoming government action: a complete boycott of Caribbean sugar or “the just and general rebellion of Negroes”.

Exhibited: Southey, Robert. Poems, Bristol, 1797 [64 e 29]

A study of fish from the late 17th century notes the blue shark's appetite for human flesh. Contemporary accounts record that sharks followed slave ships travelling from West Africa to the Americas, as they had learned that the ships would provide easy meals.³⁴ Abolitionists used the image of the man-eating shark to draw attention to the conditions and cruelty on the Middle Passage. Sharks became an emblem of the killing nature of the transatlantic slave trade. Robert Southey's first poem on the slave trade begins:

Hold your mad hands! for ever on your plain
Must the gorged vulture clog his beak with blood?
For ever must your Niger's tainted flood
Roll to the ravenous shark his banquet slain?

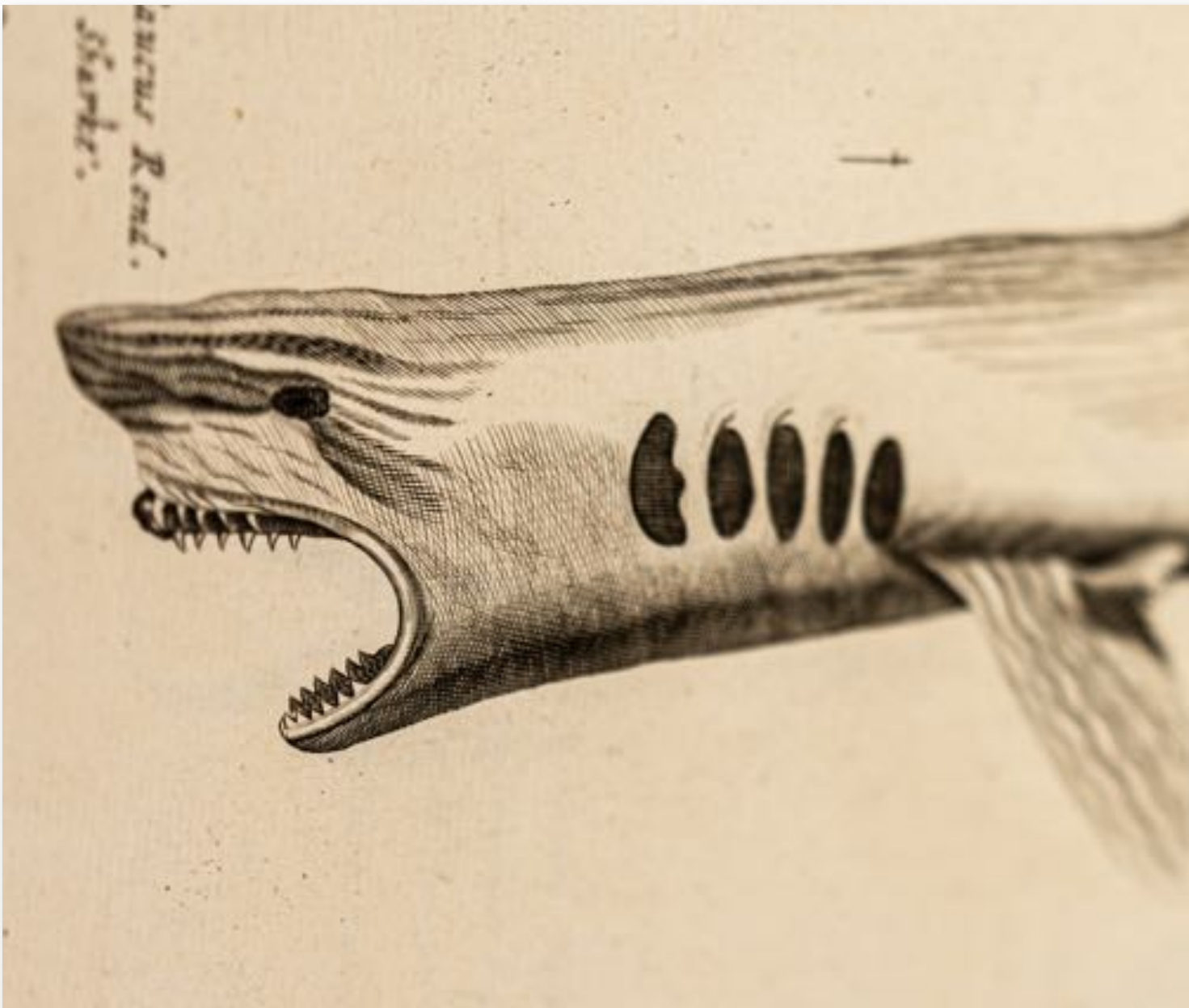
One satirist went further, publishing a letter to Parliament written by a shark opposing the abolition bills, making

a pointed comparison to those with interests in the transatlantic slave trade.

The *Historia Piscium* was part of a movement to reform the classification of the natural world by focusing on external features of plants and animals to define species. This aim was supported by the 187 full-page illustrations of fish at the end of the book. Whilst some were copied from previously published pictures, many were newly commissioned from descriptions and specimens. The little cross on the blue shark plate suggests that it was one of the new images.

Do you think the blue shark was drawn from a specimen or a description? How might the terrifying experience of the Middle Passage have affected enslaved people's relationship to the sea?

