Ignatius Sancho and the British Abolitionist Movement, 1729–1786

Manhood, Race and Sensibility

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To Linda, with all my love.

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And, as throughout my life, I have had the example of Donald Meyer, my intellectual father, before me.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1807, the British Parliament passed the "Act for the Abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire." That this Act served British economic interests is an explanation now long dismissed, or else fundamentally recast. Christopher Leslie Brown has persuasively defined "moral capital" as the foundation of British abolitionism. David Brown Davis notes the "frequent blurring of the distinction between slavery and the slave trade" proponents of that Act saw it as a stage in abolition.[1] Fundamental to that moral capital was the possession of "sensibility," which helps to explain why white, male MP's and their constituents, also white and male, supported the cause of abolition on behalf of people they emphasized were manifestly different and inferior to themselves. So influential was the appeal to sensibility seen to be, that defenders of enslavement appealed to it, too, but defining it as a natural constituent of white psychology that Africans conveniently lacked. The increase of literacy among both genders had been fundamental to the creation of a "culture of sensibility," shared by women and men, although it was gendered. That coincided with Britain's entry into and coming to dominate the slave trade.[2]

One person who came to be seen as the exemplar of the existence of sensibility in "an African" was Ignatius Sancho (1729–82). The title of his collected letters included that identification, *Letters of the late Ignatius Sancho, An African*. They are the subject of this book.

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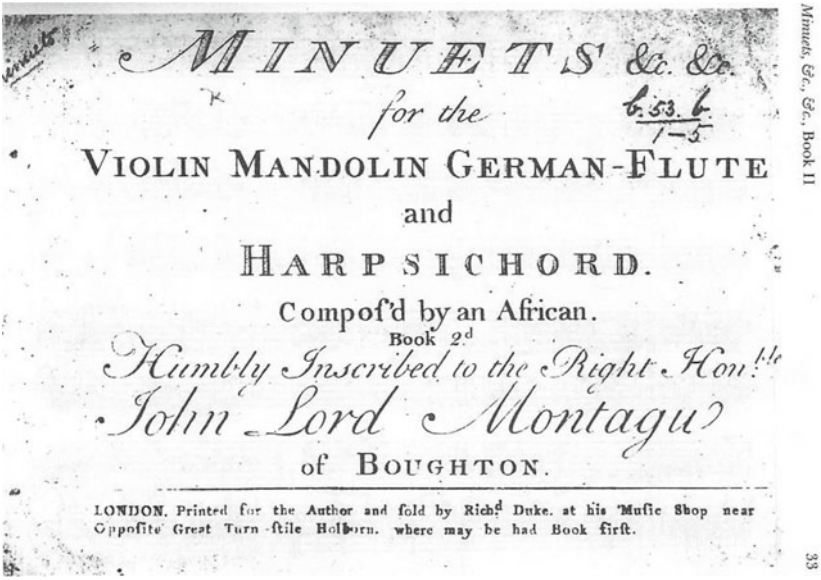
Of course, appeals to "feeling" have become pervasive, with profound effects on politics, both positive and negative. Sancho's first letter (published in 1775) stimulated Lawrence Sterne's influential sympathy for enslaved Black people. The letters with which his editor, Frances Crewe, chose to open their publications in 1782, perhaps in collaboration with Sancho (who died that year) expressed his criticism of racism and slavery in Britain's growing empire. They frequently expressed the self-conscious complexity of his being Black and African in eighteenth-century Britain, a pervasive issue for his readers in modern Britain. Sancho participated in the public debate that followed the 1772 Mansfield decision, against the enslavement of Blacks in Britain, but provoking widespread fear over the subsequent presence of free Blacks there; that opposition has resonance with the current Tory plan to deport refugees to Rwanda. The lynching of George Floyd in 2020 in Minneapolis re-energized the opposition to racism on both sides of the Atlantic, provoking intense reaction, as well as re-energizing the history of British and American participation in the slave trade and slavery among the public at large.

