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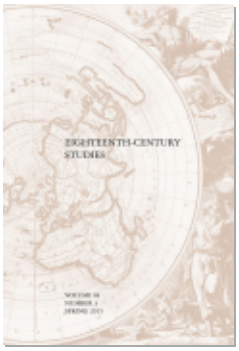

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The central issue in scholarship on Olaudah Equiano—or Gustavus Vassa as he more frequently referred to himself—has been the question of identity.[1] As his two names, and his story of having been kidnapped as a child in Africa demonstrate, his identity was undeniably multi-faceted. The recent discovery by Vincent Carretta of evidence that Equiano may have been born in South Carolina rather than Benin[2]—despite Carretta's measured and judicious approach to the discovery—has the potential to increase the distance between those critics who see Equiano first and foremost in terms of his identity as a black man or an African,[3] and those who emphasize his assimilation to a British and Christian identity.[4] While no one denies that his identity is complex, very different portraits of Equiano emerge depending on which literary and cultural tradition a given critic places him in, whether it is British, African, African-American, post-colonial, or Black Atlantic.[5] In this article, I will emphasize the interrelationship of two of Equiano's identities, examining a neglected context that helps explain the nuances of Equiano's calibration of his claim to an African versus a British national identity: the British debate on Africa that, although rarely discussed by scholars, was one of the foundations of the debate on slavery.[6] In other words, I will attempt to establish the possibilities and the stakes of competing African national or political identities within eighteenth-century British discourse, and particularly in relation to the slavery debate, and then argue that Equiano indeed shapes his self-presentation with an ear to these resonances.[7]

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To explore this context, it is my intention to set aside the question of the authenticity of Equiano's account of Africa in the *Interesting Narrative*, and instead read Equiano's representation of his Igbo childhood in the context of this eighteenth-century debate on Africa.[8] A few examples will help establish the shape of this debate at the time that Equiano wrote *The Interesting Narrative* (published in 1789). In 1788 an anti-slave trade pamphleteer, "Africanus," argued that the trade was wrong because Africans were "happy" in "their original state of freedom."[9] In the same year "some gentlemen of St. Christopher," attacking the abolitionist James Ramsay, contended that slaves taken out of Africa were "rescued" and that African traders left with unsold slaves would "cut their throats before the faces of the Europeans."[10] Even more extreme was the pamphlet *Slavery No Oppression*, which advanced the claims that the "Eastern and Western coasts of Africa" were "inhabited by stupid and unenlightened hordes," "without trade, without manufactures, without navigation, and without industry," "uncivilized & turbulent, thus wild, boisterous, and brutish, in their appetites."[11] However, the crucial place of Africa in such debate did not begin in the late 1780s: the 1773 pamphlet *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of Enslaving the Africans*, the record of a debate held as part of Harvard University's graduation exercises, hinges on each participant's understanding of the state of civilization in Africa. The proslavery disputant contends that "removal" from Africa "is to be esteemed a favor," citing those "who contend that, by the purchase of these victims, their lives are preserved, which would otherwise undoubtedly be sacrificed to the cruelty of the captors."[12] His opponent responds that "if modern writers of the best reputation are to be credited, their manners, in most parts of that extensive country, are far less savage and barbarous; their conveniences and enjoyments much more numerous, and in a word their manner of life much more agreeable than has been heretofore represented."[13] Each disputant appeals to the authority of travel writers for the basis of his opinion, but neither truly engages with the other's position. Such a state of affairs was typical of a debate on Africa that, while always carrying implications about slavery and race, began decades before the late-century abolition debate.[14]

Thomas Jefferson, then, takes up an established position in this debate with an offhand remark, made in the course of his most notorious statement on race, in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785):

> it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. It would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation. We will consider them here, on the same stage with the whites, and where the facts are not apocryphal on which a judgment is to be formed.[15]