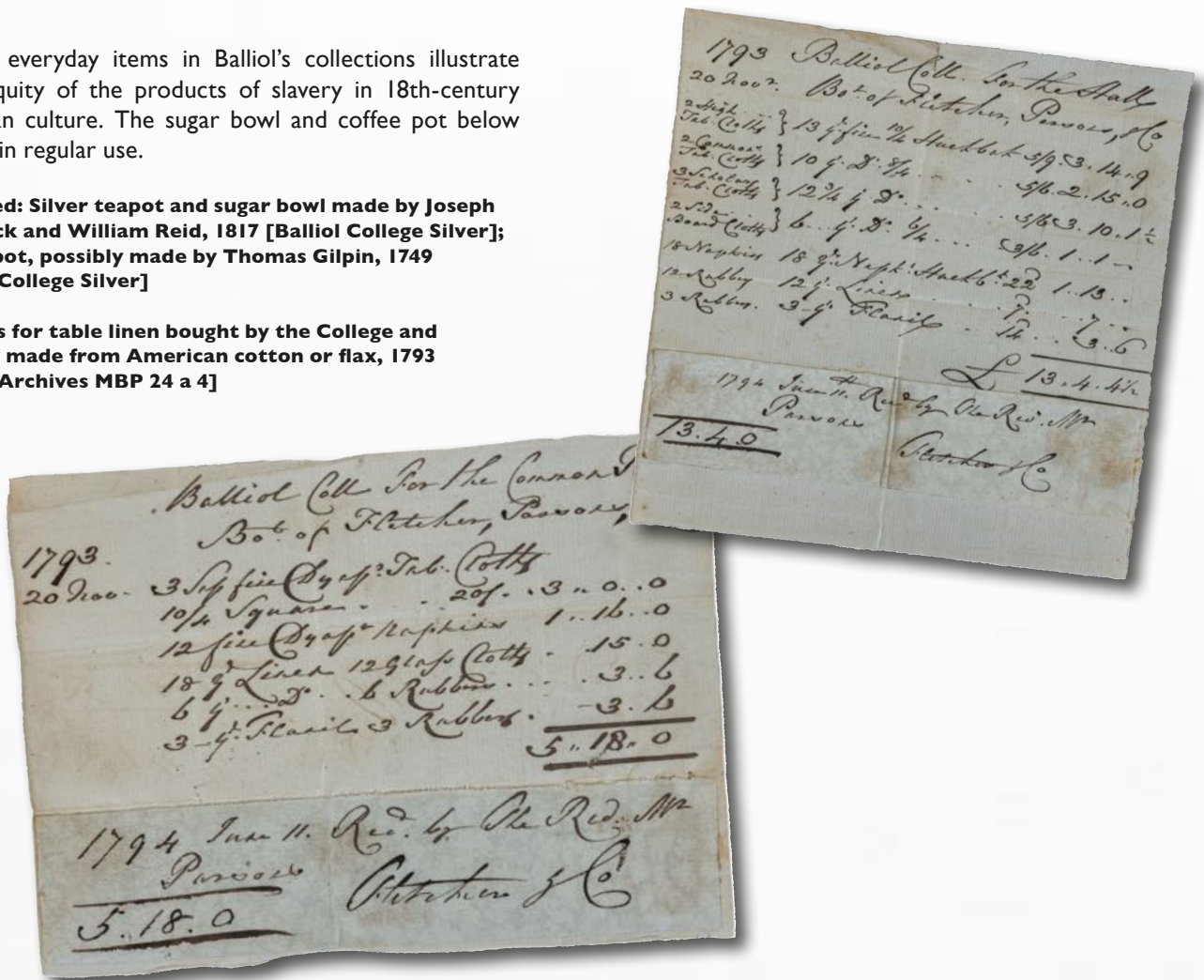
Exhibited: Willughby, Francis and Ray, John. *De Historia Piscium*, Oxford, 1686 [30 f 95]



Various everyday items in Balliol's collections illustrate the ubiquity of the products of slavery in 18th-century European culture. The sugar bowl and coffee pot below are still in regular use.

Exhibited: Silver teapot and sugar bowl made by Joseph Craddock and William Reid, 1817 [Balliol College Silver]; Coffee pot, possibly made by Thomas Gilpin, 1749 [Balliol College Silver]

Receipts for table linen bought by the College and possibly made from American cotton or flax, 1793 [Balliol Archives MBP 24 a 4]





BRAVE REPUBLICAN WARRIORS: TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE AND THE REVOLUTION IN SAINT-DOMINGUE

ESSAY BY SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH

The revolution in the Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue, France's richest and most profitable overseas territory in the late 18th century, was one of the defining episodes in modern global history. It began in 1791 with a mass uprising of the territory's 500,000 enslaved men and women. They were inspired by ongoing traditions of local resistance, fostered by military skills acquired in Africa (where the majority of them were born) and the emerging *vodou* religious spirituality. The revolution also invoked the "human rights" proclaimed by the 1789 French Declaration, but expressly and repeatedly denied to the colonies' enslaved populations in 1790 and 1791. Indeed in its early years the French revolutionaries sided with local white slave-owners, refusing to grant any civil or political entitlements to the slaves, who were seen as "foreigners".¹ By igniting the Caribbean firmament, this Saint-Domingue insurrection challenged and unsettled the dominant forces of the time: white settlers, colonial administrators, imperial lobbies, and slavers. Under its fierce and irresistible pressure, local French authorities in Saint-Domingue were forced to issue a decree abolishing slavery in 1793, a move followed by the French national legislature (the Convention) a year later. The world's first abolition of slavery was thus largely the product of the determined resistance of the enslaved people themselves.²

The Saint-Domingue revolution was led by Toussaint Louverture, a former coachman from the Bréda plantation who became a general in the colony's army and leader of its Black community. Toussaint's power rested on the overwhelming support he enjoyed among these men and women of African origin, as well as on his military prowess, which enabled his army of "brave republican warriors" (as he called them) to defeat and expel the Spanish and British occupying forces from the colony. He became a key ally of the French, and was promoted by the republican governor Etienne Laveaux to the position of deputy governor in 1796. Toussaint was much more than a military leader: over the next four years, he consolidated his power by asserting his control over the colonial administration, building a broad coalition of support at local level, reviving the plantation economy, and signing trade and military agreements with the British and the Americans. His basic objectives were to prevent any single foreign power from dominating Saint-Domingue, to follow policies which were primarily guided by the interests of the colony (which he used to refer to as "my country") and above all to preserve the unity of his people: his central republican ideal was "brotherhood", which he constantly preached by inviting his fellow-Black citizens to stay together, and work in harmony with white and mixed-race people in the colony: as he put it in one of his speeches, the inhabitants of Saint-Domingue should be "of one heart, one soul" and "forever bury their ancient divisions".³

Contrary to widely-held beliefs at the time, Louverture did not seek independence from France: his 1801 Constitution, which appointed him as governor of the colony, affirmed that its citizens were "free and French".⁴ Toussaint was nonetheless a revolutionary, who believed that Saint-Domingue could forge its autonomous republican path towards freedom and brotherhood. At the same time, he was a pragmatist, who did not think independence was desirable or even possible at the time, and wanted instead to build a robust community under the protection of the French Republic. He sought, moreover, to insulate the colony

1 For a general account of the Haitian Revolution, see CLR James, *The Black Jacobins* (London, Penguin, 2001 ed.); and Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2004)

2 On the key role of these resistance movements, see Carolyn Fick, *The making of Haiti: the Saint-Domingue revolution from below* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

3 On Louverture see Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: the epic life of Toussaint Louverture* (London, Allen Lane, 2020).