According to John Jekyll, his near-contemporary biographer, the African child to be baptized Charles Ignatius Sancho was born on a slave ship in 1729, during its voyage from Guinea to Cartagena in Colombia. It was luck that his adult voice survives, not to have died young like most of the twelve million people captured in Africa, sold to traders and then plantation owners across the Atlantic.[3] Indigenous peoples there were enslaved in their millions, too, from 1492 at least, but they did not survive as forced, field labourers.[4] Initial deracination was crucial. If Africans did not die en route, many of them and their descendants were worked to premature death, growing sugar and tobacco, forms of mass murder of those Sancho called "my miserable black brethren." Survivors resisted and lived to create new cultures in "the Black Atlantic."[5] What they grew they processed into the luxuries to be consumed very largely by customers back in Europe, the culmination of this triangular trade, from Europe to Africa to the Americas, to Europe as well as to other parts of the world. The hostile climate quickly killed baby Sancho's mother; his father "defeated the miseries of slavery by the act of suicide," by no means a unique form of assertiveness. Sancho was much too young consciously to remember the horrors of his first voyage. About two years later, Sancho was brought to London by an Englishman, to live with his next owners near Blackheath, another piece of luck because the child, seen there as a "little Negro," was selected by the Duke of Montagu,

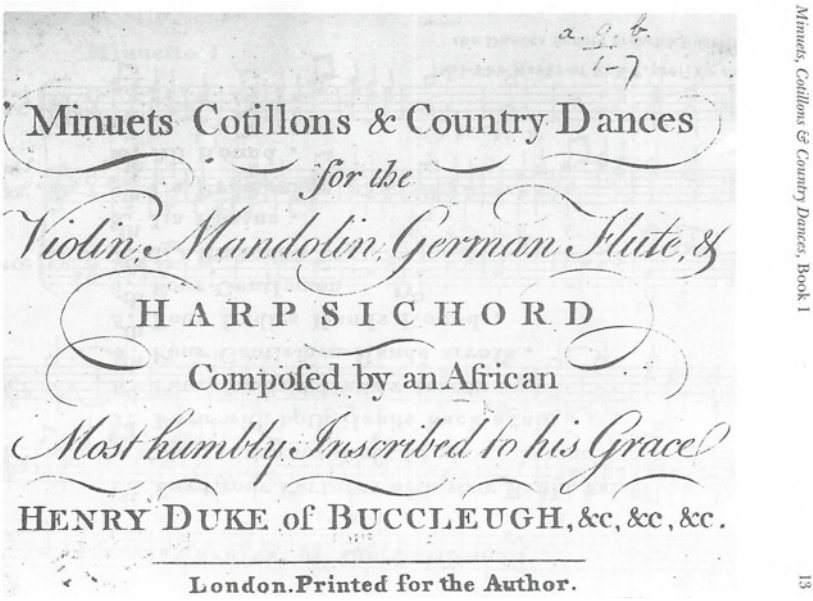
who lived by the heath with his Duchess, and often brought Sancho to their mansion. The Duke had patronized two other black males, Francis Williams the Jamaican poet, and prince Ayuba Suleiman Diallo a.k.a. Job ben Solomon, rescued from slavery because of his rank, soon to be sent back to his native Senegal, in hopes he would be an agent for the enslaving Royal Africa Company.[6]

Conflict with the three "Maiden Ladies" who owned him led to their threatening "to return Sancho to his African slavery," and his running away to the home of the widowed Duchess, who eventually employed him as her butler. Her death and a bequest left him free, but he returned to the household of the next Duke of Montagu, where he became his valet. He married Anne Osborne, "of West Indian origin." Sancho composed and published sixty-two pieces of music between 1767 and 1779. In 1773, ill-health prevented Sancho's continuing in the Montagu's service, but his own savings and "ducal munificence" enabled him and his wife, with their children (four daughters and two sons), to set themselves up in a grocery shop at 19 Charles Street, Westminster, as one of his advertisements told customers, very close to the centre of metropolitan government.[7] In his vivid if brief biography, James Walvin writes, there Sancho "tended to his counter and customers, taking tea with favoured or famous, as…Anne helped by their children, worked close by, "breaking down the sugar loaves into…smaller parcels." The scene "illustrates the intertwinings of elements of empire." His property ownership, moreover, entitled Sancho to vote which he did in two elections, in 1774 and in 1780, shortly before his death. His candidate in that second election, Charles James Fox, was in all likelihood one of their customers, and I suggest in Chapter 7, can be linked to the publication of his *Letters*. It is from this shop-tending phase of his life that we have nearly all of Sancho's letters.[8]

