Many Struggles

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—Kennetta Hammond Perry, author of *London is the Place For Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race*

Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain

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Introduction

Hakim Adi

The chapters in this book originated in the papers presented to the New Perspectives on the History of African and Caribbean People conference, organised by History Matters and held online in the midst of the pandemic in October 2021. The aim of the conference was to provide a showcase for young and emerging scholars in Britain, especially those of African and Caribbean heritage, and to present new perspectives and research relating to this important field of history.

The aims of the conference reflected those of History Matters, an initiative that brings together academic historians, teachers and students concerned to address the problem that so few young people of African and Caribbean heritage engage with history as a subject, especially at university level. History Matters was launched in 2014 at a time when for Black university students only agriculture and veterinary science were more unpopular subjects than history. Even today, although there is considerable interest in history at community level, there are still too few school history teachers, history students and historians of African and Caribbean heritage. History Matters held its first conference on 'Black British History' in 2017 and has since produced the regular *History Matters Journal*, a 'free and easily accessible digital resource', containing the latest research on the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain, the first edition of which appeared in the autumn of 2020.

Although there are still too few teachers, researchers and students of this history, it is also true to say that there has been an upsurge of interest in the subject in the last few years. The Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 highlighted a variety of ongoing concerns but one of the key demands articulated was the need to address the neglect throughout the education system of

what was often referred to as 'Black History' and particularly 'Black British history'. This was connected with what many considered a reluctance by the powers-that-be to recognise the legacy of Britain's history of colonialism, the exploitation of people of African and Asian heritage in particular, the continuing legacy of that exploitation, the racism and Eurocentrism that still exists throughout society in the twenty-first century, as well as the economic and political system that exploitation created. In regard to the teaching of history in schools, one young woman from Sunderland complained to the *Guardian*: 'The curriculum is ridiculous. They just teach you that there was slavery for a little bit and it was really bad, then the slaves were freed and that was that, Martin Luther King did a speech and racism was over. It's only from reading black authors that I realised how much of my own history I was shielded from.' A young woman from Newmarket reflected on her own experience of history lessons, 'The only thing I was taught about black people in school was that we were slaves, which when you're 12 is very upsetting'. Another commented on the importance of history, 'It really helps people manifest and grasp their identity … It shouldn't be a young person's task to have to learn these things themselves.'[1]

Such views have often given rise to demands to 'decolonise the curriculum', a phrase which has been variously interpreted but that generally recognised that too often history was taught and presented from 'a colonial perspective', that 'what we learn is the victor's story', and what is required is 'challenging the power structures that we live in'.[2] Some campaigners have even argued that the 'History National Curriculum systematically omits the contribution of Black British history in favour of a dominant White, Eurocentric curriculum, one that fails to reflect our multi-ethnic and broadly diverse society'. Although it must be borne in mind that in the twenty-first century with the emergence of academies, fewer schools are required to follow the National Curriculum.[3]

Such Eurocentrism has resulted in young people of African and Caribbean heritage being alienated from the history studied in schools and even universities. Many of them expressed their concerns at a special History Matters conference held in London in 2015, which led to the creation of Young Historians Project

(YHP), dedicated to encouraging young people of African and Caribbean heritage to discover and research history for themselves and to present it for their peers. One YHP member related her own experience:

> Before joining YHP, I associated studying History with thick textbooks with black and white photographs, boring essays and most importantly, a lack of representation. The YHP project I worked on was about the British Black power movement. This was of particular importance to me as I had only ever studied the Civil Rights Movement before and despite the importance of learning such a subject, it often used to make me feel like I did not have my own history, my own heroes and I longed for that … The YHP was an experience that greatly differed from my course at University. It was an interactive and creative process of bringing History to life; for the first time in years, I felt a passion for History again … The main skill I learned from the YHP was inquisitiveness. When approaching History, one must always be curious, it makes you ask the right questions to paint an accurate picture. I also learned the responsibility we have to document our history, to empower ourselves and to never forget the work we have inherited from our elders. All of these things reignited my passion for History and even though I was not always fortunate in having riveting Histories to study in my course.[4]

