

Ignatius Sancho's Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African (1782): Race and Nation as a Rhetoric of Resistance (Article)

CHARLES TITA

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

On December 15, 1780, *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* printed an obituary notice announcing the following: “About six yesterday morning died suddenly, Mr. Ignatius Sancho, grocer, and tea-dealer, of Charles-street, Westminster, a man whose generosity and benevolence were far beyond his humble station. He was honoured with the friendship of the late Rev. Mr. Sterne, and several of the literati of these times.”¹ Although this obituary, the first documented death announcement for a Black Briton in the British press, praises Ignatius Sancho (c.1729–1780) for his “generosity and benevolence,” it does not add any illustrative examples of the referenced benevolence. It could have mentioned his epistolary writing or his antislavery activism which had been publicized in British print media via the publication of Sancho’s letter to novelist and Anglo-Irish clergyman Laurence Sterne (1713–1768).² The obituary underscores Sancho’s “humble station” and portrays him as a recipient of Sterne’s friendship but does not reflect Sancho’s own empowerment as a composer,³ writer, and activist. Why would an obituary, a newspaper genre aimed at highlighting the biography of the dead, miss these well-established, trailblazing facts about Sancho? Just like the obituary privileges the message that Sancho is a recipient of Sterne’s altruism, the preface to Ignatius Sancho’s collected letters narrowly frames him as a beneficiary of his editor’s patronage, omits his achievements as an artist, and includes a biography that (mis)represents him. In this paper, I contend that despite Frances Crewe’s charitable purpose for editing Sancho’s letters, she asserts editorial censorship that diminishes his agency as a writer. Her portrait of Sancho subverts the capaciousness of his artistic imagination, as reflected in her collection of his letters.

Following Sancho’s death in 1780, his friend and correspondent Frances Crewe⁴ collected and posthumously published his letters in a volume titled *Letters of the Late*

1. *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, December 15, 1780.

2. Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) was an Anglo-Irish clergyman. He is the author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767), commonly referred to as *Tristram Shandy*, which was published in nine volumes. Sancho’s 1766 letter to Sterne was included in the posthumous publication of *The Letters of Laurence Sterne* (1775).

3. Sancho was a musical composer and had published a book on the theory of music (first-known Black Briton to publish in Britain).

4. Frances Anne Crewe (1744–1818), one of Sancho’s many friends and correspondents, was a political hostess described as “one of the most beautiful women of her time, married, in 1776, John (afterwards Lord) Lord Crewe. . . . She was accustomed to entertain, at Crewe Hall, her husband’s seat in Cheshire, and at her villa at Hampstead, some of the most distinguished of her contemporaries. Fox, who much admired her, Burke, Sheridan, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Canning were frequent visitors. . . . Sheridan dedicated the ‘School for Scandal’ to her, and some lines addressed to her by Fox were printed at the Strawberry Hill Press in 1775.” James McMullen Rigg, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 13, *Craik—Damer*, ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1888), s.v. “Crewe, Frances Anne,” Wikisource, last modified December 29, 2020, 01:43 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Crewe,_Frances_Anne.

Ignatius Sancho, an African (henceforth *Letters*).⁵ Crewe's charitable proposal⁶ to assist Sancho's family was a noble one, but the editorial censorship and patronage she implemented in *Letters* foregrounded her own agency and denied Sancho's authority as a writer. Contrary to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prefatory practices, Crewe's 127-word preface does not provide Sancho's purpose and does not invite readers to engage directly with his voice in *Letters*. In their prefatory address to readers, First Folio editors John Heminge and Henrie Condell, for example, encourage readers to explore Shakespeare's plays "again, and again" to "finde enough, both to draw, and hold [them]: for his wit can no more lie hid."⁷ Crewe does not add footnotes to *Letters* to provide contexts for readers, and she even misdates Sancho's most publicized letter to Laurence Sterne (1776 instead of 1766).⁸ Rather than call reader's attention to Sancho's letters, Crewe deploys a distant third-person narrative voice to situate herself as a benevolent patron and Sancho as a recipient of her beneficence. She reveals her condescension and self-interest through her formal choices in the preface.

Firstly, Crewe portrays Sancho as having no eye to publication; She insists that the rumor about Sancho's desire to publish his writings is inaccurate.⁹ Admittedly, the tenor of Crewe's attempt to convince readers that Sancho's letters were not composed with intent to publish is not inconsistent with eighteenth-century editing practice. In his preface to Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's *Narrative* (1772), for example, Walter Shirley tells readers that "this account of the Life and spiritual Experience of James Albert was taken from his own mouth, and committed to paper . . . without any intention, at first, that it should be made public."¹⁰ Notwithstanding, Crewe's claim ignores the fact that Sancho, who had already been published in a volume of Sterne's letters in 1775,¹¹ was no longer an obscure writer. Sancho's habit of adding postscripts to many of his letters, transforming them into discursive discourses that reflect on social and political events of the day, is an indication of a writer creating transcendent artifacts. In a letter on June 6, 1780, to John Spink,¹² for example, Sancho adds a postscript about a "Sardinian ambassador [who] offered 500 guineas to the rabble, to save a painting of our Saviour from the flames."¹³ A comment with such journalistic precision memorializes this and several other key details about the Gordon Riot, suggesting that Sancho is mindfully creating mini narratives for public readership.

5. Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of Ignatius Sancho, An African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Broadview Editions, 2015), 311.

6. Sancho, *Letters*, 20. "Sancho's widow received more than 500 pounds from the over 1,200 subscribers and a fee paid by the booksellers for permission to publish a second edition" (editorial notes).

7. John Heminge and Henrie Condell, eds., *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Iaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623), Folger Shakespeare Library, <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeare-in-print/first-folio/bookreader-68/>.

8. Sancho wrote Sterne when he was still a servant in the Montagu household, and it is this 1766 letter that helped launch his writing career.

9. Sancho, *Letters*, 47.

10. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince as Related by Himself*, ed. Walter Shirley (Edinburgh: Hugh Inglis, 1790), 3.

11. Laurence Sterne, *Letters of the Late Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne, to His Most Intimate Friends. With a Fragment in the Manner of Rabelais. To Which Are Prefix'd, Memoirs of His Life and Family. Written by Himself. And Published by His Daughter, Mrs. Medalle. In Three Volumes* (London: T. Becket, 1775).