But it had been in 1766, while he was in service to the first Duke of Montagu (of the second creation), when Sancho made his own luck, by writing an appeal to Laurence Sterne on behalf of those enslaved black brethren; he chose Sterne because of his celebrated reputation for humanity. This was the earliest of Sancho's remaining letters, one referring to Sterne's sermons and his previous words on slavery. And Sterne replied, Sancho's appeal and Sterne's reply were always publicly associated from



From Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), an *Early African Composer in England, The Collected Editions of His Music in Facsimile*, ed. Josephine R.B. Wright (Copyright, 1981, Garland Publishing)



From Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), an *Early African Composer in England, The Collected Editions of His Music in Facsimile*, ed. Josephine R.B. Wright (Copyright, 1981, Garland Publishing)

From Tobacco, vol. 86 (1888), 37

1775, when they were published cheek by jowl, although in a collection devoted to Sterne's letters made by his daughter.[9]

Sancho's letters were collected, edited and published by Frances Crewe, one of his correspondents. Ryan Hanley contends she was part of a "network" surrounding the *Letters*' "composition, publications, and dissemination," illustrating his view that publications by black authors were powerfully influenced "by such networks." Certainly, without Crewe's actions, the antislavery campaign would have been unable to circulate Sancho's letters—only four of them had been published during his lifetime. Crewe's editorship was anonymous like the work of the vast majority of women in antislavery. While "as writers they engaged in potential political debates from the…Glorious Revolution to …abolitionism," upper-class women "signified political allegiances by the clothing and Cockades they wore to assemblies…they attended

debating societies and responded to politically flavored plays"; working-class women, too, participated in "riots, demonstrations, chairing, and processions." But antislavery "was the first, large-scale political campaign by middle-class women, and the first movement in which women aroused the opinion of the female public in order to put pressure on Parliament." This was despite their exclusion from formal citizenship. They were unable to vote or to sign petitions because of their gender, but they "took a hand in the petitioning process itself." Women raised money by subscription, by selling sewn and embroidered items at fairs and bazaars. Actions in boycotting slave-produced goods for domestic use were similarly gendered. Campaigners for abstention "appealed to women's supposed sensitivity."[10] Famously, Josiah Wedgwood's contribution to antislavery included mass production of the jasper cameo depicting a kneeling slave with the motto supplied by the Rev. Peter Peckard, "Am I Not A Man And A Brother," one which Sancho's *Letters* had represented, and which, Clare Midgley writes, was to exploit the "role of women as the leaders of fashion." The design decorated "ladies bracelets and hairpins" as well as men's snuff boxes. Thomas Clarkson wrote that at "length the taste for wearing them became so general and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, but for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice humanity, and freedom." Quoting that passage, Mary Guyatt points out Clarkson tells us women and men "took it upon themselves to customize the piece at their own expense," showing "a mutually advantageous reciprocity between two objects of unequal moral worth: frivolous jewellery was lent moral value by this incorporation of an image associated with a popular and moral cause." She writes, too, that the inclusion of Wedgwood's image in a hairpin or bracelet as mere feminization "helped to lessen the potential embarrassment experienced by women wearing images of semi-naked black males." Of course, those males were permanently kneeling and suppliant, a posture Sancho scorned, although Jekyll presented him as having been wild before he was domesticated.[11]

Crewe made her gender known by referring to the editor three times as she "and one as "her." Of the eleven hundred and eighty-one who subscribed to the publication of Sancho's letters (as Peter Fryer points out, more than any publication since the Spectator, early in the century), three hundred and twenty at least (two just gave their initials) were women, agreeing to have their names published.[12] J.R. Oldfield writes, "subscribing to any type of project, cultural or otherwise, was

a form of self-advertisement." Presumably, subscribers agreed with the editor's intention: "the desire of showing that on untutored African may possess abilities equal to an European," as well as "to serve his worthy family," a high proportion were aristocrats and ladies and gentlemen, reflecting Crewe's contacts. The list included "Mr. Osborn," Sancho's African British brother-in-law, and other members of his circle, high-status servants, artists, local businessmen and officials, from whom Crewe said she collected his letters. Sancho had published three letters during his lifetime under the name, AFRICANUS, which Crewe included, one reason she had for placing *An African* in opposition to her title. That was followed by *In Two Volumes, To which are prefixed Memoirs of His Life*, that brief anonymous biography, in fact by Jekyll (named in latter editions), which, together with Crewe's editorial note, rebuked the most egregious forms of racism.[13]