Jefferson leaves unstated his reasons for assuming that it would be "unfair" to look to the state of Africans in Africa. Recent commentators, taking the refusal to offer an explanation as indicating that such an explanation would be unnecessary to his original audience, assume that Jefferson's views of Africa are commonplace opinions. Instead, however, he refers here to one established—and clearly polemical—interpretation of the evidence.[16] Equiano himself provides a common rebuttal to such positions, asking rhetorically "does not slavery itself depress the mind,

extinguish all its fire, and every noble sentiment?"[17] Equiano, in the same paragraph, himself describes Africans as "uncivilized and even barbarous," but contra Jefferson, and like the anti-slavery speaker in *A Forensic Dispute*, he insists that the degradation entailed by slavery is far greater than that resulting from living in an "uncivilized" culture.

The context of this debate, I will argue, ultimately helps explain some aspects of Equiano's text that critics find most perplexing, particularly his defense of slavery within Africa, and his personal claim to an "English" political identity.[18] Equiano resists the idea of essential race in a number of ways—for instance, he asks

> Are there not causes enough to which the apparent inferiority of an African may be ascribed, without limiting the goodness of God, and supposing he forbore to stamp understanding on certainly his own image, because 'carved in ebony'? Might it not naturally be ascribed to their situation? (45)

Unlike Jefferson, Equiano prefers to look to the debilitating circumstances of slavery itself, rather than to essential difference, or to African culture, to explain the degraded state of slaves. Here, referring to Africans as "certainly his own image," Equiano invokes the standing Christian consensus on the unity of humanity resulting from God's single creation, a consensus that while still the reigning orthodoxy had recently begun to be questioned.[19] As Roxann Wheeler has argued, Equiano throughout the *Interesting Narrative* resists the idea of essential race and of the primacy of complexion to identity.[20]

Several critics have seen the term "countrymen" as important in establishing Equiano's sense of identity; rooted in geography and political affiliations, the term suggests national identity. S. E. Ogude sees it as indicative of his "pan-Africanism," Felicity Nussbaum connects it to his Igbo identity, Srinivas Aravamudan links it to his flirtation with "Ethnic separatist" nationalism, and C. L. Innes sees it as indicating Equiano's construction of an "imaginary homeland" or an "imagined community."[21] Each of these positions is accurate within a certain context, but Equiano uses the term in very slippery ways. Variously, he uses it to distinguish between Africans, to distinguish Africans from Europeans, and also to describe his increasing identification with the English, as in the oft-quoted remark that "I could now speak English tolerably well, and I perfectly understood every thing that was said. I now not only felt myself quite easy with these new countrymen, but relished their society and manners" (77–78). To be a "countryman" with another is to experience a sense of identification with him or her, but such identification need not be mutual.[22] For Equiano, it is rather an elective affinity than a stable, or even clearly defined, category. In other words, the term does locally perform the functions ascribed to it by each of the critics noted above, but its only consistent function is to offer a counterweight to essential or externally imposed categories of identity.

The debate on Africa, for our purposes, began in 1734, when an English slave-ship captain, William Snelgrave, published his *New Account of Some Parts of Guinea*. In it, Snelgrave detailed both his experiences of the middle passage and the recent history of Dahomey, which was then the strongest and most aggressive

state in West Africa; it had launched a string of conquests beginning in the late seventeenth century.[23] Snelgrave claims that, as a buyer of West Africa slaves, he was rescuing Africans from worse fates entailed by their subjection to tyrants like the King of Dahomey, fates possibly including human sacrifice and cannibalism.[24] Snelgrave's book supplied many of the favorite anecdotes, and the basic attitude toward Africa, of slavery's supporters throughout the century; his influence had not diminished in the 1780s, as suggested by the proslavery commentators cited at the outset of this essay. Gordon Turnbull—an apologist for slavery with whom Equiano argued in print on other issues—repeats Snelgrave's central notion of West Indian slavery as akin to a rescue mission in 1786: "the slaves purchased by the factors are saved from the most shocking and horrid deaths, which they would often otherwise suffer, often for no crime whatsoever."[25]