12. John Spink (1729–1794) was one of Sancho's principal correspondents. He was "a draper and banker in Bettermarket. . . . During the period of his friendship with Sancho, Spink was also Receiver General for the Eastern Division of the County, County Treasurer. . . . Spink was a wealthy and generous man who bequeathed hundreds of pounds to religious and medical charities, as well as to individuals." Sancho, *Letters*, editorial notes.

13. Sancho, *Letters*, 272.

Secondly, portraying Sancho as “an African” with no view to publishing his own work undercuts his antislavery activism. Crewe’s claim ignores Sancho’s letter to Mr. Fisher (1778) that praises antislavery advocates who “paint in such strong colors” the “unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes” and “the horrid wickedness of the [Trans-Atlantic] traffic,”¹⁴ and his letter to Sterne (1766) that decries the “distresses” of his enslaved “poor moorish brethren” in the West Indies.¹⁵ Sancho’s unequivocal denunciation of slavery was a remarkable achievement for a man of color at a time when organized resistance against slavery had not yet formalized as a movement, and such a firm stance suggests that Sancho was not averse to the publication of his letters to further broaden his activism. Refuting Crewe’s claim, Vincent Carretta argues that posthumous publication of private correspondences was common, so “only naïve or malignly inclined readers believed that a correspondent would be unaware of the likelihood that his or her letters would eventually find their way into print.”¹⁶ Crewe does not even reference any of Sancho’s collected letters, several of which convey his activism and philanthropy. By not pointing readers to Sancho’s merit as a writer and activist, Crewe essentially downplays his actual talents and accomplishments to position her editorial labor as valuable.

Thirdly, Crewe implies, condescendingly, that Sancho was clumsy and disorganized. The claim that “not a single letter is here printed from any duplicate preserved by himself, but all have been collected from the various friends to whom they were addressed”¹⁷ suggests that Sancho was uncoordinated and scatterbrained because he did not keep copies of his letters. This claim is contradicted severally. Sancho’s correspondents were spread throughout the British Empire, so it would have been a herculean task to collect all 160 letters included in *Letters* directly from Sancho’s correspondents in the short amount of time that Crewe had to edit and publish *Letters*. One of the correspondents, Julius Soubise, had moved to India in 1778, but Sancho’s letters to him are included in Crewe’s edition of *Letters*. The letters to Soubise most likely were from Sancho’s duplicates, since it was customary for letter writers to keep duplicates.¹⁸ The suggestion of clumsiness and disorganization does not align with the requirements of Sancho’s careers as butler and valet, which demanded excellent organizational skills. As a butler, Sancho “held the highest servant position,” and his duties included “the hiring and supervision of other servants.”¹⁹ As a valet, Sancho was his master’s personal servant “responsible for his appearance” and “his dress and hairdressing” and was “the most visible display of his master’s wealth, fashion, and social prominence.”²⁰ Sancho honed these skills over the years and transferred them to his business and writing careers. He and his wife managed their own grocery shop in Westminster, London, a career that involved ordering and selling goods such as tobacco, tea, and sugar products from the West Indies. So, Crewe’s portrait of a disorderly Sancho is not buttressed by his self-representation in *Letters*.

Fourthly, Crewe’s claimed motive to show that “an untutored African may possess abilities equal to a European” assigns Sancho an inferior status in a presumed racial hierarchy. Although Crewe speculates that Africans and Europeans may be inherently equal in abilities, she does not point readers to any of those abilities in Sancho’s letters; conversely, the editors of Shakespeare’s *First Folio* do call attention to those abilities. It is fair to consider that Crewe may be applying “untutored” to Sancho in the sense of a genius who was

14. Sancho, *Letters*, 165.

15. Sancho, *Letters*, 311.

16. Sancho, *Letters*, 26 (editorial notes).

17. Sancho, *Letters*, 47.

18. Sancho, *Letters*, 19–20 (editorial notes).

19. Sancho, *Letters*, 14.

20. Sancho, *Letters*, 15 (editorial notes).

denied access to formal education and succeeded anyway, perhaps in the same way that critics tend to apply “native genius” to Shakespeare. However, praise of Shakespeare pertains to his skill as a playwright, but Crewe’s praise of Sancho is for unspecified merit despite his African-ness. By implying that Sancho’s “abilities” are unusual for an African, Crewe places Africans at the bottom of an envisioned hierarchy of races, thereby broadening the notion of race. Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* defined race in the traditional sense of the “human race” or the “ascending” and “descending” contours of a family.²¹ So the sense in which race is being evoked in Crewe’s preface is a departure from the Johnsonian definition and a reflection of an emergent hierarchization of race in the eighteenth century. Samuel Hudson argues that the archetypal conception of race had begun to change in the eighteenth century and was taking on new associations with “nation” and “tribe” because “of increasing colonial expansion and scientific thought.”²² Both Crewe’s and Joseph Jekyll’s²³ categorizations of Sancho as “an African” and “an extraordinary negro”²⁴ reflect this changing notion of race. Considering her well-intentioned attempt to combat structural inequity by providing pecuniary support to Sancho’s family, Crewe’s failure to point readers to letters that highlight Sancho’s talents is damning. Instead, her editorship constructs a racialized portrait of Sancho that emphasizes his African-ness (or Blackness) in her title and preface to *Letters*. The qualifying adjective “untutored,” which could also mean “unenlightened,”²⁵ suggests that Sancho has undergone a transformation to garner enlightened abilities because of white charitable rescue. The implication is that slavery is fine for Africans who lack rescuable merit.

Fifthly, the third-person voice positions Crewe as Sancho’s “rescuer,” thereby promoting her own philanthropy. This seemingly objective voice declares that Crewe “is happy in thus publicly acknowledging she has not found the world inattentive to the voice of obscure merit.”²⁶ By presenting Sancho as an “African” with “obscure merit,” Crewe rhetorically deemphasizes his “Britishness,” thus upholding the British colonial ethos that Africans need European saviors. Hence, the preface presents Crewe as a savior at work salvaging Sancho’s merit from obscurity, yet she does not identify the merit that she is rescuing. Her self-enthroned savior figure ignores Sancho’s own philanthropy. In his letter to Sterne, Sancho reveals that his “chief pleasure has been books; philanthropy [he] adore[s].”²⁷ Crewe’s narrative voice also celebrates her as a patron driven by a “superior motive, of wishing to serve [Sancho’s] worthy family.”²⁸ On the strength of Crewe’s influence and connections with the elite class, Sancho may have asked her to posthumously publish his

21. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. “race,” Samuel John’s Dictionary Online, <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/views/search.php?term=race>.

22. Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996): 247–64; 247.

23. According to Brycehan Carey, “Joseph Jekyll [1754-1837] was one of the few successful Welsh politicians of his age. Though often thought of as a lightweight, he nonetheless became Solicitor-General and was universally thought of as a wit and pleasant dining partner. Although by no means an active abolitionist, well before his parliamentary career began, he wrote *The Life of Ignatius Sancho*, the work for which he is best remembered now.” After Samuel Johnson declined to write Sancho’s biography, Frances Crewe assigned the task to Joseph Jekyll.

24. “Extraordinary negro” assumes that successful Blacks are a novelty and an exception to the anti-Black belief that Blacks are unexceptional. The concept suggests that Black success is unusual. Framing Sancho as an extraordinary hero perpetuates the notion of race as hierarchical. Thus, the extraordinary negro is a trope that imagines Blackness as ontologically inferior.

25. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “untutored.”

26. Sancho, *Letters*, 47

27. Sancho, *Letters*, 311.

28. Sancho, *Letters*, 47.

letters and provide financial support for his impoverished family. In his last letter to Crewe just three months before his death, Sancho invites her to consider an important, urgent matter that he has pondered for some time. He tells her, “I have the honour to address you upon a very interesting, serious, critical subject. Do not be alarmed! It is an affair which I have had at heart some days past.”²⁹ Ryan Hanley argues that “Sancho was aware of his impending death and put measures in place to provide for his family.”³⁰ The fact that Crewe was gathering Sancho’s letters for publication, drawing up a subscription list, and hiring a biographer within a few months of Sancho’s death tells us that Sancho most likely had authorized the publication of his letters, and Crewe was acting on that agreement to fulfill her patronage to his family.

Governed by her own self-interest, however, Crewe’s editorship of *Letters* undermined Sancho’s artistic imagination. The following excerpt from a letter Thomas Lord (1755–1832)³¹ sent to Sir Martin Holkes on July 24, 1781, sheds light on Crewe’s interests as patron and editor:

Miss Crew lately dind here, she patronizes Ignatius Sancho’s family, a widow, & three children, one a cripple, Mr. Holkes answered for one of them, Miss Crew hath received already near one hundred pounds by subscription for his Letters, knowing Sancho I threw in my mise. I fear as Dr. Johnson at present declines the drawing up the Memoirs of Sancho’s Life, that the account may not be so entertaining as the subject would bear.³²

As Lord’s letter reveals, Johnson, the most famous biographer of the day, had accepted to write Sancho’s biography but later declined most likely because he considered that the available biographical material was insufficient for an entertaining narrative. Although Jekyll later accepted to do the job, he too confirms this paucity of biographical material: “Of a Negro, a Butler, and a Grocer, there are but slender anecdotes to animate the page of the biographer.”³³ This statement implies that Crewe was interested in achieving an entertaining portrait of Sancho. By exerting editorial censorship that sought to exclude Sancho’s voice and frame him entertainingly suggests that she had self-interest beyond the provision of pecuniary support to Sancho’s family. Crewe was a political hostess with close ties to leading Whig politicians, including Charles James Fox (1749–1806)³⁴ and Richard Sheridan (1751–1816)³⁵ who were both antislavery activists, so her editorship of *Letters* was an opportunity to produce a text that would serve as a useful tool for antislavery campaigns.³⁶

Crewe’s promotion of *Letters* in British newspapers further reveals her nuanced editorial goal to provide for the Sancho family as well as fulfill her own self-interest. Carretta

29. Sancho, *Letters*, 290.

30. Ryan Hanley, *Beyond Slavery and Abolition: Black British Writing, c. 1770–1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 38.

31. Thomas Lord was an English professional cricket player. See Harry Altham, *A History of Cricket*, vol. 1 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962).

32. Thomas Lord to Sir Martin Holkes, July 24, 1781, Norfolk Record Office, MC 5D/30/3 503X.

33. Sancho, *Letters*, 51.

34. Charles James Fox was member of parliament and an antislavery advocate.

35. Richard Brinley Sheridan was a member of parliament, an antislavery advocate, and a playwright.

36. *Letters* was published in 1782, and the transatlantic slave trade was abolished by the British Parliament twenty-five years later in 1807. The Abolition of Slavery Act was passed by the British Parliament, abolishing the practice of slavery in all British territories in 1833. “Timeline of The Slave Trade and Abolition,” The National Archives (UK), accessed August 27, 2023, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/abolition-slavery/>.

notes that Crewe was likely the one who “anonymously submitted to *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in May 1781” a copy of Sancho’s 1772 letter to Julius Soubise to be used as a sales pitch for *Letters*.³⁷ The referenced letter portrays Sancho as a coach advising the wayward Julius Soubise to “look up to thy almost divine benefactors” with “awe and reverence.”³⁸ In the same letter, Sancho also asks Soubise to “look around upon the miserable fate of almost all of our unfortunate colour—superadded to ignorance.”³⁹ This letter is a selected snapshot that shows Sancho praising British benefactors, contrasting his and Soubise’s “fortunate” circumstance with the misery of their fellow Blacks in the West Indies and implying that he and Soubise are in better conditions because of British rescuers. Crewe highlights this seemingly pro-imperialist gaze of Sancho, if satirical, perhaps to invite Britons to join the antislavery effort. Ryan Hanley argues that such contrivances demand “a reading of *Letters* as a purposefully constructed commercial and literary artefact, in which Sancho’s self-representations were carefully but not unproblematically manipulated by Crewe and Jekyll to show him in the best light presumed possible and thereby advance an antislavery agenda and maximise income for the support of his family.”⁴⁰ That being so, Crewe prepared a preface and directed a biography of Sancho that envision Sancho’s success as a product of white benevolence. Therefore, Crewe’s preface is a discourse that may be read as a colonial narrative⁴¹ in which her editorial authority is mimetic of Britain’s hegemonic power.