Sancho's letter to Sterne and Sterne's letters to Sancho are the subject of my first two chapters. They were nearly always published together from 1775, when Sterne's daughter, Lydia Sterne Medalle, published them in her collection of her father's letters. I elicit the significance of Sancho's cryptic and not so cryptic references to Sterne's sermons and novels in greater detail than previous scholars have done to emphasize their shared milieu, the culture of sensibility.[14] Chapter 2 takes up their discussion, implicit and explicit, of slavery, of race and of manhood. Sancho's praise for Sterne's Uncle Toby has particular significance because of the wound, actual and symbolic, he suffered to his groin, effectively castration, a central subject of Chapter 5, and black male's sexuality hovering over Sancho, linked to what becomes his well-known relation to the licentious Sterne.[15] Chapter 3 describes Sterne's careful replies to the issues of gender, race, religion and slavery which Sancho had raised, and the connections which can be made to Sterne's novels. The episode of the starling in the Bastille in *A Sentimental Education* is of a significance not fully appreciated before, although my positive interpretation may be controversial.[16]

S.S. Sandhu has concisely described the impact of Sterne on Sancho's writing and summarized the value they each placed on "generosity, toleration, and philanthropy." Sandhu also refers to a "nudge-nudging lewdness" in Sancho's letters; it is a characteristic of Sterne's writing but Sancho keeps it to a minimum, if it is there at all. Markman Ellis interprets his letters as expressions of "Sentimental Libertinism," placing them in a tradition of such correspondence written by eighteenth-century rakes,

including Sterne. In fact, as a black man facing the "sexualized stereotyping" of black males, Sancho distinguished himself from Sterne in this regard. That is not to say that on a few occasions he was not flirtatious with two women he addressed together, one of them Crewe. Typically, he undercut that at once, as he frequently playfully undercut his points in writing self-consciously as a black man to whites.[17] Brycchan Carey begins his fine book, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing Sentiment and Slavery, 1760–1807* (2005), by referring to Sancho's 1766 letter to Sterne. He judges Sancho to have been "engaging in a form of antislavery." His letter was "an important moment in the development of a rhetoric of antislavery." Carey sees the episode of "the poor Negro girl" in *Tristram Shandy* as an excellent example of "a sentimental parable," although Wylie Sypher dismissed it as mere fashionability.[18]

Carey provides detailed analyses of sentimental rhetoric in a wide variety of forms, in prose and poetry, "in the pamphlet wars of the 1780s," and in Parliament, in the pulpit and courts of law, to conclude that, "while most political questions of the day were dismissed in sentimental terms," "none gave rise to quite as much sentimental rhetoric as the debate over slavery." It is evident that writers and speakers who "demanded a fundamental change to the way Britain did business with the world" believed that such rhetoric would affect their readers and listeners. Clare Midgley writes, women "writers were aware of the power they possessed," which could arouse "public feeling to the extent of influencing events" in Parliament, even if they could not vote. Such power was the result of the dramatic increase in their literacy over the previous century. Oldfield's history of the mobilization of public opinions against the slave trade is the story, Walvin writes, of "rallying popular feeling," and Oldfield describes the intention of antislavery pamphleteers was to "arouse" the "sympathy" of their readers. The petitions they persuaded thousands sign demonstrated the "strength of popular feeling on abolition." This was the intention of antislavery agitators across the political spectrum.[19]

According to David Brion Davis, "Sentimentalization" "conditioned many people to an active support for abolition." Like eighteenth-century critics, he also saw that sentimentalism could be merely self-indulgence or a fashion. It had to be acted on. Wollstonecraft and Austen agreed, "it requires sense to turn sensibility into the broad channel of humanity." In the end, the culture of sensibility was incompatible with enslavement, of wives, as well as black people. It was a culture that had evolved in tandem

with the rise of literacy, among both genders. In 2007, Davis wrote that "in both Britain and America women played an absolutely central role in the antislavery movement."[20]

In her *Slavery and Sentiment: The Politics of Feeling in Black Atlantic Antislavery Writing, 1770–1850*, Christine Levecq presents Sancho as "the foremost black representative of eighteenth-century sensibility." She describes "the common interest" of Sancho and Sterne "in the details of interior life, specifically the life of the emotions," a dimension comparable to "the special style of self-consciousness" which Christopher Leslie Brown suggests Thomas Clarkson brought to the antislavery campaign he led.[21]