4 *Constitution républicaine de Saint-Domingue* (Port-Républicain, 1801).

from the vicissitudes of French politics, and in particular from the menace of a vocal colonial lobby which became more assertive on the national political scene in the later 1790s, demanding reparations for the abolition of slavery in 1794, and the reimposition of white domination and slavery in Saint-Domingue. Toussaint warned the French government that his people would “bury themselves in the ruins of their country rather than face the prospect of the restoration of slavery”.⁵

Unfortunately for Toussaint (and for the French) this warning was not heeded by Napoleon Bonaparte, the new French ruler who seized power in France in late 1799. Confident in the power of his army, and hoping to use a reconquered Saint-Domingue as the lynchpin of a French economic empire in the western hemisphere, which would include the Caribbean colonies, as well as Guyana, Louisiana, and Florida, Bonaparte sent a massive expeditionary force to overthrow the Louverture regime in late 1801. His view of Saint-Domingue was shaped by racist attitudes which were widespread in France at the time, even among “enlightened” citizens: thus in 1802 he ordered that Black and mixed-race people from the colonies should be banned from entering France.⁶ In the same year, Bonaparte restored the slave trade and slavery in Martinique, Tobago, and Saint-Lucia (soon followed by Guadeloupe and Guyana), offering this crude justification to one of his subordinates: “I am for the whites, because I am white; I have no other reason, and this one is good enough”. Referring to the abolition of slavery by the Convention in 1794, he continued: “how can we have given liberty to Africans, to men without any civilisation, who had not the slightest idea as to what a colony, or for that matter France was?”⁷

The revolutionaries in Saint-Domingue gave Bonaparte a defiant answer, echoing one of Toussaint’s most famous sayings: “I was born an enslaved person, but nature gave me the soul of a free man”.⁸ Saint-Domingue’s citizens greeted the French invading army with a national insurrection, and even though Louverture was treacherously captured, and imprisoned in France where he died in 1803, his lieutenants took up the struggle and defeated Bonaparte’s army at the battle of Vertières. This humiliating defeat forced the French to withdraw from Saint-Domingue and abandon what had been their most profitable colony in the 18th century; it also ended Bonaparte’s dream of a French-dominated empire in the western hemisphere. The revolution culminated in the birth of the new independent state of Haiti in January 1804, the world’s first Black post-colonial state: as its leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines put it: “we have dared to be free”.⁹

Throughout the 1790s and early 1800s, as evocatively described in Julius Scott’s *The Common Wind*,¹⁰ word about events in Saint-Domingue spread across the Greater Caribbean region, inspiring fear among the plantocracy and upsurges in revolutionary activity among the enslaved and free Black populations: in Cuba alone, there were 19 major insurrections between 1795 and 1812.¹¹ Indeed, despite attempts to erase it from the historical record, the Haitian Revolution brought about a new dawn across the Atlantic world, generating intellectual and social movements which coalesced around the issues of slavery, colonialism, racial equality and justice, self-determination, and popular sovereignty.¹² Through the

5 Toussaint Louverture, *Réfutation de quelques assertions d'un discours prononcé au Corps Législatif par Viénot Vaublanc* (Cap-Français, Roux, 1797), p. 32.

6 Decree of 25 June 1802.

7 Quoted in Antoine-Clair Thibaudeau, *Mémoires sur le Consulat* (Paris, 1827), pp.120-121.

8 Toussaint Louverture, report to Directory, 4 September 1797, Archives Nationales, Paris, AFIII 210.

9 Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1 January 1804. CO 137/111/1 National Archives, Kew.

10 Julius Scott, *The Common Wind* (London, Verso, 2018).

11 On the impact of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba, see Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014).

12 See Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity disavowed: Haiti and the cultures of slavery in the age of Revolution* (Durham, NC, and London, Duke University Press, 2004).

assistance she provided to Simon Bolivar, Haiti made a direct contribution to the liberation of Latin America from Spanish rule. The revolution had a significant impact in the United States,¹³ and abolitionists and advocates of Black liberation and Black dignity celebrated the achievements of Toussaint Louverture throughout the 19th century.¹⁴ The Haitian epic also featured prominently in the imagination of modern anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism: notably through the works of Marcus Garvey, the writings of C.L.R. James (whose *Black Jacobins* remains a classic), the *négritude* movement founded by Aimé Césaire as well as communist figures such as Paul Robeson, Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh. And this presence continues to be felt in our own times: conversations about colonialism, reparations, the memory of slavery and the defence of the rights of Black people are still nourished by the example set by Toussaint Louverture and his brothers. What the great African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass declared in the 19th century remains true to this day: the Haitian Revolution “served the cause of universal liberty”.¹⁵

13 See Ashli White, *Encountering revolution: Haiti and the making of the early Republic* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

14 See Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (eds.), *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution* (London, Routledge, 2010).

15 Frederick Douglass, *Lecture on Haiti* (Chicago, 1893), p.208.

RESISTANCE, REBELLION AND THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

“ I AM Toussaint Louverture, you have perhaps heard my name. You are aware, brothers, that I have undertaken vengeance, and that I want freedom and equality to reign in Saint-Domingue. ”

Toussaint Louverture³⁷

“ IS NOT the slave trade entirely a war with the heart of man? ”

Olaudah Equiano³⁸

REBELLION AND REVOLUTION run through the entire history of the transatlantic slave trade. From defying capture in Africa, to fleeing plantations in the Americas, people fought against bondage at every step. Sometimes rebellions met the violence of enslavement with equal violence and warfare, but resistance took many forms and sought different individual and collective goals.

During the Middle Passage, African people resisted their enslavement by refusing orders, overpowering ships and demanding return or safe landing; they also escaped by jumping overboard. Upon landing, enslaved people fought and fled, demonstrating collective strength, as at the mass suicide of Igbo Landing, or through *marronage*, escaping to remote areas, often alongside the remaining indigenous population, and establishing new “Maroon” communities.

Enslaved people attacked production by devastating crops or refusing to work. They rejected submission to slavery through self-harm or directly attacking overseers. They defied their condition and claimed autonomy and dignity through retaining suppressed cultural practices and creating new ones, in music, religion and language, and by writing their own histories. They fought for freedom and power in large-scale military uprisings and wars.

War was embedded in the expansion of empire and trade. It was how empires claimed land, resources and power from each other; it simultaneously created captives for enslavement and opened the market for firearms in West Africa. Britain established military strongholds in its American dominions to fight both external and internal threats, particularly in Jamaica, which was Britain’s most profitable, powerful and protected American colony, governed under military control and structure.³⁹ Early English settlement was disrupted by the Maroons, who fought two wars to ensure their autonomy and their own land. However, one of the conditions of their freedom was to join Britain’s wars against future rebellions.