The representation of colonized people (or people targeted for colonization) as simplistic, disorganized, and needing European rescue is a pervasive motif in postcolonial studies. Attesting to the stereotypical simplification and objectification of the colonized, novelist and critic Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) argues that “to the colonialist mind it was always of the utmost importance to be able to say: ‘I know my natives’, a claim which implied two things at once: (a) that the native was really quite simple and (b) that understanding him and controlling him went hand in hand—understanding him being a precondition for control.”⁴² In this vein, Crewe emblemizes the colonialist philosophy in her assignment of simple, unexemplified references to Sancho such as “an African,” “untutored African,” and “obscure merit.” She is like the district commissioner in Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958),⁴³ whose tenure in Eastern Nigeria is ending and who reflects on a book he is planning to write upon his return to Britain: “There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.”⁴⁴ The title of the district commissioner’s envisioned book and his condescension depict the British colonial philosophy as monstrously hypocritical. The district commissioner, whom the indigenes resent for his petulant disruption of their traditional way of life, is an agent of Britain’s hegemonic domination. Despite his ignorance about the rich culture and polity of the Igbo people, the colonial agent, who only sees the colonized through a white supremacist veil, imagines them as uncivilized and in dire need of order that the British are there to

37. Sancho, *Letters*, 19 (editorial notes).

38. Sancho, *Letters*, 97.

39. Sancho, *Letters*, 98.

40. Hanley, *Beyond Slavery*, 38.

41. Colonial narrative is any narrative that reflects what Saito calls “triumph of civilization over savagery” motif. Natsu Taylor Saito, “Unsettling Narratives,” in *Settler Colonialism, Race, and the Law: Why Structural Racism Persists*, Citizenship and Migration in the Americas (New York: NYU Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814723944.003.0003>.

42. Chinua Achebe, “Colonialist Criticism,” in *Selected Essays 1965–1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 58.

43. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Premier Book, 1958).

44. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 191.

provide. So, the charge of disorganization is a pretext for settler colonialism.⁴⁵ And the word *pacification* in the title of the district commissioner's colonial narrative is used denigratingly to propound the notion of an African wilderness with savage natives needing to be tamed and civilized. In this context, *primitive* could mean "native" or "indigenous" which, though not derogatory, does connote a misguided assumption that the colonized are homogeneously noncomplex. The word *primitive* in the district commissioner's book title is akin to Crewe's use of "untutored African" that similarly stereotypes Sancho and, by extension, all Africans.

Like the district commissioner who most likely does not see the need to include the voices of colonized indigenes in his book, Crewe does not include Sancho's voice in her preface. Not a single letter by Sancho is referenced in Crewe's preface or in Jekyll's biography of Sancho. By emphasizing Sancho's African-ness, Crewe transforms him into a colonial symbol that represents Africans who are "untutored" or "unenlightened" and therefore ripe for British colonial "rescue." It is through this kind of racialized and denigrating gaze that Jekyll constructs *The Life of Ignatius Sancho* (henceforth *Life of Ignatius*)⁴⁶ as a complement to Crewe's preface.

Much like the colonial narrative that Achebe's district commissioner proposes, Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* imagines Sancho as an extraordinary negro, a stereotypical portrait that subverts Sancho's own self-fashioning in *Letters*. The biography consists of narrated events, each culminating in an anticlimax, implying that Sancho's success is only possible because of a white savior and not his innate ability. According to Jekyll, Sancho's birth occurs onboard a slave ship on the Middle Passage in 1729. Sancho's mother dies of disease soon after giving birth to him, and his father commits suicide to defy enslavement. Instead of blaming the monstrous slave system that claimed the lives of the infant's parents, the biography lauds the white priest who baptizes the infant and names him Charles Ignatius, thus showing the priest as the baby's savior. The euphemistic phrasing of Charles Ignatius's enslavement in England at age two is striking: "At little more than two years old, his master brought him to England, and gave him to three sisters, resident at Greenwich."⁴⁷ Jekyll masquerades this merciless sale of an orphaned child into domestic slavery as some type of search-and-rescue mission undertaken by the slave master for the child's own welfare. The child's new owners name him Sancho, inspired by a perceived "resemblance to the Squire of Don Quixote."⁴⁸ Jekyll tells us that Sancho faced the scrutiny of his new enslavers who kept him from acquiring literacy in his teenage years, believing that his "African ignorance was the only security for his obedience and that to enlarge the mind of a slave would go near to emancipate his person."⁴⁹ Jekyll's use of "African ignorance" compares to Crewe's use of "untutored African" to label Africans as unenlightened and in need of European rescuers. Jekyll also highlights the philanthropy of the Duke of Montagu, who intervenes to save Sancho from his first London enslavers, but does not consider Sancho's mental health when facing the threat of being sent to plantation slavery in the West Indies by his enslavers. Notwithstanding the goodwill of Montagu for his intervention, the truth is that Sancho was still his slave. He had merely been traded from three cruel mistresses to a kind master and

45. Settler colonialism refers to "interlocking forms of oppression, including racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism . . . [and the] intersecting dimensions of settler colonialism coalesce around the dispossession of indigenous peoples' lands, resources, and cultures." Alicia Cox, "Settler Colonialism," Oxford Bibliographies, last modified July, 26 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780190221911-0029>.