In the opening paragraph of his *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament (1808)*, Clarkson wrote of "the joy we ought to feel on its abolition from the contemplation of the nature of it." He describes "the passions interwoven into our nature," the conflict between virtue and vice, "the counteractive power" to "wrong" within "us," meaning both genders. The "victory" over our "corrupt affections" results in "an immediate perception of pleasure, like the feeling of a reward divinely conferred upon him." If "one, by suffering his heart to become hardened, oppresses a fellow-creature, the tear of sympathy starts up in the eye of another, and the latter instantly feels a desire of flying to his relief." By "our nature," he again means women's as well as men's, although the number of women he lists as "forerunners and coadjutors," who have added their stream to procure such feeling is a mere handful.[22]

Brown paraphrases Clarkson's explanation for the success of the campaign he led as "the working out of impulses deeply embedded in the society from which it emerged, the elaboration of principals essential to British Protestantism," essentially inflected by Latitudinarianism. As we shall see in Chapter 8, it was hearing Sancho's recently published words quoted in a Latitudinarian sermon given by the Rev. Peter Peckard as an undergraduate in Cambridge that helped inspire Clarkson to his lifelong work against the slave trade and slavery.[23]

Brown's *Moral Capital* shows the importance of women to the politicization of the antislavery campaign through the Teston Circle, a group of women and men, presided over by Lady Elizabeth Bouverie and Lady Margaret Middleton. They were inspired by evangelical Christianity (describing Latitudinarians' commitment to feeling), to reforms of many kinds, an orientation shared with William Wilberforce, a member of their

circle and the close ally of Clarkson. Lady Middleton encouraged and helped the Rev. James Ramsay with *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves* (1784); Clarkson went to visit Ramsay in Teston before completing his prizewinning Latin essay for Peckard in 1785, publishing the English version *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African*, in 1786.[24]

The reverberations from Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's freeing of the enslaved African-Virginians, James Somerset in 1772, lasted for years, on both sides of the Atlantic. Two of Mansfield's first critics were white, West India plantation owners, Edward Long and Samuel Estwick, then residing in London. They amplified Mansfield's concern over the effects of his decision on the white population of releasing thousands of emancipated black men into Britain. The issue was taken up and perpetuated alongside increasing expressions of antislavery, animating Somerset's defence. This is the subject of Chapter 4.

In 1778, a writer signing himself "Pro Bono Publico" ("for the public good) echoed Long's and Estwick's warnings, which had been resounding through popular culture. Sancho joined with his closest white friend, John Meheux, to write a rebuttal, signing it with the alias, "Linco," derived from Sancho's friend David Garrick's dramatic romance, *Cymon*. This answer drove Pro Bono Publico to propose that Parliament pass legislation requiring the deportation of white women who bore children to black men, and to castrate the fathers. This public correspondence is the principal subject of Chapter 5, placing it in the context of the castration of blacks in Britain's American colonies as well as later, in Kenya. It also describes Sancho's responses under the *nom de plume*, AFRICANUS, to the racism directed against black people. Sancho was identified as a black man already publicly associated with the morally dubious, even licentious Sterne, and in any case, wanted to represent Africans.

Mansfield's decision was soon followed by the American Declaration of Independence and renewal of Britain's war with France, to which Sancho referred in his remaining years, the subjects of Chapter 7, adding to his expressions of the ambiguities of being black and British. Immediate pressures included his being an eye-witness to the Gordon riots of 1780, provoked by the British government's need to raise troops. They coincided with Sancho's fatal decline, a subject he addresses with humour and sensibility, as he reached out to family and friends.

Crewe decided to open each volume of her edition of Sancho's *Letters* with two written to Jack Wingrave, who had gone to India to make

his fortune. They had occasional Sancho's clearest expressions of antislavery to someone he saw as an agent of imperialism. Metropolitan politicians were uneasy over British expansion, its conquest and exploitation of millions more people very different from familiar, white Britons, as Sancho suggests, looking more like him. Crewe's political purpose was emphasized by her inclusion of germane letters not by Sancho. This chapter also illustrates more of Sancho's versions of sensibility in relation to the young, attractive Crewe and her companion, Mrs. Margaret Cocksedge. It suggests the connection between Crewe and Charles James Fox, an early critic of Britain's expansion, and Sancho's new MP.