Despite – and because of – the aggressive military means with which slavery was enforced, there was near-constant

rebellion across the Caribbean and South America, notably in Venezuela and Cuba (under Spanish control) and Jamaica. In most cases, these uprisings were suppressed, but were nevertheless impactful, influencing the governance and geography of these territories, and maintaining a constant murmur of defiance. A contemporary from Jamaica wrote: “Witness the twenty-seven bloody rebellions of Jamaica ;– indeed, had we not emancipated the West India slaves in 1834, it would have been impossible to retain them much longer in bondage.”⁴⁰

Jamaica’s hilly landscape provided good protection and cover for people who fled the plantations. The names of places on a 1794 map of the island – ports, plantations, barracks, and forts – show a land shaped by commerce and warfare. Amongst them, in the hills, are the marks of rebellion and freedom: Maroon settlements such as Moore Town and Nanny Town in the east, and Accompong Town and Trelawny Town in the west.

Exhibited: Jamaica from the Latest Surveys, Thomas Jefferys, 1794 [Balliol Archives ART 31]

An article in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* reports the beginning of Tacky’s War in April 1760, an uprising across Jamaica to overthrow British rule. The rebellion in the east was led by a man named Tacky, who was likely a military or political leader from what is now Ghana.³⁵ The rebels overran plantations, killed planters and burned properties. The British military response was swift and bolstered by Maroon armies. Hundreds were killed, captured and re-sold into slavery, or executed – hanged, burned, or starved in chains. Tacky’s head was taken as a trophy. Rebels continued to plan and fight across the island consistently for a year; May 1760 saw a stronghold of 1,200 fighters in Westmoreland, leaving their mark at “Rebel’s Barricade” as recorded on a 1763 map.³⁶ The island remained volatile for years after.

Why do you think readers of *The Gentleman's Magazine* might have been interested in news of Tacky's War?

Exhibited: *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Volume 30, London, 1760, page 307 [Balliol Historic Collections]



Roehampton Estate was one of over a hundred estates burned during the largest and last slave rebellion in Jamaica, the Baptist War, which lasted from December 1831 to January 1832. Britain had outlawed the slave trade in 1807, but the debate around the abolition of slavery had progressed frustratingly slowly. The uprising was led by Samuel Sharpe, an enslaved man and Baptist deacon. It began as a labour strike, but when their demands were refused, escalated into war across the island involving tens of thousands of enslaved fighters. They were met with British military force and hundreds were killed in the war and in the aftermath, as the island's landowners retaliated through executions and brutal punishment, as well as burning chapels.⁴¹ A year later, in 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, with the process of emancipation beginning across British colonies in 1834.

The publication from which the illustration below was taken arose from "a Meeting, representing the Shipping, Manufacturing, and Commercial interests [. . .]

in order to remove erroneous impressions from the public mind" regarding the condition and treatment of enslaved people in the Caribbean. It identifies 24 witnesses including politicians, proprietors, military men, lawyers, overseers, missionaries and ministers, who had resided in the Caribbean anywhere from six months to over 30 years, including John Baillie, owner of Roehampton Estate. Eight of the witnesses are highlighted as having "been produced by the Anti-Slavery Party".

Why do you think the plantation has been depicted as a serene estate, with few people in view?

Exhibited: View of Roehampton Estate, Jamaica, in Evidence Upon Oath Touching the Condition and Treatment of the Negro Population of the British West India Colonies, House of Lords Select Committee, 1833 [Urquhart Collection 3.23.11]



THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

Resistance was also widespread in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. By the late 18th century it was known as the “Pearl of the Antilles”, generating enormous wealth for local white settlers and metropolitan France. In August 1791, the first uprisings of what would become the Haitian Revolution began. Preparations had been made in the preceding months, with strategy meetings and a *vodou* ceremony led by Dutty Boukman and Cécile Fatiman. Toussaint Louverture emerged as the Revolution’s central figure. A former slave, skilled horse-rider, strategist, and revolutionary thinker, he led armies, at turns against and alongside European forces, to ensure the abolition of slavery in 1793 and ultimately, the colony’s independence from France in 1804. It shed the territory’s French name, reclaiming one of the names given by the Taíno (Ayiti), to become Haiti. This revolutionary victory was a major landmark in the history of emancipation, inspiring generations of people in their fight against slavery across the Atlantic world in the 19th century.

The decree of the French Revolutionary Government pictured below specifies how authorities and privateers

in France’s colonies should treat neutral vessels which might be trading with the enemy, in this case the British, with particular reference to ships from North America. Primarily a legal proclamation, it still prominently displays the revolutionary watchwords of liberty and equality.

In spite of the prominence of these ideas in its literature, the French Revolutionary Government did not extend them to enslaved people in the French Caribbean colonies. There were attempts to quash ideas of freedom and equality amongst enslaved people by restricting the circulation of revolutionary material and talk, but the reverberations of the French Revolution nevertheless resonated in France’s colonies. In Saint-Domingue, the French settlers and the free people of colour made demands to improve their civil rights, protections, and freedoms. The instability of a new regime in France, and the resultant internal conflicts in Saint-Domingue made fertile ground for the Black and enslaved population to rise up.

Exhibited: Republic Francaise. Decree regarding neutral vessels and enemy goods with particular reference the United States of America, 1794 [Urquhart Collection 3.11.5]