The YHP is one of the initiatives to emerge from the History Matters conference in 2015 and it is great to see that some of those young historians have continued their research and have been able to contribute to this volume. Another important initiative to emerge from the conference was the creation of the Masters by Research (MRes) Degree programme at the University of Chichester, which aims to train new historians, whether they be young or mature students. It has been particularly successful at encouraging and training students who are interested in researching the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain. Several of its graduates are contributors to this volume.

The University of Chichester is not the only university to specialise in this history. In recent years new courses, or academic posts,

have also been established at Goldsmiths University and, after the events of 2020, also at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Durham, Lincoln, Leeds and the Open University.[5] It is to be hoped that such initiatives will lead to many more researching and writing about this history in future years. Certainly, in the period since the 2017 History Matters conference many more post-graduate students of African and Caribbean heritage have begun to research this history and we are delighted to present their work in this volume.

The chapters in this volume focus on history after 1700, a period that many historians might consider constitutes the modern history of Britain. It is therefore interesting to reflect on those time periods most favoured by young and emerging researchers and presented here. We still have a distinct lack of research on the period before 1700 and, even though there have been some important findings relating to the medieval period, there is still much work to be done by historians and archaeologists.[6] Much work has already been undertaken on the eighteenth century but historians have not been so keen to examine the following century, when people of African and Caribbean heritage established important and permanent communities in such cities as London, Cardiff and Liverpool. A great deal of research has been carried out on the twentieth century and the chapters in this volume indicate that it continues to constitute a popular century for research. The 1960s–1970s, often seen as the Black Power era, appears to have become especially popular and several of the chapters included here cover aspects of this period. We still await much more research on the more than 40 years since the conclusion of the 1970s.

The eighteenth century was a time when the empire had already been established in North America and the Caribbean and when Britain became the world's most important human trafficker, transporting millions of Africans to its own colonies in the Americas, as well as to those of its economic rivals. It was therefore also a period when significant numbers of Africans were brought to or travelled to Britain. In the past much attention has been focused on significant African males, such as the abolitionists and writers Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cuguano, but Montaz Marché's chapter focuses our attention on Anne Sancho, a significant female figure,

and one who was almost certainly born and raised in England, in Whitechapel, east London. Anne's life is presented here through the letters of her well-known husband, the London-based writer and grocer Ignatius Sancho. It may be that her professional life really began after his death when, together with her son, it seems likely that she became one of the first African booksellers and publishers. In the eighteenth century Africans were to be found not just in London but in many towns and cities in Britain, as is evident from the chapter by Annabelle Gilmore, which focuses on their presence in Warwickshire, and the chapter by Kate Bernstock, which focuses on Falmouth and Penryth in Cornwall. The most notable African resident of Cornwall in that period was undoubtedly Joseph Emidy, the violinist, music teacher and composer, but as Bernstock's chapter illustrates there were many other residents, women as well as men.

Britain's colonial relationship with Africa and the Caribbean, as well as the ubiquitous colour bar and the prevalence of various forms of racism provide the context for many of the chapters that focus on the twentieth century in this volume. Christian Høgsbjerg, Rey Bowen and Theo Williams all focus on some of the key British-based activists from Africa and the Caribbean in the period before World War II. Williams's chapter details the role played by female Pan-Africanists, such as Amy Ashwood Garvey, Una Marson and Constance Cummings-John, as well as the significant political relationships established by Black activists and white women in the period. Bowen examines the efforts of the government to monitor the political activities of Dusé Mohamed Ali, a radical journalist and editor of the *African Times and Orient Review*, during and just after World War I. Høgsbjerg details the activities of Algerine Sankoh, a Sierra Leonean Pan-Africanist, one of the founders of the Ethiopian Progressive Association and perhaps the first African to be connected with the revolutionary socialist movement in Britain. In this regard Sankoh was one of many Africans who would become radicalised by the time they spent in Britain and their connections with British political organisations.