The concluding chapter describes the reception of Sancho's *Letters*. Hannah More, a member of the Teston Circle, an ostentations advocate of sensibility and of antislavery, illustrates the risks Sancho had run by his association with Sterne. The chapter concludes by describing the impact of Sancho's words on Peckham, on Clarkson and the antislavery movement.

Notes

1. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 152–53; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionists* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 12–15, 357–62, and *passim*, Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1975]), 407.
2. G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Thomas L. Haskell wrote a antislavery and sensibility in 1985, but he did not give the latter term its historical meaning. His influential article was republished as chapters in *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).
3. [John Jekyll], "The Life of Ignatius Sancho," in Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1998 [1782]), 5–9: 5. For approaches to this subject, about which we are learning more each day, see Philip D. Morgan, "British Encounters with Africans and African Americans," in *Strangers in the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Morgan (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 157–219;

and David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

4. Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2017), 4–9.
5. Ignatius Sancho to Laurence Sterne, July, [1776], *Letters of Sancho*, 73–74; 74; Roger Bastide, *The African Civilization in the New World*, trans. From the Frank by Peter Green (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
6. Jekyll, "Life of Sancho," 5; for Francis Williams, see Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica; Or a General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island*, etc. 4 volumes (London: Lowndes, 1774), 1: 476; Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda, in Africa, Who Was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland* (London: Richard Ford, 1734). For the use of "Negro," "Black," "Blackamoor" and other synonyms in England, 1660–1812, see Kathleen Chator, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales During the Period of British Slave Trade, c. 1660–1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 23. The source for the idea that Montagu patronized Francis Williams is a chapter devoted to Williams in Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, etc., 3 volumes, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [London: T. Lowndes, 1774]), 475–85. Vincent Carretta casts doubt on the accuracy of this account, notably that Montagu sent Williams to Cambridge, Carretta, "Who Was Francis Williams," *Early American Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2003): 213–37.
7. Jekyll, "Life of Sancho," 5–7; Josephine R.B. Wright, *Ignatius Sancho xi (1729–1780) An Early African Composer in England: The Collected Editions of His Music in* Facsimile (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), xiii. Catherine Molineux reproduces two advertisements Sancho commissioned in 1779 "for the tobacco that he sold in his Westminster grocery. One used black cherubs to stress the sensual pleasures of his Trinidadian brand. The other, titled 'The Wish,' depicted a white man holding hands with a Native American-African figure, standing on a fleur-*de-lis*." *Fades of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 171, see Figs. 5–19, 5–20. The second card gives his shop's address, 19 Charles Street Westminster.
8. Walvin, "Ignatius Sancho: The Man and His Times," in *Ignatius Sancho: An African Man of Letters*, ed. Reyahn King, Sukhdev Sandhu, James Walvin, and Jane Girdham (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997). This collection contains valuable essays on Sancho by all of those editors on different aspects of his life and work. For Sancho's voting, see ch. 6, below. Walvin first described Sancho briefly in a book he co-wrote with Paul Edwards, *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (1982)

Edwards was, with Polly Rewt, the first modern editor of *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

9. Laurence Sterne, *The Letters, Part 2: 1765–1768, Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, vol. VIII, ed. Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009), 504–05, n. 1.
10. Ryan Hanley, "Ignatius Sancho and Posthumous Celebrity, 1779—1782," ch. 1 of Hanley, *Beyond Slavery and Abolition: Black British Writing c. 1773*–1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 49; Kathleen Wilson, "Citizenship, Empire and Modernity in the English Provinces, c.1720–1790," *Eighteen-Century Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Fall, 1995), 69–96; 79; Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaign, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 35–40; J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Antislavery: The Mobilization of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (London: Routledge, 1998), 139; Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760–1807* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 12 and *passim*. For "subscription" see *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain,* vii vols. vol. V, 1695–1830, ed. Michael F. Sucrez, SJ and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 143, 659–60.
11. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 37–38; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* (York, UK: William Sessions, 1989), 39–40; Clarkson, *History of Abolition*, 2: 60; Mary Guyatt, "The Wedgwood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-Century Design," *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2000), 93–105; 97.
12. Sancho, *Letters*, 4; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2010 [1984]), 968. Fryer derives 1,216 names from Alexander Chalmer's *The General Biographical Dictionary* (1812–17), the source of his reference to the *Spectator*; Carretta, Sancho's *Letters*, 247 n. 1. I counted 1181, including the 320+ names of women. Carretta's edition prints "subscribers Names," 10–24.
13. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, 45; for Crewe's intentions, Sancho, *Letters*, 4. For Crewe's role, see Carey, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 62–63.
14. See Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Brycchan Carey's "Ignatius Sancho: A Bibliography," last updated, January 16, 2020, is available online.
15. Markman Ellis refers to the view that wound was "celibacy," the *Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69.
16. Ellis, *Politics of Sensibility*, 71–78; Christine Levecq, *Slavery and Sentiment: The Politics of Feeling in Black Atlantic Antislavery Writing,*

