Black Georgians

Background

The Georgian period covers the years 1714 to 1837, from the reign of King George I, the great grandson of King James I, through to the end of King William IV's reign. For some, the Georgian period extends only until 1830, finishing with the death of King George IV. This subject guide, however, recognises the regency of King George IV's brother, King William IV, which ended with his death in 1837. In 1837, Queen Victoria ascends to the throne, ending the Georgian period and introducing the Victorian period.

The Georgian period was a time of immense growth and change in Britain, a pivotal point in British history. The emergence of Industrialisation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed the landscape and economy of Britain forever, through the introduction of steam engines, large-scale production factories, and the development of a new network of canals. During the eighteenth century, there were a number of pioneering individuals who worked relentlessly as abolitionists, poets, political leaders, and radicals. They actively challenged prevailing notions of white supremacy and the system of enslavement that, until then, was dominating British consciousness. A number of these individuals published first-person testimonies relating the horrors of enslavement. These forcefully drew attention to a trade that many in Georgian society were unable to fully comprehend. These prevailing notions of white supremacy were challenged in all aspects of British society, through the arts, politics and sports.

Whilst there were a number of prominent figures leading and shaping the campaign for racial equality in Georgian Britain, there were a larger number of more “everyday” Black Georgians, working particularly as domestic servants. The sale of young African men and women was a feature of port city life in Georgian Britain adding to the growing population of Black men and women working and living across the UK.

Underpinning the economic success of Industrialisation lay the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which boosted the economy of the UK through wealth generated on plantations. The first slave

---

Subject Guide

ship is thought to have made the triangular voyage between Africa, the Caribbean, and England, in 1562-3, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The Trade ended in the UK 1807 when the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was passed, but the system of enslavement lasted until 1833. Between 1562-1807 (Act to abolish the Trade only) there were 27,000 known journeys, with an estimated 12 million Africans loaded onto ships, forcibly removed from their homes and families; many of the 12 million would not survive the difficult journey and appalling conditions on board the slave ships. For more information regarding enslavement, see the Enslavement Subject Guide.

Key Figures

This subject guide will only touch upon the stories of a few highlighted individuals and there are many other prominent figures from the Georgian period, including Robert Wedderburn and Mary Prince, amongst others. Some of the key figures during this period were closely related to publishing and writing, using their skills to highlight, and advocate for the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Ignatius Sancho

Ignatius Sancho was born in 1729, on board a Mid-Atlantic slave ship. Sancho was the first African prose writer to publish work in England, with his text, Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, published in 1782, two years after his death. At the young age of two, Sancho was “given” to three maiden sisters from Greenwich, where he taught himself to read and write. Sancho developed a close relationship with the Duke of Montagu, penning dedications to the Montagu family in some of his work. The Duke of Montagu left Sancho a small legacy, which Sancho used to purchase and open a grocer’s shop on Charles Street, Westminster. He was an active abolition campaigner and a well as writing, Sancho also experimented with composing music.

Francis Barber

Francis Barber was born in Jamaica about the year 1735, and was brought to England in 1752 by Richard Bathurst. In England, Barber became valet to Samuel Johnson, the prolific writer and poet, and Barber later became Johnson’s close companion and friend. When Johnson died in 1784, he left a legacy for Barber, including an annuity and a gold watch. Unfortunately, due to financial management issues, Barber was later forced to sell the gold watch. Barber died in 1801.

Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano was born around 1745, in Eastern Nigeria, and was kidnapped along with his sisters by slave-traders at about the age of 11. Throughout his youth and early adulthood, Equiano was sold and re-sold a number of times, and given the name Gustavus Vassa, before eventually buying his freedom for the sum of £40. Equiano became a leading political figure of the Black community in Georgian Britain, an active abolitionist campaigner, working closely with the White Humanitarian Granville Sharp; in 1781, Equiano would alert Sharp to the Zong ship incident, promoting Granville’s campaign for justice, which was never

---

successful. More information regarding the Zong ship incident can be found in the timeline below. In 1789, *The Interesting Narrative and Life of Olaudah Equiano* was published.

As part of his active campaigning for abolition, Equiano gave a review of Gordon Turnbull’s *Apology for Negro Slavery*, in which Equiano asked, ‘Can any man be a Christian who asserts that one part of the human race were ordained to be in perpetual bondage to another?’. ³ Equiano toured the United Kingdom, during 1791 and 1792, delivering pro-abolition talks and speeches. Equiano died in 1797. Married to Susan Cullen, Equiano was survived by his only living daughter, Joanna Vassa.