The post-1945 period is introduced by A.S. Francis's chapter again reminding us that some British cities, such as Manchester, have had an African population for a very long time before the

arrival of ships from the Caribbean in the late 1940s, and that some of the earliest 'Black communities' were comprised of African men and their British wives. The chapter is centred on three remarkable sisters, Kath Locke, Coca Clarke and Ada Phillips, whose father arrived in Britain from Nigeria in 1907, and details the numerous political organisations of which they were a part. Students from both Africa and the Caribbean have played a very crucial role in the political life of Britain, at least since the nineteenth century, if not before. Colonial rule did not generally provide higher education institutions in the colonies, meaning that would-be professionals were forced to study in Britain, as well as in the US and other places. Claudia Tomlinson's chapter highlights the key role played by Caribbean students during the 1950s and 1960s at a time when mass immigration from the Caribbean was also at its height. In particular, she analyses the role of the West Indian Students' Union and the West Indian Student Centre which became an important political and cultural hub in this period.

Women are also the focus of the chapter by Olivia Wyatt, which chronicles their activities in Chapeltown, Leeds, during the 1970s, as well as in the chapter by Aleema Gray, that focuses on the influence of the Rastafari movement on 'the lives of everyday Black women' during the 1970s and 1980s. Studies on Rastafari in Britain have often placed great emphasis on Rasta men, an approach that Gray redresses in her research and writing. The emphasis on women throughout this volume reflects a growing concern for gender-sensitive research and a concern to research and present the lives and activities of women. We should expect to see much more research informed by these concerns in the future.

The chapters by Perry Blankson and Elanor Kramer-Taylor both concentrate on the Black Power era of the late 1960s and 1970s, when a plethora of new organisations and publications appeared not only in London but throughout the country. It was a time when new approaches to key political questions, especially those concerned with racism, were being developed in Britain. In presenting this era hitherto there has been much focus on the impact of events, organisations and individuals in the US, but the roots of 'Black Power' in Britain can often be traced to British antecedents as well as connections to Africa and the Caribbean. Blankson

focuses on the efforts of the British state's security services to monitor the growing radicalism that developed amongst organisations and individuals in the period. Kramer-Taylor looks at the inter-connections between radical Black Power organisations and politics in Britain and the Caribbean during the same era. One of the organisations that certainly would have come under surveillance by the state's security services was the Black Parents' Movement (BPM) and its allied organisations that is the subject of Hannah Francis's chapter. She highlights the incidents of the state of racism that created the conditions for new organisations of resistance on the street and in the courts and details of the activities of some of the individual involved such as the London-based activists John La Rose and Albertina Sylvester and, in Manchester, Gus John and the Manchester Black Women's Cooperative.

The two final chapters highlight the various sources historians use to present their work. Rebecca Adams details the life of Molly Hunte, an education activists and psychologist, from the standpoint of an archivist, at the same time explaining the importance of the archive for preserving everyday life histories, not just those of celebrated figures. Her chapter demonstrates that the archive should be and must be a place that we can all find accessible and useful. Last, we have a chapter of reminiscences, memoirs from three key activists from the 1970s, Zainab Abbas, Tony Soares and Ansel Wong. Soares has become an almost legendary figure, one of the founders of the Black Liberation Front (BLF), who was imprisoned for his activities, he rarely grants interviews. Abbas and Wong were also early members of the BLF and, as the chapter makes clear, have also much to relate. Abbas for example, was one of the original members of what became known as the Brixton Black Women's Group. Here they give us their own accounts of activism that began more than half a century ago.