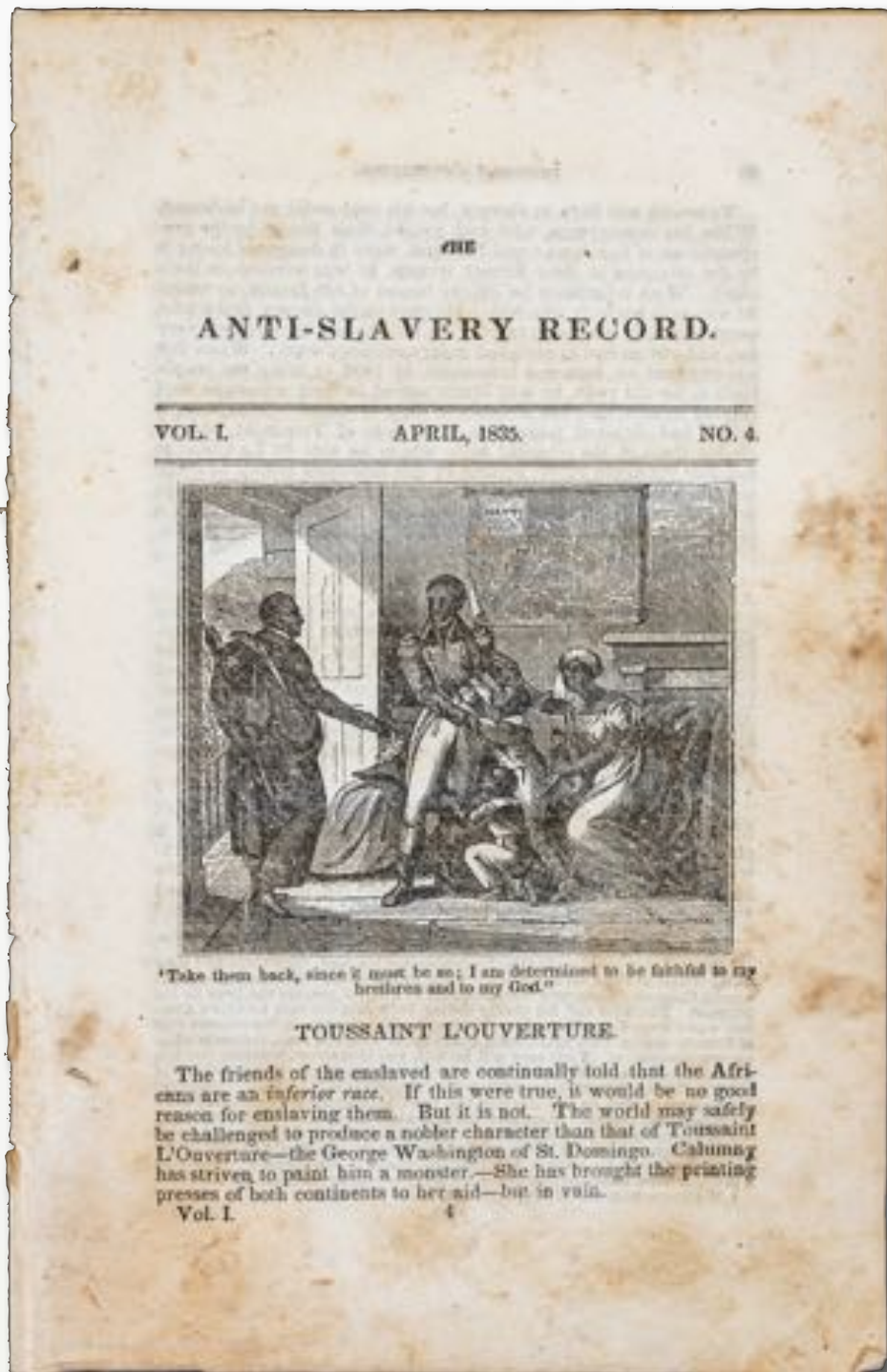


Toussaint Louverture's life and legend were widely celebrated in the Atlantic world from the early 19th century onwards. This image, published in the review of the abolitionist Anti-Slavery Society pictured below, was drawn from an original series commissioned by the Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer in the early 1820s. It depicts the dramatic moment in early 1802, shortly after the French military invasion of Saint-Domingue, when Toussaint's two young children Isaac and Placide, who had been kept hostage in France by Napoleon, were brought back to him in an attempt to buy his allegiance. Toussaint defiantly refuses to betray his brothers and his God,

preferring that his children be "taken back" to France. The image thus highlights Toussaint's "noble character".

The pamphlet calls Toussaint Louverture "the George Washington of St. Domingo". Both led the liberation of their countries, but only Louverture liberated the enslaved, while Washington was himself a plantation owner. Louverture also came to be known as the "Black Spartacus", after the gladiator-slave who faced down the Roman army.

**Exhibited: *The Anti-Slavery Record*, vol.I no. 4, 1835,
[From the collection of Oliver St Clair Franklin]**



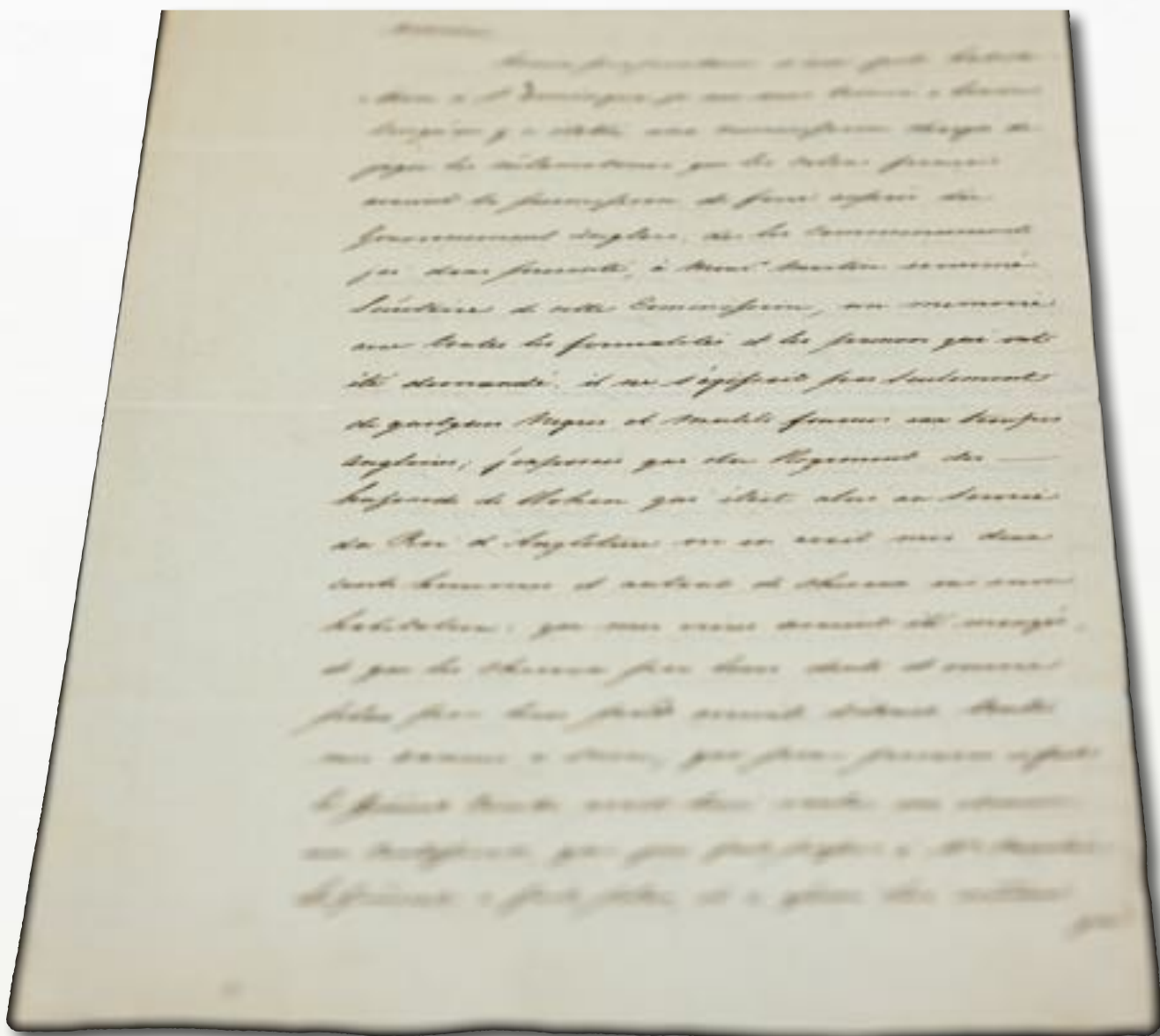
A complaint to the British Government from a French plantation owner in Saint-Domingue reveals the complex political situation in the Atlantic world at the end of the 18th century. Having been among those who invited the British to intervene in Saint-Domingue against Toussaint Louverture and restore slavery, Pierre-Jacques Ferron de la Ferronnays seeks compensation for the damage caused by the soldiers stationed on his land. The soldiers in question were a French cavalry regiment fighting for the British. Ferronnays is more worried about the destruction of his sugar crop than the loss of enslaved people that he owned, whom he mentions casually alongside farm animals. In order to find favour with the British Government he emphasises that he fought with the British against the French Revolution.