46. Sancho, *Letters*, 49.

47. Sancho, *Letters*, 49.

48. Sancho, *Letters*, 49.

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was only manumitted at age twenty by the Duchess of Montagu after the duke's death in 1749.⁵⁰

According to Jekyll, when the duchess had rejected Sancho's request for protection after the duke's death, "[Sancho] procured an old pistol for purposes which his father's example had suggested as familiar and had sanctified as hereditary."⁵¹ The evocation of the filial link is an apt one, but Jekyll does not also consider the trauma that prompted many enslaved people to consider suicide. The young Sancho reportedly squandered his personal savings and the annuity bequeath to him upon the death of the duchess, and Jekyll attributes this gambling addiction to "a propensity which appears to be innate among his countrymen."⁵² Even if the gambling did happen, it would be prejudicial to interpret Sancho's youthful extravagance as indication that all Africans exhibit profligate behaviors. After the death of the duchess, Sancho attempted to pursue a stage career by auditioning to play Othello and Oroonoko, and Jekyll explains that "a defective and incorrigible articulation rendered it [Sancho's audition] abortive."⁵³ The referenced "incorrigible articulation" is uncorroborated, and may be explained by what Cara Samuel and Drexler Ortiz observe as a growing recognition in psychology "of how racialized groups are often dehumanized and pathologized."⁵⁴ That being so, Jekyll is pathologizing the particularities of Sancho's speech rather than foregrounding the endemic racism Blacks were up against in eighteenth-century British society.

Sancho was attempting a stage career at a time when a Black man was yet to play the role of Othello in Britain (the first was Ira Aldridge in 1825, about half a century later).⁵⁵ Before Aldridge, the roles of Othello and Oroonoko were played by white men, beginning with Richard Burbage (c.1567–1619), who wore dark makeup, a phenomenon known as "blackface."⁵⁶ For this reason, blaming the rejection of Sancho on his articulation seems elitist and insincere, particularly since Jekyll was aware of the discriminatory exclusion of women and Blacks from eighteenth-century theatre in Britain. Sancho's subsequent careers also do not bear out the claim of an incorrigible articulation. After wasting his money and failing to secure a stage career, Sancho was employed by the Second Duke of Montagu, who made him his valet, a job that required more than average communication ability. It is ironic, also, that the Othello symbol was often evoked in British print media, if denigratingly, to describe Sancho, yet he was deemed unfit to play Othello's character on stage. Finally, Jekyll recounts that Sancho retired as a servant in 1773 due to complications of gout disease and obesity that "rendered him incapable of farther attendance in the duke's family"⁵⁷ and became a grocer and writer until his death in 1780. Throughout *Life of Ignatius*, Jekyll underscores Sancho's success as exceptional but only in the context of other people of African descent and mostly because of white saviors. Brycchan Carey argues that Jekyll fabricated much of *Life of Ignatius* to create a fascinating story for eighteenth-century

50. Sancho, *Letters*, 37.

51. Sancho, *Letters*, 50.

52. Sancho, *Letters*, 50.

53. Sancho, *Letters*, 50.

54. Drexler L. Ortiz, "'Method and Meaning': Storytelling as Decolonial Praxis in the Psychology of Racialized Peoples," *New Ideas in Psychology* 62 (2021) 1–14; 1.

55. Errol G. Hill and James Vernon Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

56. *Blackface* refers to the cartoon and caricature representation of Black characters by white actors and actresses wearing makeup. The practice in itself—particularly since Black actors were not generally allowed to play Black heroes—is racist.

57. Sancho, *Letters*, 50.

abolitionists as evidence that Africans had both humanity and intellectual capacity.⁵⁸ The knowable chronology of Sancho's life only begins at age two when he is enslaved in Britain. His parentage and life before his enslavement in Britain are a logical impasse, which was typical for enslaved people in the eighteenth century. For example, the early years and parentage of Phillis Wheatley are unknown because she was kidnapped as a child from the Senegambia region and enslaved in Boston. Rather than leave readers in aporia, Jekyll fills the gaps in Sancho's biography with narrated events that scholars now consider fictive, which helps explain why Samuel Johnson declined to write Sancho's biography.

Jekyll's overriding goal in *Life of Ignatius* is to frame Sancho in the image of an extraordinary negro, and he selects a verse from Virgil's *Eclogue* as the epigraph for the narrative. The translation states, "Tho' he was black, and thou art heav'nly fair."⁵⁹ This verse freights Sancho as a racialized "other." The contradictory conjunction "tho[ough]" in the Virgilian verse sets up the argument that despite Sancho's Blackness, he is exceptional, and the verse concludes with an appeal to white readers who "art heav'nly fair" to look past Sancho's Blackness to the portrait that shows him as an extraordinary negro. By describing Sancho as an exceptional black person, Jekyll perpetuates the myth that blackness represents a nonalluring category that contrasts with whiteness, depicted as "heav'nly fair." This racializing approach of defining Blackness in apposition to whiteness is amplified by Thomas Jefferson's critique of Sancho's *Letters* in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). Jefferson reluctantly praises Sancho as a writer who has "approached nearer to merit in composition," but Jefferson introduces a racial hierarchy via two contrasting conjunctions to emphasize that such merit is only applicable in the class of Black writers and to exclude Sancho from the class of white writers: "Though we admit him to the first place among those of his own colour . . . yet when we compare him with the writers of the race among whom he lived, and particularly with the epistolary class, in which he has taken his own stand, we are compelled to enroll him at the bottom of the column."⁶⁰

Jefferson also critiques Phillis Wheatley, whom he considers meritless: "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis [Wheatley]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism."⁶¹ Jefferson's injection of color into his critique of Sancho and Wheatley is consistent with Crewe's and Jekyll's racializations of Sancho's portrait, therefore pointing to the hierarchization of race in the eighteenth century. Phillis Wheatley, whom Jefferson exiles from the republic of letters, satirizes this eighteenth-century white supremacist notion of race in her poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America." She mimes the rationale that white enslavers provide to justify enslavement of their Black brethren. Focusing on the lines "*Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train*" in Wheatley's poem, Victoria Ramirez Gentry argues that "through her alignment of 'Christians' and 'Negros,' Wheatley not only establishes her right to the 'angelic train' of Christian redemption but destabilizes the Black/white binary that wrongly identifies Christianity as belonging to whiteness."⁶² Although Wheatley's enslavement forced her to depend on the patronage of her enslaver to

58. Brycchan Carey, "'The Extraordinary Negro': Ignatius Sancho, Joseph Jekyll, and the Problem of Biography," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 1–13; 1, https://brycchancarey.com/Carey_BJES_2003.pdf.

59. Sancho, *Letters*, 49.

60. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1785), 150–51. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>.