NOTES

1. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/30/history-young-black-britons-race-schools-policing (accessed 15 March 2021).
2. www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z7g66v4 (accessed 15 March 2021).
3. https://theblackcurriculum.com/report (accessed 15 March 2021).

4. www.younghistoriansproject.org/single-post/2020/05/04/how-yhp-changed-my-relationship-with-my-degree (accessed 15 March 2021).
5. K. John, 'Black History Matters: Then and Now', *History Matters Journal*, 2/1 (Autumn 2021), pp. 75–8.
6. R. Redfern and J. Hefner, '"Officially Absent But Actually Present": Bioarchaeological Evidence for Population Diversity in London during the Black Death, AD 1348–50', in M. Mant and A. Holland (eds), *Bioarchaeology of Marginalised Peoples* (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2019), pp. 69–114.

1

'A Diamond in the Dirt': The Experiences of Anne Sancho in Eighteenth-Century London

Montaz Marché

Ignatius Sancho was an exceptional Black Briton. He was the first African Briton to vote in Parliament, or have an obituary published in the British press and his life and letters testify to Black presence, voice and agency in eighteenth-century Britain. Anne Sancho was married to Ignatius Sancho for 22 years and still, her life and actions are continually underrepresented despite her life being closely intertwined with her husband's. Her presence in the *Letters* offers a rare glimpse into the experiences of a Black middling-class woman in eighteenth-century London, examining themes such as motherhood, pregnancy and marriage, in a source which engages with the Black perspective and experience. By revisiting the *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* I consider the politics of class, race and gender by examining some key elements of Anne's life and representation as they allude to the experience of Black middling-class womanhood.[1]

I draw upon a sample of 158 letters by Ignatius Sancho, published within the first and second volumes of the *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African.* This sample utilises the five editions of the *Letters* between 1782 and 1803 alongside modern editions of the *Letters* by Edwards/Newt and Carretta. The sample examines letters dated between 1768 and 1780 and pertains to the letters written by Ignatius to members of his social circle. I chose to focus on these 158 published letters to highlight the known but undervalued commentary on Anne's life present in Ignatius' letters,

which has been in the peripheral consciousness of research into the Sanchos since the *Letters*' first publication. However, I precede this analysis by stating that this research refers to references of Anne within this sample of letters and is not a conclusive examination of her life in the historical records.

Anne Sancho née Osborne was born in 1733. The exact location of her birth is unknown, however, in the same year as her birth, she was baptised in St Mary's Church, Whitechapel, on 26 September 1733. As her baptism was in the same year as her birth, it is highly likely that Anne was born in England, in the London area. Her sister, Mary, and brother, John, were all baptised in the same parish in 1735 and 1743, respectively. The familial links to the St Mary's Whitechapel parish indicate that the Osborne family settled in this parish. Anne married Charles Ignatius Sancho in St Margaret's Church, Westminster, on 17 December 1758. St Margaret's Church also holds the baptism records of their eight children: Mary Ann (1759–1805), Frances (Fanny) Joanna (1761–1815), Ann Alice (1763–1766), Elizabeth (Betsy) Bruce (1766–1837), Johnathan William (1768–1770), Lydia (1771–1776), Catherine (Kitty) Margaret (1773–1779) and William (Billy) Leach Osborne (1775–1810).[2] Her husband, Ignatius, died on 14 December 1780 of complications from gout and his letters were published in 1782, where Anne received £500 from 1,200 subscribers, alongside a fee from the booksellers. Recently, Kate Moffatt continued research into Anne's life after Ignatius' death and uncovered a source which lists Anne working alongside her son, William, as a bookseller a few years after Ignatius' death.[3] She died on 25 November 1817, aged 84 and was buried with her husband.