The Haitian Revolution unsettled the countries that profited from slave labour and they refused to trade with Haiti, or welcome it as an independent nation. France only recognised Haiti's independence in 1825, in exchange

for a payment of 150 million francs, as compensation for property losses during the Haitian Revolution. Haiti was paying off this debt for over 100 years, until 1947. Ferronnays received 151,040 francs from this pot.

His petition to the British Government failed on technicalities although he could name several other planters who were compensated for the damage that they had invited. In addition to compensation for his Haitian estates, his family was compensated by the French Government for the loss of their chateau, built by forced labour in the later 18th century, and burned down, then sold as national property during the French Revolution. There was no compensation for the families of people enslaved on his plantation in Saint Domingue or those who were forced to build his chateau.

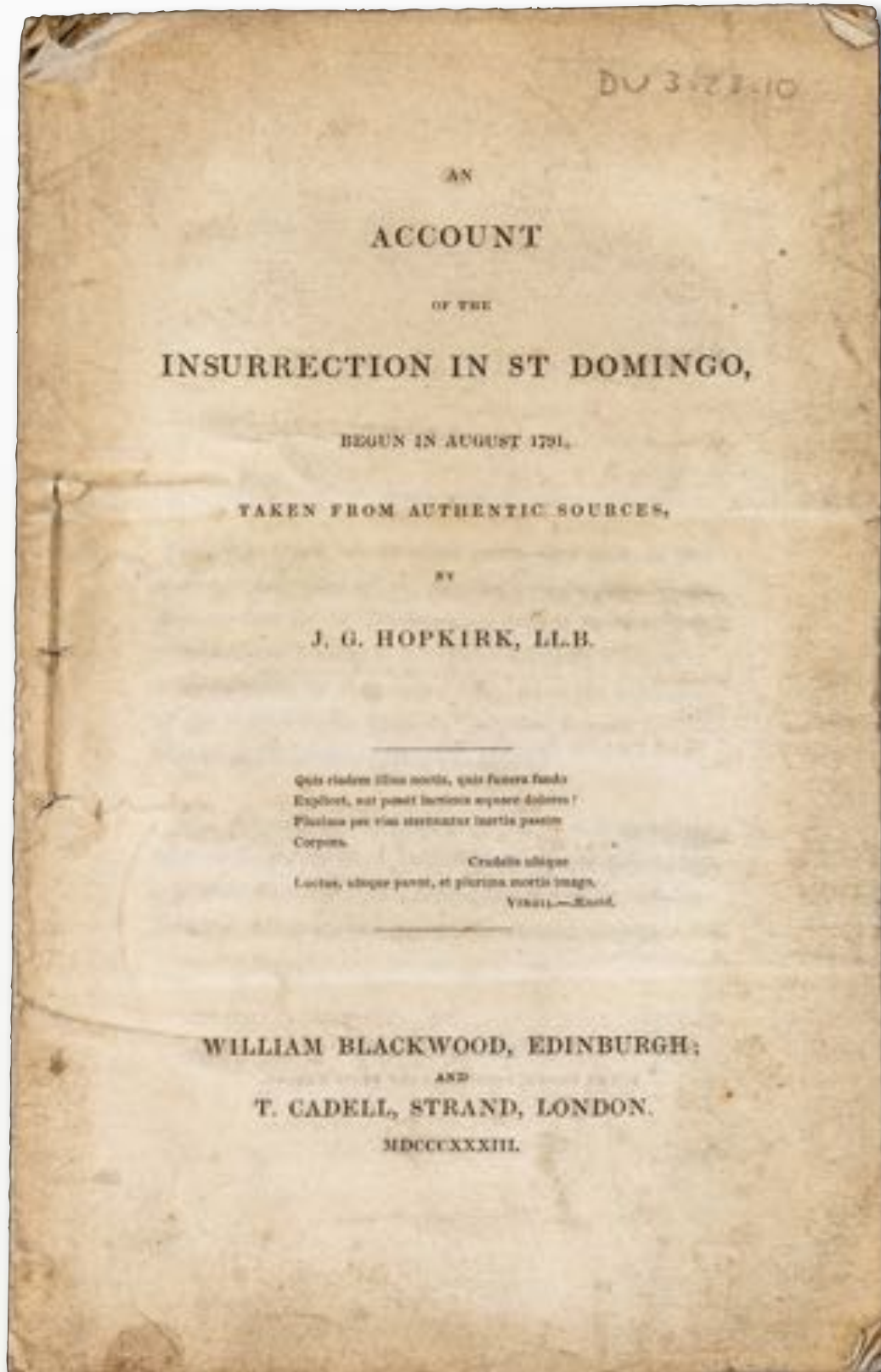
Exhibited: Letter to David Richard Morier from Pierre-Jacques Ferron de la Ferronnays
[Papers of the Morier Family - Class E: Correspondence of David Richard Morier 1784-1877 Box 9.2.7a.]



The account pictured below begins with a preface stating that it offers “a simple narrative of the nearly forgotten story of the Insurrection in St Domingo, as related by those who witnessed it” and a hope that Britain will “not neglect the solemn warning” of the events. Published in 1833, the year the Slavery Abolition Act passed, it warns against the consequences of amelioration and abolition.