1770–1850 (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 75–76.

17. S.S. Sandhu, "Ignatius Sancho and Laurence Sterne," *Research in African Literatures, Special Issue* "The African Diaspora and its Origins," Vol. 29, No. 4 (1998), 88–106; 94, 97; Ellis, "Ignatius Sancho's *Letters: Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form," in Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 199–217; 206; others have agreed with Felicity A. Ellis including Hanley, *Slavery and* Abolition, 35, and John Saillant "The Invisible Man of Indecency, Profanity and the *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African (1782)*," *Journal of Eighteenth-Century* Studies, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2020), 221–238); Felicity A. Nussbaum, "The Theatre of Empire: Racial Counterfeit, Racial Realism," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 71–90; 73. See, too, Nussbaum, "Being a Man: Olandah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho," *Genius in Bondage*, 54–71; 62; Sancho to Frances Crewe, May 9, 1778, Sancho *Letters*, 117–19.
18. Carey, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 1, 5; Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIII the Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 151.
19. Carey, *Rhetoric of Slavery*, 2; *Midgley, Women Against Slavery*, 32; Oldfield, *Popular Politics and Antislavery*, vii, 44, 49, for antislavery among eighteenth-century conservatives, Nicholas Hudson, "'Britons Never Will Be Slaves,': National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Summer, 2001), 559–576; for working-class origins, see John Donoghue, "'Out of the Land of Bondage': The English Revolution and Atlantic Origins of Abolition," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 4 (October 2010), 943–74.
20. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 357; Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Penguin, 1975 [1792], 295; Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (New York: New American Library, 1961 [1811]; Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York: Routledge 2014 [1992]); David Brion Davis, "Declaring Equality: Sisterhood and Slavery," *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 3–17; 11.
21. Levecq, *Slavery and Sentiment*, 73, 74; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 434.

22. 2 vols. (Lexington, KY: 2013 [London: Richard Taylor, 1808), 1: 3–4. Carey writes of Clarkson's rhetoric of sensibility in his *Essay on Slavery*, see Carey, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 130–37.
23. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 5.
24. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 341–45, 346–49, Clarkson, *Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 1: 75–76. See ch. 7, below.

CHAPTER 2

"Considering Slavery—What It Is," Ignatius Sancho Appeals to Laurence Sterne

In July 21, 1766, Ignatius Sancho, an African British servant in the household of the Duke of Montagu, wrote a letter to Laurence Sterne, one that would motivate Sterne to reach out to his avid audience on behalf of those Sancho called, "the millions of my fellow creatures born to an inheritance of slavery." This letter, and Sterne's response to it, first published together in 1775, permanently identified Sancho with Sterne and both, eventually with antislavery.[1]

Why did Sancho write to Sterne? Before looking at the letter itself (the earliest of Sancho's extant writings), we can note that Sterne was the brightest star in the literary firmament of Sancho and his contemporaries. Although the planetary Richardson and Dr. Johnson still lived, neither of them was dazzled by their new rival. The publication of the first two volumes of Sterne's *Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, in London, December 1759, "catapulted" the "work and its author to fame almost overnight," raising them, "to a position in the public eye…practically unbroken until his death in 1768." They remained powerful referents through the rest of the century. To an upper-class culture whose members competed with each other to lead the "ton," and those in the ranks below them who aspired to it, Sterne's style became the fashion, "Shandyism" and "Shandean," as he called it. It spawned a flood

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of imitations as well as artefactual spinoffs, as had Richardson's *Pamela*, twenty years before.[2]