Details of Anne's life are now known thanks to the research of scholars like Paul Edwards, Polly Newt and Vincent Carretta.[4] Yet the consciousness of Anne's presence and involvement in Ignatius' life retains a mythic ambivalence. Firstly, what was known of Anne before this research and what is known outside of this research presently assumes an origin story given to many 'unknown' Black women in this century. Historiographically, Black women born and recorded in British eighteenth-century parish records are often overlooked in Black women's history. The origin histories for Black women in eighteenth-century Britain are instead

framed around themes of Black Atlantic migration and employment. Indeed, as Safia Mirza writes 'to be black and British is to be unnamed in official discourse'.[5] Here, the concept of a native or indigenous Black woman or woman of African heritage in Britain is a non-entity.

Still, despite her baptism in the Whitechapel records, Anne is said to be a migrant from the West Indies. Scholars describe Anne as 'a black woman born in the Caribbean in 1733' or as a 'West Indian' woman, with little consideration for her baptism in Whitechapel or the absent evidence of her family's ethnic background.[6] These impressions of Anne's life parallel the historiographic assumptions made about other Black women in the period. For example, until recent research by Joanna Major challenged this perception, it was believed that Dido Elizabeth Belle was not born in London but in the British West Indies. Indeed, Maria Belle, Dido's mother, was pregnant during her time on the *Bien Amie* when it sailed into the Downs in May 1761, meaning that Maria was in Britain when she gave birth to Dido in May 1761.[7]

Nevertheless, Anne is referenced 117 times in 77 of the 158 published letters written by Ignatius. Throughout these letters, Ignatius refers to Anne by different names. Predominantly, Ignatius refers to his wife as 'Mrs Sancho' but he also refers to her as 'Dame Sancho', 'wife', his 'spouse', 'the old duchess' and Anne. Predominantly, Anne is mentioned obliquely, in quick statements of her wellbeing or statements which pass on her sentiments to Sancho's friends. Anne was rarely central to the *Letters*' conversations, thereby leaving her as a conscious presence, adjacent to the social relationships between Ignatius and the recipients. Yet details of her character are drawn from the few larger comments about her. These larger comments are integrated sporadically within the sample letters and extend beyond statements of her wellbeing or sentimental greetings. I have divided the types of references to Anne within the *Letters* into three categories. The first is recorded actions: where Ignatius comments upon something Anne has done, said or wishes to express. For example, in a letter to Mrs H--, Ignatius writes 'Mrs. Sancho is in the straw' or 'Mrs. Sancho re-joices to hear you are well – and intrusts me to send you her best

wishes'.[8] There are approximately 65 instances of Anne's recorded actions.

The second type of reference to Anne are observations of Anne made by Ignatius; where Ignatius records the behaviours and sentiments of Anne without direct reference to any specific action that Anne is performing. For example, when saying to Miss Leach 'Mrs. Sancho is but indifferent – the hot weather does not befriend her …'.[9] There are approximately 47 of these observations. Finally, the third category is signatures: where Ignatius includes Anne's name in the signature of the letter. For example, where Ignatius signs letter XXXII, 'Anne and I Sancho'.[10] There are approximately five of these signatures in the published letters. Each category of reference draws Anne into the conversation/commentary as Sancho's wife and signifies how the Sanchos operated as a marital unit. Moreover, these recorded instances echo the records of Black women in Britain in this period; succinct, sporadic and selective, acknowledging moments in their lives deemed noteworthy. Nevertheless, the consequence of each reference, when collated and analysed, is a closer insight into Anne's experiences and character.

But I must first acknowledge some of the limitations of using the *Letters* as historical material. Firstly, our perception of Anne is presented by third-person commentators rather than Anne herself. All 158 letters are written by her husband, Ignatius, and are the most comprehensive materials on Anne in known records. Additionally, there are no known sources written by Anne. In this absence of voice, Anne falls into the category of dispossessed Black women, whose voices (but not necessarily agency) are left to the 'power and authority of the archive and the limits its sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor'.[11] In this case, Ignatius as a man, husband and narrative lens, is this historical actor, and, predominantly, his viewpoint shapes our understanding of Anne's life, revealing but possibly concealing much about her. Also, a secondary gaze in the *Letters* is the editor, Frances Crewe-Philips, who openly expressed her desire to show that 'an untutored African may possess abilities equal to a European' alluding to her biased selection process.[12] Furthermore, despite claiming to have published only letters sent to recipients, Crewe-Philips undermines

her selectivity by including unsent copies of letters to William Stevenson and Julius Soubise proving that the volumes were not merely collections of sent letters printed and bound.