**Phillis Wheatley**

Phillis Wheatley was born around the year 1753. Her forename derives from the ship, *Phillis*, which brought her to America from Africa as an enslaved individual, and her surname derives from the family that purchased her, at the approximate age of seven. Wheatley was taught to read and write, reading the Bible and learning Latin, and has been described as a ‘child prodigy’. ⁴ Throughout her early life, Wheatley wrote poetry, which would eventually be published in London, making Wheatley the first African-American female poet to be published in England. Wheatley’s book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was published in 1773, the same year that Wheatley visited London.

Included in Wheatley’s 1773 book of poetry is perhaps her most famous poem, ‘On Being Brought from Africa to America’:

> Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,  
> Taught my benighted soul to understand  
> That there’s a God, that there’s a Saviour too  
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
> “Their colour is a diabolic dye.”  
> Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain.  
> May be refin’d, and join th’ angelic train. ⁵

Like many women before her, and many women thereafter, Wheatley had to defend her writing as her own. Reviews at the time of publication celebrated Wheatley’s work, with one reviewer ‘much concerned to find that this ingenious young woman is yet a slave’. ⁶ Wheatley married John Peters in 1778, but despite a promising turn of events in her earlier life, including literary fame as a female African-American poet, Wheatley died in poverty in 1784, having not published any further work.

**Ottobah Cugoano**

Ottobah Cugoano, other name John Stewart, was born c1757, in present-day Ghana, and was kidnapped in 1770, at about the age of 13. His full name is Quobana Ottobah Cugoano, and he was brought to England in 1772 and set free. In 1786, Cugoano appealed for Granville Sharp’s help in the case of the kidnapped runaway slave, Harry Demane. In 1787,

³ Olaudah Equiano, *Public Advertiser*, no. 16761 (5 February 1788).


Cugoano published *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, proposing that ‘a total abolition of slavery should be made and proclaimed; and that an universal emancipation of slaves should begin from the date thereof.’ There is little surviving information regarding Cugoano’s later life, with records trailing into obscurity after 1791. Martin Hoyles, author of *Cugoano Against Slavery*, highlights Cugoano’s relative obscurity: ‘Out of the three leading black figures in eighteenth-century England (Sancho, Equiano and Cugoano), Ottobah Cugoano is the least well known. Yet he was the most radical, campaigning not just against the slave trade but against slavery itself*.

---

## Timeline of the Black Georgians: Key Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1714</td>
<td>King George I ascends to the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1727</td>
<td>King George II ascends to the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1729</td>
<td>Ignatius Sancho is born on a slave ship in the Mid-Atlantic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1735</td>
<td>Francis Barber is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1745</td>
<td>Olaudah Equiano is born in Eastern Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1752</td>
<td>Francis Barber is brought from Jamaica to England by Richard Bathurst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1753</td>
<td>Phillis Wheatley is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1757</td>
<td>Ottobah Cugoano is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>King George III ascends to the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Robert Wedderburn is born in Jamaica, of mixed Jamaican and Scottish heritage. Wedderburn would later travel to Britain and become a campaigner against slavery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>Granville Sharp, political reformer, publishes <em>A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery</em>, in which he argued that “a toleration of Slavery is, in effect, a toleration of inhumanity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>Lord Mansfield judges the case of James Somersset, ruling against the kidnapping, or enforced removal, of Black individuals against their will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Letters of the late Ignatius Sancho is published, two years after Sancho’s death. It immediately becomes a best-seller.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Zong ship incident occurs with the mass murder of an estimated 133 Black enslaved individuals who were thrown overboard whilst still alive. It was claimed at the time that the ship’s safety demanded the loss of these lives, and the ship’s owners later filed an insurance claim for the loss of their “property”. As Fryer explains, “Solicitor-general, John Lee, represented the owners, and referred to the slaves as “property”, “goods” or “chattels”. Despite Granville Sharp’s attempts to get the ship owners charged for murder, no charge was ever brought forward successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>Anti-slavery legislation is presented to Parliament by the Quaker community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Samuel Johnson dies, leaving a legacy in his last Will for his companion, Francis Barber.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