Although Snelgrave advocates putting to death any captive African attacking a "white man" to keep slave-ship discipline, he avoids appealing to essential racial difference as a reality in itself justifying slavery.[26] Instead, he tries to make his concept of rescue compelling through both assertions of genocide and specific, sentimentalized examples, such as a boy he himself intervenes to save from religious sacrifice and then "reunites" with his mother, and an old woman his sailors save when the king has her thrown into shark-infested waters.[27] Most famously, Snelgrave also claims that the King of Dahomey ordered the mass slaughter of hundreds of captives, and suggests that the corpses disappeared overnight, taken to be eaten by Dahoman citizens.[28] Snelgrave works to create the impression that all West Africans might as well be this King's subjects, because his conquests likely will continue, and because other African Kings are similar to him.

Snelgrave's book inspired an immediate rebuttal: John Atkins' 1735 *Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the West Indies*.[29] Atkins's skeptical rebuttal of Snelgrave's reports of African cannibalism has attracted some recent scholarly attention.[30] More relevant here is Atkins' dismissal of scrutiny of West African politics with the contention that the "best" Africans are those most in contact with Europeans. Atkins develops this sense even in rejecting the idea of the slave trade as a form of rescue:

> When the Nakedness, Poverty and Ignorance of these Species of Men are considered; it would incline one to think it a bettering their Condition, to transport them to the worst of Christian Slavery; but as we find them little mended in those respects at the *West-Indies,* their Patrons respecting them only as Beasts of Burden; there is rather Inhumanity in removing them from their Countries and Families; here they get ease with their spare Diet; the Woods, the Fruits, the Rivers, and Forests, and what they produce, is equally the property of all. (61–62)

Atkins' "defense" of Africans is to reduce them to a state of savagery, desirable only in contrast to their fate as "beasts of burden" in the New World, although he does hint at Edenic plenty. Atkins' vision of Africa is similar to that of abolitionists like "Africanus" and Anthony Benezet. Even more notably, Atkins, not Snelgrave, proposes the reality of absolute racial difference, remarking: "Tho' it be a little Heterodox, I am persuaded that the black and white race have, *ab origine*, sprung from different coloured parents" (39). This amounts to the suggestion of "polygenesis," or the concept of separate divine acts of creation for the distinct races.[31]

Countering the Snelgravian view of Africa more effectively was Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet's key anti-slavery text of 1771, *Some Historical Account of Guinea*. Although Benezet's status as a pioneer of abolition has often been noted, surprisingly little attention has been given to Benezet's devoting this text—so influentiual on subsequent anti-slavery writing—to developing a positive image of Africa.[32] In *Some Historical Account*, Benezet compiles, with polemical intent, long passages from first-person travel accounts of West Africa, beginning with a generalizing image of Guinea's people which sets the tone and agenda: "notwithstanding the converse of many of its inhabitants with (often) the worst of the Europeans, they still retain a great deal of innocent simplicity" (2). Here, Benezet reverses Atkins' account of Europeans' positive effect on Africans, while repeating his view of their primitive and malleable state. Benezet goes on to argue that Europeans have failed to make "such endeavors as their christian possession requires, to communicate to the ignorant Africans that superior knowledge which providence had favored them with" (2). Benezet conceives of Africans outside the terms of race or nation, but in an older tradition, through their religious identity and state of civilization.[33]

Benezet's comments emphasize European responsibility for the slave trade, and for Africans' cultural and religious state. By embracing the idea of Africans as victims, Benezet opens the door to an anti-slavery version of racial difference—no doubt because he takes for granted the absurdity of a belief in the reality of race—and gives license to a rhetorical move that became quite common among his followers. Anti-slavery writers would often concede the possibility of African inferiority, only to turn back to their proslavery opponents, asking if Africans are indeed inferior, is not our obligation to them, as Christians, all the greater?[34] Benezet himself makes a muted version of this move, regretting that Europeans use their god-given "superior knowledge" to corrupt rather than to help simple, innocent Africans (82).