Secondly, I also consider the performative tendencies of letter writing as a culture in the eighteenth century. I can only speculate on any personal alterations to Anne's character made by Ignatius and/or Crewe-Philips in the *Letters*. However, it is likely that, in the *Letters*, representations are influenced by letter writing cultures where personal identities were constructed and represented 'how writers imagine themselves, often in ideal terms and how writers think others see them'. Ignatius utilises the letter writing culture of creating identity to emphasise his 'boundaries of status, education and race' and his 'enthusiasm for, and ambition within, the cultural elite of London society'.[13] Arguably, a broad social and cultural parallel is the racially specific experience of W.E.B. Du Bois' 'double consciousness'. Ignatius would have 'this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others' and be responsible for merging 'his double self into a better and truer self' as a testament to the abilities of the 'untutored African'.[14] These alterations to perceptions of Ignatius' self could equally result in Anne's representation being altered to create a conforming image of Black middling identity.

Our knowledge of Anne's actions and character are a consequence of these perspective gazes. However, these materials are still significant in conceptualising images of Anne as a historical agent. The challenge of viewing Anne, through brief, third-person sources, is the same challenge we face viewing many Black women's histories in this period. An absence of priority and focus on Black women both contemporarily and historiographically often leaves Black women's histories underrepresented in the historical conversation. Nevertheless, I draw out these histories, by recognising that each third-person source is comprised of the real actions or presence of a Black woman. Then, I isolate individual moments of Black women's agency and examine the social, political, cultural and personal circumstances that encouraged these actions and the likely results of them.[15] Using this methodological approach, I formulate a composite image of Black womanhood through a

variety of themes and highlight the potential of illuminating Black women's histories in Britain.

Anne Sancho was a woman of the middling sort, a diverse social collective that, within a triadic class system, is the middle group between the aristocracy/gentry who made up 2–3 per cent of society and the working classes who made up 60 per cent. Ignatius' socio-economic position ranked within, what Davidoff and Hall distinguish as, the lower ranks of the middling sorts, because Ignatius, by 1773, operated a 'single person enterprise' (a grocer's shop), after his employment with the Duke of Montagu, 'lived in the city centre with a local social circle'. [16] As a woman of polite society, Anne would likely coordinate the household management and child rearing, while participating in social visiting cultures and in social/leisure events such as attending the Pleasure Gardens in Vauxhall.[17]

MARRIAGE

Significantly, the *Letters* provide a glimpse into the last twelve years of the Sancho marriage. Undeniably, marriage shaped the lives of Anne and Ignatius. The implication of marriage demonstrated emotional, physical and economic maturity in both Anne and Ignatius. Though the precise steps of Anne's social mobility in marrying Ignatius are unclear due to Anne's unconfirmed social standing before her marriage, for both Anne and Ignatius, 'depending upon sex', there was some discernible increase in 'wealth, status and participation in civic and social duties and rights'. For example, Anne as a wife had a 'recognised station' that we see her benefit from, receiving £500 from subscribers to Ignatius' letters. Represented often within their family home in 19 Charles Street, Westminster, Anne, as a wife, consolidated an image of an ordered middle-standing family home. Ignatius was the established domestic authority and gentleman, as a husband, father and householder. Anne, as the married housewife, was 'a pillar of wisdom and worth, with a prominent position in the hierarchical institution that society recognised as both normal and fundamental to social order, the male headed conjugal unit'.[18] As a wife, she was granted authority over the household and family