Sterne came to London from distant Yorkshire in March 1760. He had prepared for his first book's London reception in a letter he had had transcribed by his lover, Catherine Fourmantel, to David Garrick, the actor, writer and producer at the heart of metropolitan, artistic culture. Fourmantel, a singer, would follow Sterne to London. The letter told Garrick that Sterne's novel already had a "prodigious Run" in York; "it has a great character as a witty smart book, and if you think it so, your good word in town will do the Author, I am sure, great service." The letter told Garrick the author's name was Sterne, and that he held office at the church at York. The letter's linking gender/sex to controversy was also intended to stimulate Garrick's interest and prospects for the novel's popularity: "The Graver People, however, say 'tis not fit for young Ladies to read his book, so perhaps you'll think it not fit for a young Lady to recommend it. However, the Nobility and great folks stand up mightily for it and say 'tis a good Book, tho' a little tawdry in places." Garrick complied, and by the end of the same month, Sterne wrote to thank him.[3]

"Garrick and Sterne were well acquainted with Ignatius Sancho," wrote John Jekyll in "The Life of Ignatius Sancho," published in 1782 after Sancho's death, along with Sancho's letters. He tells us, too, of Sancho's eagerness to see Garrick ("the greatest actor of the eighteenth century"), during the brief period in the early 1750s, when he was not in service to the Montagu household; "his last shilling went to Drury Lane, on Mr. Garrick's representation of Richard." It was in this connection that Sancho offered to play Othello and Oroonoko (black characters in plays by Shakespeare and Southerne), at Drury Lane, a subject to be discussed in Chapter 4, below. Two of the songs Sancho published in 1769 were settings of verses from an "Ode" by Garrick. The first of *A Collection of New Songs Composed by an African* was "The Complaint," his setting of "The Words from Measure for Measure, Act 4th, Scene 1st," linked to Garrick by its being immediately followed by "Sweetest Bard," "The Words from Mr. Garrick's Ode." He included a second song from the same Ode, "Thou Soft Flowing Avon."[4]

Sancho's *Letters* show his continuing acquaintance as well as admiration for Garrick. In July 1772, he held him up as a characterological model to Charles Browne, probably the son of the steward to the Bunbury family, with which servants Sancho had close ties. (The

Bunbury's knew Garrick, too.) Sancho assumed the role of mentor to several young men (and occasionally, a young woman). At the outset of this letter to Browne, he called him, "my worthy young man," and later "my child," advising him to "ever let your actions be such as your heart will approve," assuming the culture of sensibility's absorption of the moral sense. In addition to that internal monitor, "always suppose yourself before the eyes of Sir William [Bunbury?] and Mr. Garrick," to whom Sancho referred as "your noble friend – his virtues are above all praise –he not only has the best head in the world, but the best heart, also – he delights in doing good" another central quality of sensibility. From London, he reported that your "mother and father called on me last week to show me a letter which Mr. Garrick to has wrote to you – keep it my dear boy, it is a treasure beyond all price – it would do honour to the pen of a divine…indeed I know of no being that I can reverence so much as your exalted noble friend and patron Mr. Garrick."[5]

Another letter to Browne showed that Sancho solicited aid from Garrick for a distressed scholar, named de Groote. Sancho told Browne that he was a descendant of Hugo Grotius, and "married the widow Marchioness de Malaspina. He is 86, has had a paralytic stroke – and has a rupture…his eyes are dim…he comes close to Shakespeare's description of the last age of man – "sans teeth – sans eyes – sans taste - sans everything." In July, he reported to John Meheux, a close friend to whom Sancho sent many letters, "Mr. Garrick called upon on Tuesday night, and won his heart: he called upon to pay De Groote's lodgings, sat with him some time, and chatted friendly." The editor suggests that "S" was probably John Spink a banker, who "helped to arrange, Garrick's payment of…de Groote's rent." Spink would come to Sancho's aid at the end of his life.[6]

Sterne had capitalized on the sensational fashionability of *Tristram Shandy* by publishing a two-volume collection of sermons with two title pages, the first, THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK, and the second, "SERMONS by LAURENCE STERNE, A.M. Prebendary of York, and Vicar of Sutton on the Forest, and of Stillington near York." He wrote in the Preface that he supposed it "needless to inform the public the reason for printing these sermons, arises altogether from the favourable reception, which the sermon given as a sample of them in TRISTRAM SHANDY, met from the world"; although he preceded that admission with, "I hope the most serious reader will find nothing to offend him, in my continuing these two volumes under the same title." The Sermons had