Benezet's text presents Benin as the most attractive of West African nations, especially in the context of the threat of Dahomey. This may partially explain Equiano's emphasis on his childhood there, although he likely had other, more decisive reasons. Benezet depicts Benin as stable and capable of mustering a vast army, in other words as more than capable of resisting Dahomey. To elaborate on the situation of its people, Benezet quotes from William Smith, whose posthumous 1744 book on Dahomey generally follows and confirms Snelgrave: "The natives are all free men; none but foreigners can be bought and sold there."[35] However, this passage, while it may have appealed to Equiano as representing the closest thing to political liberty in Guinea ("free men"), in fact is meant by Smith to show that Benin's citizen's are, if anything, less free than Dahomey's. Benezet misquotes Smith, leaving out a key letter and a key phrase. Smith actually writes of Benin: "The Natives are all Freed-Men, tho' treated as Slaves by their King: none but foreigners can be sold here" (228). For Smith, Benin's natives are free, in their own understanding, only at their King's good will. They are freed men, not free men. While Snelgrave concentrated on Dahomey's effect on all other West Africans, for Smith, any African in Benin is either a literal slave, if a foreigner, or a virtual slave by the terms of his citizenship, if a native. Benezet hints at the possibility of a positive West African national identity, a land of free men, by misquoting Smith's

suggestion that Benin is a land in which the natives have a political identity—but only through a keen awareness of their subjection. Smith's position, however, was also challenged by means other than just typographical skullduggery. James Stanfield, whose 1788 pamphlet *Observations on a Voyage to Guinea* Equiano cites elsewhere, more bluntly rejects Smith's position, saying that "I never saw a happier race of people than those of the Kingdom of Benin."[36] Stanfield also implicitly defends the King, noting that his "subjects . . . were seated in ease and plenty," and contending that black slave traders in Benin are renegades who have declared themselves independent of the King.[37]

The Smithian argument was developed as well as challenged, notably in Robert Norris's 1789 book *Memoirs of Bossa Ahadee*, although Norris treats Dahomey rather than Benin.[38] Norris contends that the King of Dahomey's subjects willingly accept chattel slavery as their natural state, as exemplified in his report of the views of a Dahoman soldier named Dakou:

> 'my head belongs to the king, not to myself; if he pleases to send for it, I am ready to resign it; or if it is shot through in battle, it makes no difference to me; I am satisfied, so that it is the service of my king.' Every *Dahoman* possesses the same sentiments; even at this day, after tyranny of forty years, their loyalty and attachment remains unshaken.[39]

The implications of this scene are striking. Unlike Snelgrave, who was intent on his theme of rescue, Norris here invokes political theories of the consent of the governed to make a sophisticated argument that African natives (at least those within Dahomey's sphere of influence) have already consented to slavery as part of their social compact. Norris then adds a footnote to identify Dakou: "A faithful servant whom I employed in my factory, he afterwards fell undeservedly under the king's displeasure, and was sold, by his order, for a slave."[40] This is the heart of Norris's use of Dahomey as a justification for slavery. Dahomans have already resigned their lives to the king, and thereby accepted the possibility of being sold away as slaves, simply by consenting to his rule.

Accusations of malevolent European influence like Benezet's become irrelevant if all West Africans have already, as a condition of their citizenship, consciously consented to be the slaves of their king. Indeed, Norris goes so far as to imply that European slavers cannot even be held responsible for the destruction of African families. He does this by presenting a dystopian vision of Dahomey as systematically negating family connections: "children belong to the state, or rather are the property of the king, to whom they are sent at too tender an age to recollect any thing of their parents."[41] Norris prefers the contention that Africans are inherently slaves, and understand themselves as such, to the complex sentimentality of Snelgrave's claim to "rescue" Africans.