9 Quoted in, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 117.  
Subject Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>Ottobah Cugoano’s <em>Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species</em> is published. A convoy sails to and lands in Sierra Leone as part of the Sierra Leone “resettlement” scheme but the scheme is unsuccessful. Many of the Black people who were being resettled died, either on the journey, or once in Sierra Leone. Quaker Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade is launched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1788</td>
<td><em>Sir Dolben’s Regulation Act</em> is passed by Parliament with the aim of officially regulating the Slave Trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>The French Revolution results in the overthrowing of the French Monarchy, causing concern over unrest and societal tensions in Georgian Britain. Nine ‘Sons of Africa’, including Cugoano and Equiano, pen a letter to the <em>Diary</em> newspaper, declaring that ‘thanks to God the nation at large is awakened to a sense of our sufferings’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791-1804</td>
<td>Haitian Revolution occurs as a direct result of the French Revolution. The Haitian Revolution is the first fully-fledged uprising that was successful in not only ending slavery but also ending French control over the colony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Mary Seacole is born in Jamaica. Seacole later raised her own funds to travel to and help out at the Crimean War, where she opened a boarding house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>The Act to abolish the British Slave Trade receives Royal Assent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>The Battle of Waterloo marks the end of the Napoleonic Wars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>King George IV ascends to the throne. Robert Wedderburn is arrested for blasphemy. After a trial, he is found guilty and imprisoned for two years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Robert Wedderburn’s <em>The Horrors of Slavery</em> is published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>King William IV ascends to the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td><em>The History of Mary Prince</em> is published, becoming the first published enslavement testimonial written by a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td><em>Act for the Abolition of Slavery</em> is passed by Parliament, freeing enslaved Africans in the British Caribbean Islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>King William IV is succeeded by Queen Victoria, ending the Georgian period and commencing the Victorian period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Please find Black Georgian material listed below from both the archive and library collections:

**Archive**

1. **AN Antique Newspapers**
   These newspapers contain articles relevant to Black British history; these are usually on the Transatlantic Slave Trade but some articles relate to musicians and British imperialism

   **AN/3 The Post Boy. Number 6095. 8-10 August 1728**
   Includes a notice for an enslaved woman, ‘Celia’, run away from her master at Black-Heath (second page, second column).

   **AN/11 The General Evening Post (London). Number 7929. 23-25 December 1784**
   Includes ‘an authentic copy of Doctor Johnson's will' containing provision for Francis Barber "my man servant, a negro" (second page, first column) and an article on the tea trade (second page, second column).

   **AN/33 The Times. Number 8346. 18 March 1811**
   Includes an account of a 'pugilistic contest' between the amateur boxer Powers and the Black champion Molineux (third page, fourth column).

   **AN/35 The Globe. Number 3215. 5 April 1813**
   Includes an article on a boxing match between Tom Molineux ('The Black) and Jack Carter (fourth page, third column).

   The Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA) was originally established in 1991 as the Association for the Study of African, Caribbean and Asian Culture and History in Britain ASCACHIB. The main reason for its creation was to encourage research and disseminate information on the history of Black and Asian people in Britain. The organisation altered its name to the Black and Asian Studies Association in 1997. In 2000 it adopted a constitution and became an unincorporated association. VASA campaigned on educational issues, highlighted public commemorations and focused on related issues in museums and libraries.

   **BASA/5/1/24 "Black and Asian studies Association" Newsletter 48**
   Includes, A Celebration of the Lives of Tom Molineaux & Bill Richmond

3. **BCA Black Cultural Archives 1981- (present)**
   This collection is held offsite – please give a week’s notice in order that we can retrieve it. In the early 1980s, a group of parents based in Brixton formed the African Peoples Historical Monument Foundation (UK) in order to co-ordinate the development of a Black Cultural
Subject Guide

Archives (BCA) to collect, document and disseminate the history and culture of Black people in the diaspora. In the early days, BCA was primarily concerned with educational activities.

The founders were keen that the organisation recorded not only the traditionally noteworthy, but also the life experiences and “walking archives” of the Black community.

**BCA/5/1/49 Quobna Ottobah Cugoano**

Reference material related to Quobna Ottobah Cugoano.

**BCA/6/4/7 Newsletters (1992)**

Produced by the BCA. The letters include a personality of the month section giving information on Phillis Wheatley.

4. **EPHEMERA Ephemera Collection 1689-2008**

Please note that this collection is currently being re-ordered, so the reference numbers may alter from time to time. Ephemera collected by the Black Cultural Archives.

**EPHEMERA/163 Notes and copies relating to the descendants of George Africanus**

Notes sent by Ray Gale to Len Garrison. Includes genealogical information on Hannah Africanus Cropper and Esther Africanus Turnbull, copy of Esther's marriage certificate (1865), copy of a page from George Molineux's diary (1762-1766), and a copy of a map showing George Africanus' property on Chandlers Lane, Nottingham (early C19th).