61. Jefferson, *Notes*, 150.

62. Victoria Ramirez Gentry, "'Th'angelic train': Evangelicals, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the Anti-racist Christianity of Phillis Wheatley and Quobna Ottobah Cugoana," *Studies in Religion and the Enlightenment* 2, no. 2 (2021): 5–10, <https://dx.doi.org/10.32655/srej.2021.2.2.2>.

publish her book of poetry, the first by a Black person in North America,⁶³ several of her poems are replete with satiric resistance of the hypocrisy of slaveholding.

While Crewe and Jekyll did not create the artifice of racial hierarchies, their racialized portraits of Sancho furthered the notion of whiteness and Blackness as markers of race. Perhaps Crewe may even have derived inspiration for her preface and Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* from earlier reviews of Sancho's 1766 letter in British print media. Sancho's 1766 letter to Laurence Sterne (to which we will return) charmed the English public when it was first published in 1775, making him the most popular Black Briton, and his reception reflects the growing hierarchization of race. *The Monthly Review* wrote: "It is a letter to Mr. Sterne, from a sensible Black, in the service of the Duke of Montague. . . . This honest African genius, we are informed, is at this time, by the permission of Heaven, earning a subsistence by keeping a little shop somewhere in Westminster."⁶⁴ Additionally, *The Gentleman's Magazine* introduced Sancho's letter by noting that it will "[show] that the writer, though black as Othello, has a heart as humanized as any of the fairest about St. James's . . . and the connection between [Sterne] and his sooty correspondent was afterwards continued, as appears by subsequent letters, and by honest Sancho visiting his friend in London."⁶⁵ Consequently, the popularity of Sancho as a Black novelty in British newspapers may have been a factor that impelled Crewe to expedite a publication of Sancho's *Letters* in just two years after his death. In comparison, it took seven years for Sterne's collected letters to appear after his respective death. Like the London papers, Crewe's preface and Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* strike a balance between praise of Sancho and a disclaimer that color-codes his success. This contrast suggests that antislavery advocates were generally only seeking to end slavery, not to eliminate racial hierarchies.

Remarkably, Crewe's preface and Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* do not incorporate any aspects of Sancho's literary vision as represented in his letters. Despite his celebrated popularity, Sancho faced a racist menace in London on account of his Blackness, and his self-fashioning in *Letters* constitutes a counter discourse that challenges empire and seeks to revise the British public's color-based racism. Sancho's 1766 letter to Sterne was his most publicized piece of correspondence. While still working for the Duke of Montagu, Sancho wrote Laurence Sterne, who was arguably the most popular novelist in all of Europe at the time. Sancho had just read Sterne's *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* in which Sterne castigates Britons for their role in the slave trade and the enslavement of Africans. Sterne's position on slavery so impressed Sancho that he wrote Sterne to introduce himself as "one of those people that the illiberal and vulgar call a Nee-gur" and to thank him for taking up the cause and "distresses of [his] poor moorish brethren" by telling Britons to "consider slavery—what it is—how bitter a draught—and how many millions have been made to drink of it."⁶⁶ In the letter, Sancho also appeals to Sterne to consider giving "half an hour's attention to slavery" in his popular novel *Tristram Shandy*, which was being published serially. Perhaps Sterne's own experience of dislocation as a child may have prepared him to empathize with the perilous fates of enslaved Africans that Sancho recounts. Many readers tend to be familiar only with Sterne's later years when he had become the famous author of *Tristram Shandy*. His early years in Ireland where he was born were filled with intractable suffering. During the first decade of his life, his family moved more than ten times, living in military barracks

63. Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (Boston, 1773).

64. *The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 53 (November 1775), review of *Letters of the Late Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne, to His Most Intimate Friends* (London: 1775), 403–13.

65. *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle* 46 (January 1776), review of *Sterne's Correspondence*, 27–29.

66. Sancho, *Letters*, 311.

with his father who was an ensign in the British army.⁶⁷ Sterne became familiar with army garrisons and British soldiers, who, much like his father, were the tools of British colonial expansion. Sterne's father died in Jamaica in 1731 in service to the British Empire, and news of it came to him "in the last weeks of his years in the grammar school" in Halifax.⁶⁸ These experiences Sterne would later recreate through the characters of Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim.

When Sterne received Sancho's letter, he had already published the first eight volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. In his response to Sancho's compelling request, Sterne wrote: "There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro—girl, and my eyes had scarce done smarting with it, when your letter of recommendation in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me—but why her brethren?—or yours, Sancho! any more than mine?"⁶⁹ Sterne was a celebrity writer, and Sancho a valet in the service of the Duke of Montagu—two men from two social classes—yet Sterne's response to Sancho strikes a chord of reciprocity, a sincere expression of the egalitarian impulse of the Enlightenment. And, Sterne agreed to honor Sancho's request, noting: "If I can weave the Tale I have wrote into the Work I'm [about]—tis at the service of the afflicted—and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a sad Shade upon the World, That so great a part of it, are and have been so long bound in chains of darkness & in Chains of Misery."⁷⁰ Sterne kept his promise to Sancho by weaving the tale of the poor Negro girl with Uncle Toby's combat chronicle in chapter six of the last volume of *Tristram Shandy*, the only single-volume installment of the novel. Thus, Sancho's inspiration helped guide the direction of a chapter in the last serialized volume of *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne's most caustic rebuke of empire and slavery is reflected in the story of a Black girl told by Uncle Toby's assistant, Corporal Trim, who was told the story by his brother, Tom. So, Tom goes to purchase some sausages at a sausage shop in Lisbon wherein he encounters a Black girl alone chasing away flies while making sure not to kill them. Uncle Toby interrupts the story with the comment, "Tis a pretty picture! . . . She had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy."⁷¹ Uncle Toby also notes that the girl's goodness is the result of nature and suffering. It's no wonder Sancho, an avid reader and admirer of Sterne, was charmed by the character of Uncle Toby.

As one who is himself a victim of Britain's imperialist ambitions, Uncle Toby understands the impact of Britain's hegemonic exploitation, a motif that undergirds Uncle Toby's war story. Tom's narration of the Black girl's story turns to a reflection of Blackness and race—a thought-provoking discourse on race in the eighteenth century. Trim asks Uncle Toby, "A Negro has a soul? an' please your Honour."⁷² To which Uncle Toby responds, "I suppose God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me. It would be putting one sadly over the head of another."⁷³ Uncle Toby's use of a masculine pronoun suggests that the reference has moved from the Black girl to collective Blackness. He also seems to suggest that color is an arbitrary form of difference invented as a basis for subjugation, a point upheld by critic Ibram X. Kendi, who argues that "race is a mirage" that "creates . . .