By 1788–89, the myriad positions being taken in the abolition debate, almost all touching to some degree on the state of Africa, would make it misleading to suggest that the two sides stayed strictly within parameters originating with either Benezet or Snelgrave; nonetheless, this was clearly the dominant tendency. Indeed, the very existence of the "third position" of "Amelioration" calls any such claims into question.[42] A 1760 pamphlet by "Philmore," for instance, strongly rejects both slavery and racial difference, but nonetheless approvingly cites Snelgrave for

providing evidence of the basic sentimental humanity of Africans.[43] Nonetheless, it would be fair to suggest that, broadly speaking, the abolitionists—following the influential Anthony Benezet—inclined toward Atkins' position on Africans' simple, primitive freedom, preferable to life as "beasts of burden" on New World plantations, but certainly susceptible of improvement if the efforts of Europeans were to be redirected from exploitation and corruption of Africans to economic development and moral and religious instruction. This implication of the cultural and religious inferiority of primitive Africans and superiority of Europeans leaves open the question of the ultimate reality of racial difference.[44]

This debate on Africa, then, can help explain two of the aspects of the *Interesting Narrative* most perplexing to current readers and critics: Equiano's repeated desire for an "English" identity, and his positive portrayal of slavery within Africa.[45] In the context established, Equiano's preference for an English over a specifically Igbo or Beninite national identity should come as no surprise.[46] Indeed, Equiano stresses that in Benin he never understood himself as part of a larger national community: "our subjection to the king of Benin was little more than nominal; for every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of that place" (32). Rather than directly attempting to define a Beninite national identity in new terms, then, Equiano counters the argument that Beninites were willing slaves to their king by radically diminishing his presence in his subjects' consciousness. In so doing, Equiano implicitly supports those who argue for primitive simplicity, rather than monarchical tyranny, as the norm for life in Africa.

This, then, also begins to explain Equiano's claim of "Englishness," his expressions of love for "old England" (122), his desire to return to "England, where my heart has always been" (147) and his pride in describing his younger self as "almost an Englishman" (77). Equiano's sense of himself as English, and particularly as entitled to the protection of English law (protection denied him as a black man, of course, in colonial courts) shows traits that have been described as typical of the identity of white Creole settlers.[47] A claim of English identity by a Black colonial could remind Equiano's readers of the contradictions between slavery, racial oppression, and "English liberty."[48] However, claiming an Igbo origin but an English identity also allows Equiano to demonstrate the irrelevance of Smith's and Norris's claims about the nature of national identity in Africa to the experience of enslaved Africans, at least once they have arrived in the New World, and recasts positions like Jefferson's remark that "it would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation" as willful ignorance rather than generosity.

Remarkably, however, Equiano can also be taken to resist abolitionists like "Africanus," Stanfield, and Benezet, in their reductive treatment of all Africans as happy primitives. Equiano insists on the similarity of Igbos, in particular, to biblical Hebrews, and details the cultural differences he encountered on his unwilling trip through West Africa to a slaving port: "All the nations I had hitherto passed through resembled our own in their manners, customs, and language: but I came at length to a country, the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars" (53).[49] Equiano's assessment of each new group he encounters suggests that he did not perceive the people on his journey as "fellow Africans" or "countrymen," but as strangers with varying degrees of similarity to his language and

cultural traditions. Within West Africa, Equiano suggests, the diversity of cultures is so great that any broad, generalized "African" identity would be incoherent; such an identity is only possible for him after his arrival on a slave ship and experience of the middle passage.