Who do you think is included amongst the witnesses and “authentic sources”, and thereby given the power to write history?

Exhibited: Account of the Insurrection in St Domingo, J. G. Hopkirk, 1833 [Urquhart Collection 3.23.10]



COURAGE AND TEARS: WHY THIS HISTORY STILL MATTERS

“ **SOON AFTER THIS**, the preparation time for freedom began, that is, children under 6 years were free. House servants were to work 4 years, and field laborers 6 years, and then full freedom was to take place. This arrangement Br Scholefield read to us in the Church; but it did not excite general joy, for the people did not suppose that freedom was so far distant.

Archibald John Monteith, a Jamaican man who bought his own freedom in 1837⁴²

“ **I’M PROUD** to say I am descended from a slave. People like him are giants, and I stand on the shoulders of giants. It is the courage of slaves we should be celebrating.

David Monteith, descendant of Archibald Monteith, 2017⁴³

“ **... THE GRIEVOUS** thoughts which I then felt, still pant in my heart; though my fears and tears have long since subsided. And yet it is still grievous to think that thousands more have suffered in similar and greater distress . . .

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano⁴⁴

WHY SHOULD WE TALK about the transatlantic slave trade today? Because we live with its financial, civil and industrial legacies, as well as the generational trauma of untraceable pasts, family separation, millions of lives lost, and the horrors of facing the violence perpetuated to our own and by our own. Remembering the transatlantic slave trade is an act of mourning and commemoration of the past; equally, it is a reminder of what we have inherited and poses questions about what we do now with that inheritance.

The resilience and courage of the enslaved people who resisted the violent dehumanisation of the transatlantic slave trade remains inspirational. Their story – visible and audible in a rich cultural legacy that includes the musical roots of most of today’s popular music, as well as performance, language, visual art, literature and dance – is a lesson in the power of humanity.

Still, the racism created and institutionalised during the transatlantic slave trade remains with us. This trade in people could only persist so openly and successfully for 400 years because it was supported by racist propaganda that positioned those of African descent as naturally inferior and inhuman. The legal structures implemented during this period influence modern law, politics, and therefore societal structures and beliefs. Understanding the origins of this racism helps us identify it for the construct it is and recognise that it can be changed.

BALLIOL TODAY

“ IT’S NOT ENOUGH to just listen . . . ”
Josiah Senu (Balliol 2020)⁴⁵



Balliol BME Society, 2019

THROUGHOUT THE 20TH CENTURY Balliol College has supported scholarship that engages with the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, including the work of historian Thomas Lionel Hodgkin (Fellow 1945–1970) in the “decolonization of history and the rediscovery of the African past”,⁴⁶ and the essays of philosopher R.M. Hare (Fellow 1947–1996) on slavery and racism. In the Fellowship of the 21st century, Sudhir Hazareesingh (CUF Lecturer in Politics and Tutorial Fellow in Politics) has written an award winning biography of Toussaint Louverture and Daniel Butt (Tutorial Fellow in Political Theory) has published widely on reparative justice. Sebastian Pender’s (Balliol and Empire research coordinator) work on Balliol’s benefaction from the proceeds of slavery was central to this exhibition.

Amongst Balliol’s former fellows, Marisa Fuentes (Oliver Smithies Visiting Fellow 2019/20) researches slavery in the early modern Atlantic World and has written *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, and Diana Berruezo-Sánchez (Career Development Fellow 2018–2021) works on the representations and productions of enslaved Black Africans in Golden Age Spanish literature.

This work is also reflected in the student body. The College’s BME Society, founded in 2018, seeks to provide a community for ethnic minority students to share experiences, have open discussions, and facilitate change by advocating student voices and needs. In June 2020, the Society delivered a report to the College’s Governing Body, detailing their experiences of racism and discrimination within the College, in support of a collaborative student statement outlining the actions needed to promote the safety and success of all Balliol students, present and future.

The original artwork for the exhibition film has been made into a legacy book as an embodiment of listening and openness, and a challenge to the dominant narratives and documents that violently erased or carelessly overlooked the histories and voices of the enslaved. It represents an acknowledgment of our past and its legacies, to allow us to inform and empower our future. The blank pages are an opportunity to continue telling unheard histories, and writing our stories.