67. See Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years* (London: Methuen, 1975).

68. Thomas Yoseloff, *A Fellow of Infinite Jest* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1944), 15.

69. Sancho, *Letters*, 312.

70. Sancho, *Letters*, 313.

71. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1978), 747.

72. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 747.

73. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 747.

the power to categorize and judge, elevate and downgrade, include and exclude.”⁷⁴ Uncle Toby declares: “Tis the fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands now—where it may be hereafter, heaven knows,” meaning that today Britain is enslaving Africans, but tomorrow someone may be enslaving Britons. To which Trim responds, “God forbid.”⁷⁵ The thought of the tables turning frightens Trim, who cannot imagine himself a slave—a reflection on the hierarchy of race, a white supremacist construct that envisions Blacks as ontologically inferior and whites as permanent purveyors of power. The symbiotic relationship between Sterne and Sancho provides a contrast to this rhetoric of race, nation, and power. Despite their divergent lived experiences, they are unified in their belief that all human beings share a common bond of mutuality—a true reflection of the egalitarian philosophy of the Enlightenment, one that Sancho, in his capacious spirit, aspires to emulate and foster. Therefore, Sancho and Sterne inspire and promote each other’s view and critique of empire, both of which resist imperialist modes of domination.

Sterne’s condemnation of slavery may also have emboldened Sancho to vocalize his own stance against the transatlantic slave trade and the enslavement of Africans in the West. Sancho’s 1778 letter to Jack Wingrave⁷⁶ is an example of his militant imputation against British imperialism. Sancho playfully tells his young mentee, “In one of your letters which I do not recollect—you speak (with honest indignation) of the treachery and chicanery of the natives.”⁷⁷ In response, Sancho chides, “My good friend, you should remember from whom they learnt those vices:—the first Christian visitors found them a simple, harmless people—but the cursed avidity for wealth urged these first visitors (and all succeeding ones) to such acts of deception—and even wanton cruelty.”⁷⁸ He further lectures Wingrave, noting that these enlightened Christians are not in Africa to share the riches of the gospel but to participate in the “Christians’ abominable traffic for slaves—and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the Kings.”⁷⁹ Sancho concludes his letter by noting, “I mentioned these only to guard my friend against being too hasty in condemning the knavery of a people who bad as they may be—possibly—were made worse by their Christian visitors.”⁸⁰ As demonstrated, Sancho’s letters serve as narrative discourses that resist British imperialism. By linking Christianity with the slave trade, Sancho calls attention to the hugely hypocritical and incongruent British colonial missions. In a 1778 letter to Mr. Fisher,⁸¹ Sancho also condemns the triangular slave trade as an “unchristian and most diabolical usage of [his] brother Negroes.”⁸² Sancho then switches to a critique of enslavement of Africans in the West. He praises Phillis Wheatley as a “genius in bondage,” whose poetry “reflects nothing either to

74. Ibram X. Kendi, “How Racism Relies on Arbitrary Hierarchies,” *Literary Hub*, August 13, 2019, <https://lithub.com/ibram-x-kendi-how-racism-relies-on-arbitrary-hierarchies/>.

from Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be An Antiracist* (One World, imprint of Random House) 2019.

75. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 748.

76. Wingrave, the son of Sancho’s friend, John Wingrave, was a young soldier in the British colonial mission in India.

77. Sancho, *Letters*, 187.

78. Sancho, *Letters*, 188.

79. Sancho, *Letters*, 188.

80. Sancho, *Letters*, 188.

81. Mr. Fisher (one of Sancho’s correspondents), a Philadelphia Quaker who had sent Sancho a copy of Wheatley’s *Poems*. “When Sancho wrote his letter in 1778, he was unaware that Phillis Wheatley had already been manumitted upon her return to America in 1773 following her visit to London.” Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould, *Genius in Bondage-Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 2.

82. Sancho, *Letters*, 165.

the glory or generosity of her master.”⁸³ He mocks Wheatley’s Christian owner for “[his] vanity of having in his wanton power a mind animated by Heaven—a genius superior to himself.”⁸⁴ Similarly, he berates the hypocrisy of all enlightened Christians who stand by idly: “These good great folks—all know—and perhaps admired—nay, praised Genius in bondage—and then, like the Priests and the Levites in sacred writ, passed by—not one good Samaritan amongst them.”⁸⁵ Sancho’s insightful reflection on Wheatley’s poetry is a clear indication of his transnational vision and knowledge of the slave trade, slavery, and empire. Referring to Sancho’s comments about Phyllis Wheatley, Carretta valorizes Sancho as “an emblematic figure” who “became the first Anglophone critic of a fellow Black writer and one of the earliest Black critics of the institution of slavery.”⁸⁶ The genius in bondage trope equally applies to Sancho and explains his and Wheatley’s transcendent connection with other enslaved Africans in the British Empire.

Sancho and Wheatley were both owned by slaveholders who allowed them access to books, and despite their privileged positions in relation to other Black slaves of the time, they variously expressed feelings of alienation. Sancho lived in Britain his entire life since being enslaved there at age two, so he was a Briton in every respect. He held property and voted twice in parliamentary elections. Writing to his correspondent John Spink on June 6, 1780, however, Sancho says: “I am not sorry I was born in Afric.”⁸⁷ By assuming an African persona, Sancho rhetorically removes himself from the British Empire, the place of his upbringing and the subject of his critique. The outsider stance positions him to look at Britain through the lens of oppressed Africans. The letter gives an eye-witness account of the barbarity Sancho observes on the streets of London during the Gordon Riots, generally described as the worst in English history.⁸⁸ Sancho tells John Spink about the wounding of a “Lord Sandwich,” who flees from the rioters “bleeding very fast home,” and he reports that there are “two thousand liberty boys . . . swearing and swaggering by with large sticks” looking for Irish workers. In an exasperated tone, Sancho mocks, “This—this—is liberty! genuine British liberty!”⁸⁹ As one who is himself a victim of racial discrimination, Sancho’s empathy is on the side of the Irish. For this reason, he sees the Gordon Riots as a microcosmic representation of the hypocrisy of British claims to the ideals of the Enlightenment and Christianity. How could a public that endorses these ideals perpetrate such violence? These kinds of monstrous hypocrisies, compounded by the frequent racial slurs he endured, may have left Sancho with feelings of traumatic displacement. Sancho’s friend William Stevenson (c. 1749–1821) relates an incident that illustrates the racist climate in which Sancho and other Blacks lived: “We [Stevenson, Sancho, and other friends] were walking through Spring-gardens-passage, when, a small distance from before us, a young Fashionable said to his companion, loud enough to be heard, ‘Smoke Othello!’ This did not escape my friend Sancho; who, immediately placing himself across the path, before him, exclaimed with a thundering voice, and a countenance which awed the delinquent, ‘Aye, sir, such such Othellos you meet with but once in a century,’ clapping his hand upon his goodly