**EPHEMERA/198 Photocopies of documents relating to George John Scipio Africanus**

Includes manuscript notes on Africanus and his family, pedigrees of the Molineux family, the will of Benjamin Molineux (1772), Africanus' burial certificate (1834), baptism record of George Africanus (1766), marriage licence between Africanus and Esther Shaw, extracts from books and general information relating to the Africanus and Molineux families of Nottingham, Mansfield, Teversal and Wolverhampton. Documents are copies from the Nottingham University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections and Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies. Also correspondence with R W Gale relating to his research on Africanus.

**EPHEMERA/292 Images of Black British pioneers of the 18th & 19th centuries**

Includes images of Mary Seacole, Phillis Wheatley & Ignatius Sancho.

**EPHEMERA/315/3 Local Black History: A Beginning in Devon, booklet by Lucy Mackeith**

A project booklet by Lucy Mackeith in conjunction with Black Cultural Archives on Black Georgians in Devon, c2002.

5. **PHOTOS Photographs 1930s-early twentieth first century**

A collection of photos covering the 1930s-early twentieth century.

**PHOTOS/25 Photocopy of a Phillis Wheatley Portrait**

Colour photocopy (undated) of artwork by Scipio Moorhead portraying Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) for her book ‘Poems on Various Subjects’ (unknown source). Wheatley was the
Subject Guide


PHOTOS/27 Photograph and Printed Document of Francis Barber

1. Photographic reproduction (undated) of artwork, portraying Francis Barber, Butler to Dr. Samuel Johnson (source unknown).

2. Printed document (undated) of artwork of Francis Barber (inset) and residence? On the back states' Francis Barber (1735-1801) and Streatham Park, c. 1760. Valet to Dr. Samuel Johnson who lived with the Thrale family at Streatham', Wandsworth Libraries.

PHOTOS/73 Photograph of portraits of Olaudah Equiano, William Davidson, Ignatius Sancho

Black and white photographic copy of portraits (from unknown book source) of Olaudah Equiano (Nigerian, born c.1745, Britain's first Black political leader), William Davidson (Jamaican, born 1786, Britain's earliest Black working-class radical) and Ignatius Sancho (born 1729 on slave ship, first African prose writer to have work published in England, first Black person to open a grocer's shop, in Charles Street, Westminster). No information on verso.

PHOTOS/74 and PHOTOS/75 Photographs of portrait of Olaudah Equiano

Black and white photographic copy of portrait (from unknown book source) of Olaudah Equiano (Nigerian, born c.1745, Britain's first Black political leader). No information on verso.

6. PRESS Press cuttings 1769-2005

This collection is held offsite – please give a week’s notice in order that we can retrieve it. This collection consists of a variety of original and photographic press cuttings.

PRESS/13

Volume 31 September 1981 includes an article entitled ‘Black Personalities in Georgian Britain’ by Paul Edwards.

7. WILLIAMS Papers of Howard G Williams c1947-1988

The Williams Collection contains slides, research and reference material amassed by H G Williams. This collection is held offsite – please give a week's notice in order that we can retrieve it.

WILLIAMS/41 Conference papers and teaching resources

Papers from the Standing Conference for Multicultural Education in the South West; information on A Rough Road to Freedom, a play about Olaudah Equiano and accompanying teacher's pack, and papers related to the Equiano bicentenary project in 1989; papers regarding the Swann Report.
8. **WONG Papers of Ansel Wong 1966-1988**

Ansel Wong was born on 4 October 1945 in San Fernando, Trinidad & Tobago. In 1965 Wong arrived in the UK to attend Hull University, his studies ended there in 1968. Wong was at the centre of educational reform for the Black community in Britain in the late twentieth century.

**WONG/6/98 Olaudah Equiano**

The story of Equiano written for children and illustrated with pictures.

**Black Cultural Archives – Library**

2.1A FRY Fryer, Peter, *Staying Power* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010)


326.8 BOL Bolt, Christine, *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform* (Kent: WM Dawson and Sons, 1980)


Subject Guide


709.086 KRI Kriz, Kay Dian, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement - Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

920 CUG Hoyles, Marin *Cugoano Against Slavery* (Hertford: Hansib, 2015)


920 SEA Anionwu, Elizabeth N., *A Short History of Mary Seacole: A Resource for Nurses and Students* (London: Royal College of Nursing, 2005)


Subject Guide


Other Sources

BBC, *Abolition in Parliament*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/parliament_article_01.shtml> [accessed 2 June 2015]

BBC, *Historic Figures: Mary Seacole*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/seacole_mary.shtml> [accessed 2 June 2015]


Cuguano, Ottobah, *Thoughts on the Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787)

Equiano, Olaudah, *Public Advertiser*, no. 16761 (5 February 1788)


Subject Guide