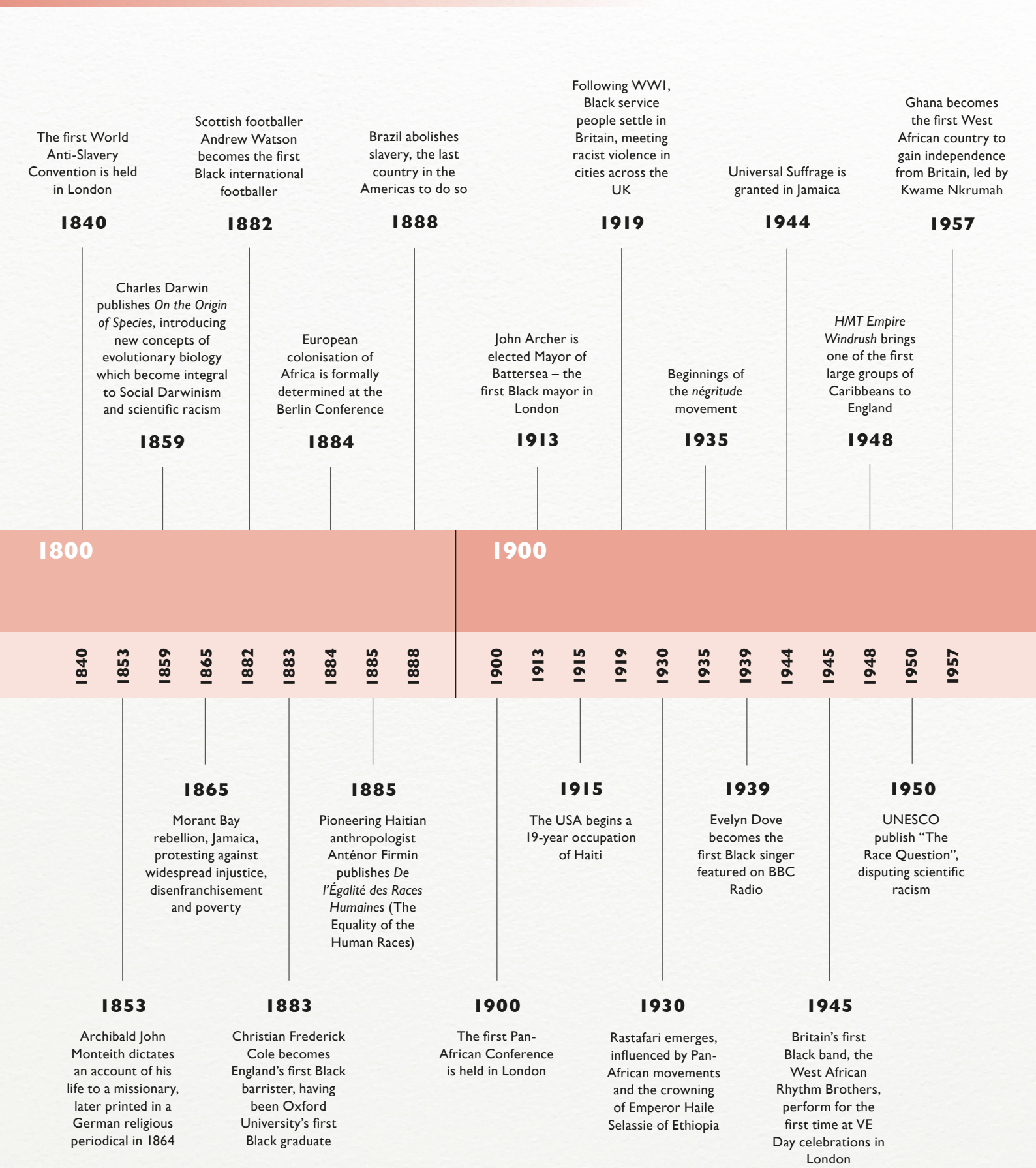


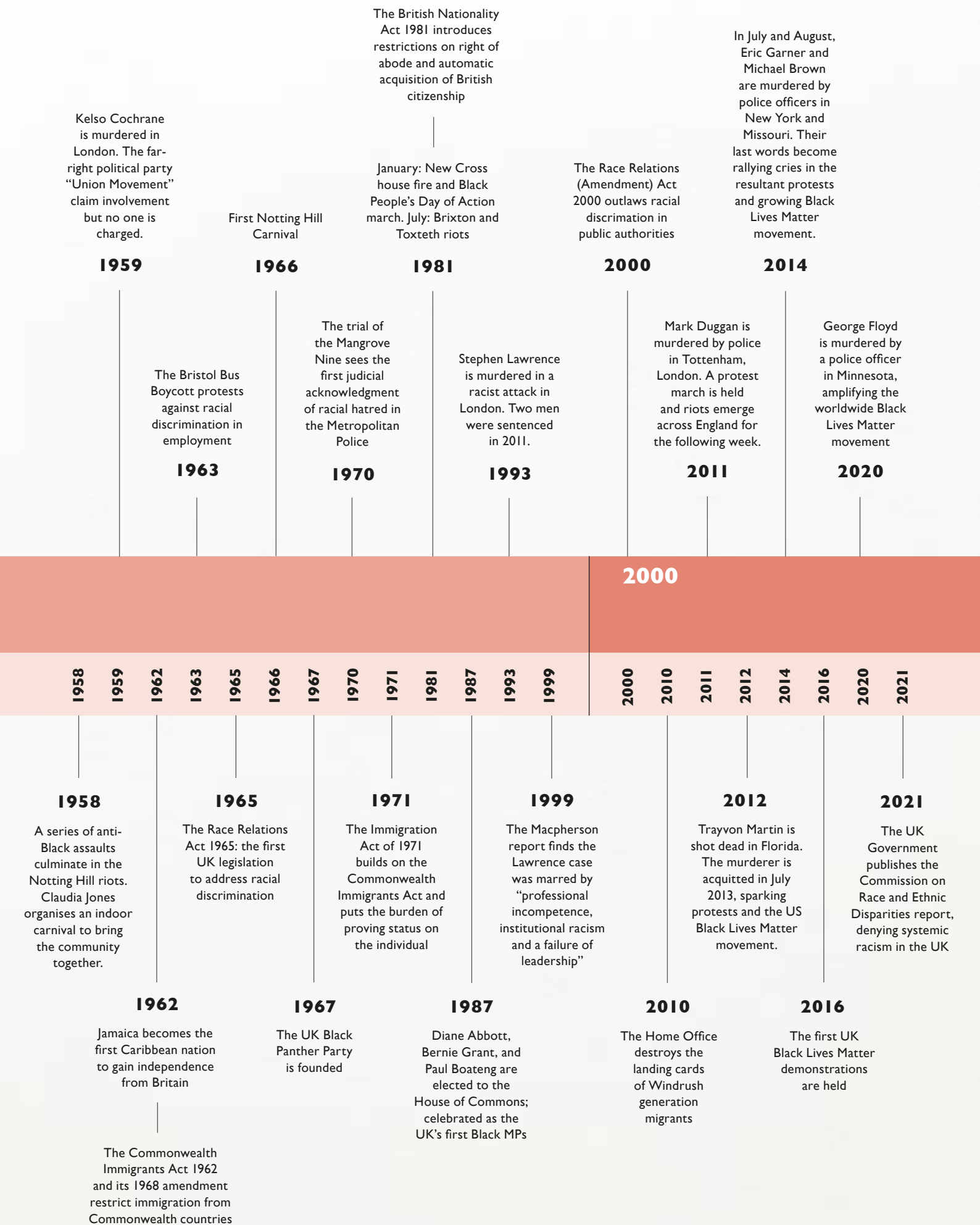
Legacy Book, Bespoke book, per stellas Ltd



Legacy Book, Bespoke book, Word art by Imani Grant, per stellas Ltd

POST-ABOLITION TIMELINE: 1840–2021





ENDNOTES

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- 13 UCL: The Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery. *Browse the legacies | Legacies of British Slavery*. Retrieved 04/06/2021, from <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/legacies/>
- 14 Pender, Sebastian R. (2020) *Balliol and the Proceeds of Slavery*. Internal Balliol College report. Unpublished.
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WHAT TO READ, WATCH AND LISTEN TO NEXT:

Introductions:

BBC Radio 4 series *Descendants* and selected episodes of *You're Dead to Me* including the Asante Empire (first broadcast 19 February 2021), the Haitian Revolution (first broadcast 14 August 2020), and Mansa Musa (first broadcast 20 September 2019).

BBC World News series, History of Africa with Zeinab Badawi. All 20 episodes are available on the BBC News Africa YouTube channel. (For an introduction to West African civilisations see episode 11: "City States and Civilisations")

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Understanding Slavery Initiative. <http://www.understandingslavery.com/>

Find out more:

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