83. Sancho, *Letters*, 166.

84. Sancho, *Letters*, 166.

85. Sancho, *Letters*, 166.

86. Carretta and Gould, *Genius in Bondage*, 2.

87. Sancho, *Letters*, 272.

88. Sancho’s *Letters*, 273. The Gordon Riots riot that began “as a peaceful demonstration on 2 June 1780 by fifty thousand people petitioning Parliament to repeal a recently enacted law granting Roman Catholics minor relief from legal restrictions.” It was reported that “government troops killed 285 rioters . . . the total number of dead, including those killed by drink and fire, were probably between 800 and 1,000” (editorial note).

89. Sancho, *Letters*, 271.

round paunch. ‘Such Iagos as you, we meet with in every dirty passage. Proceed, sir!’”⁹⁰ Consequently, the racism that Sancho experienced alienated him from feeling fully British.

Similarly, Wheatley’s self-representation in her poetry provides readers a more complex portrait than the one her enslavers project. Although the patronage of the Wheatley family enabled Phillis Wheatley to compose and publish her trailblazing book of poetry, her poetry is infused with symbolism that resists her enslavement. As one critic argues, the verse “some view our sable race with a scornful eye” in Wheatley’s poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “is direct speech in which Wheatley separates herself from the interlocutors who are doing the viewing and she becomes the object that is being scorned.”⁹¹ In effect, Wheatley and Sancho indicate that their African-ness makes it impossible to be fully accepted as American and British, respectively, mostly because of their skin color. The genius-in-bondage trope, therefore, is a commentary about the intellectual isolation of Sancho and Wheatley and, by extension, all diasporic Africans. In a letter to correspondent and fellow valet Roger Rush on September 7, 1779, Sancho comments on British militarism, noting that “for my part it’s nothing to me—as I am only a lodger—and hardly that.”⁹² Sancho’s feelings of dislocation foreshadowed the ambivalent sensation conceptualized and illustrated by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903).⁹³ Du Bois describes these feelings as “a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity . . . two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁹⁴ Ultimately, Crewe and Jekyll reinforce Sancho’s sense of dislocation by assigning him alienating labels. Sancho’s literacy expanded his worldview, providing him the intellectual agility to situate himself within an expanded diasporic Black community, which includes the West Indies, the Americas, and Europe.⁹⁵ Jonathan Elmer explains that the Black Atlantic “[focuses] on those aspects of African diasporic experience and expression that transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.”⁹⁶ Sancho assumes this alienating and transnational posture in many letters when he refers to enslaved Africans in the West Indies as “my brethren” and to himself as a “lodger” or immigrant in Britain. The plaguing Du Boisian sense of twoness may explain Sancho’s exploration of other Black diasporic voices, and, as a result, his engagement with the work of Phillis Wheatley. His self-representation provides readers a broader view into the complex and complicated experience of Blacks in eighteenth-century Britain.

Despite Frances Crewe’s charitable and noble purpose for editing Ignatius Sancho’s letters, she asserted editorial censorship that subverted the capaciousness of his artistic imagination. In her effort to frame *Letters* as an exigent narrative for antislavery discourse,

90. William Stevenson to John Nichols, September 14, 1814, in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1815), 9:682–83.

91. Charles Tita, “Towards a Poetics of Decolonization: Mungo Beti’s *Poor Christ of Bomba*,” *’n Tydskrif vir Afrika-letterkunde—A Journal of African Literature* 53, no.1 (2016): 179–92; 184.

92. Sancho, *Letters*, 231.

93. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (The Project Gutenberg eBook, 2021).

94. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks*.

95. The Black Diaspora (also referred to as “African Diaspora”) is “the voluntary and involuntary movement of Africans and their descendants to various parts of the world during the modern and pre-modern periods.” “Defining Diaspora,” Center for Black Diaspora at DePaul College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, accessed August 27, 2023, <https://las.depaul.edu/centers-and-institutes/center-for-black-diaspora/about/Pages/defining-diaspora.aspx>.

96. Jonathan Elmer, “The Black Atlantic Archive,” *American Literary History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 160–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3567999>.

she did not consider Sancho's own voice for a more inclusive and balanced portrait. After all, Sancho was the first person of color to openly condemn slavery in Britain. Instead, Crewe condescendingly framed Sancho as "an African" and directed a Sancho biography that envisioned him as an "extraordinary negro," perhaps with the best misguided intention of showing how Sancho had overcome enslavement because of the benevolence of white Britons. But, by silencing Sancho's voice as an artist and antislavery advocate, Crewe failed him as editor. The stereotypical portrayal of Sancho in Crewe's preface and Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* continues to detract from his self-representation in *Letters* and, in effect, holds his vision and artistic genius in bondage. In our own time, Jekyll's *Life of Ignatius* is still an influence on readers, and those who teach Sancho's *Letters* may find that students tend to lean too heavily on this embellished biography of Sancho. Because our modern notions of race as a social construct are steeped in an eighteenth-century conception of race as hierarchical, Sancho's clarion call to resist all forms of discrimination is still unheeded. Just as Sancho was perplexed about a white supremacist discourse that sought to perpetuate the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement of Africans in the West, we too should be perplexed about modern forms of domination that seek to banish Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ2+ rights and Black Studies.