Equiano does not reject the entirety of the abolitionist argument, of course. Sharing the desire of writers like Benezet, Clarkson, Ramsay, and Cugoano to replace the slave trade with a mutually beneficial exchange of raw materials for manufactured goods—enabled by the civilizing efforts of European colonists—Equiano does support the vision of Africa as Edenic, deriving from travelers like Atkins and Michel Adanson, and sometimes adduced as an explanation for Africa's failure to develop more industry.[50] Equiano remarks that "as we live in a country where nature is prodigal of her favors, our wants are few and easily supplied; of course we have few manufactures" (36–37). But Equiano carefully contains the denigrating implications sometimes connected to this position, adding that "all our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature," thereby refusing the image of the indolent savage; to drive home this point he adds that "we are all habituated to labour from our earliest years" (37).

Indeed, even Equiano's strikingly positive portrayal of slavery within Africa can be usefully contextualized in terms of this debate, as a rebuttal to the Snelgravian concept of slavery as a "rescue" from African depravity and tyranny. His most positive description of the lot of those enslaved in Africa draws a distinction from the British colonies: "how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies! With us they do no more work than other members of the community" (40). This reflects the logic of Atkins' rebuttal of Snelgrave, emphasizing the misery of West Indian slaves and the happier life in Africa—even for those enslaved there. This comparison raises the possibility of relativizing slavery, and current readers often find this possibility disturbing; why would Equiano endorse a "humane" form of slavery, especially during the abolition debate? Equiano does differ here from his anti-slavery allies who accept the vision of Africa as totally uncivilized in their efforts to see Africans as innocent primitives. Furthermore, Equiano's point must also be understood as responding to the contention that Africans have effectively consented to be slaves to their Kings in Africa. If slavery in Africa does not entail dehumanization or even exclusion from "the community," then even explicit consent to such a form of slavery (if it existed) still would not justify the "beast of burden" slavery on West Indian plantations. Equiano, furthermore, contains his relativizing of slavery by describing his natural impulse to escape even from an African master who "used" him "quite well": "my love of liberty, ever great, was strengthened by the mortifying circumstance of not daring to eat with the free born children" (49). For Equiano, then, even the most humane form of slavery within Africa, containing as it does reminders of his degraded status, runs up against his inherent desire for liberty. In this suggestion, Equiano could be construed as more radical than most British abolitionists, who argued against the African slave trade but not against the holding of slaves in the West Indies.

Despite his interest in colonialism in Africa, then, by depicting Igbos as industrious, principled, and liberty-loving, Equiano counters the abolitionist view of Africans as malleable primitives.[51] Indeed, his depiction of Africa makes more sense in the context of the eighteenth-century Africa debate. His "positive" view of

slavery in Africa is carefully contained, while nonetheless undermining Snelgrave's "rescue" argument and the contention of willing slavery. Equiano's implication of the meaninglessness of a broad "African" identity to actual experiences within Africa further resists the pernicious generalizing tendency of arguments on both sides, forcing a step back from Abolitionist condescension to the "primitive" African that converges with the emerging belief in racial difference.[52] Finally, his insistence on a British national identity, and the legal and social privileges it entails, recasts the terms of the debate by suggesting, quite sensibly, that the terms of African political identities—whatever they are—apply only in Africa, while the terms of European identities should be applied consistently to all people, whatever their origins, in European countries and their colonies.

In conclusion, the argument between Snelgrave, Smith, and Norris on one hand, and Benezet, Equiano, and other anti-slavery writers on the other, is at bottom really about who bears ultimate responsibility for the slave trade. Race—whether in the form of a colonial regime of legal and social oppression or of a belief in essential inferiority—plays only a marginal role in the debate. Instead, ascriptions and denials of a conscious sense of national identity—one based on acceptance of the state of slavery—become central. Norris goes so far as to suggest that the regime of racial oppression in the British colonies is simply an extension of the Africans' inherent enslavement to their own Kings. Benezet tries to counter such arguments primarily by emphasizing the simplicity and innocence of Africans, thereby highlighting the responsibility of Europeans for the slave trade and for the corruption of West Africa. Equiano follows Benezet, but tries to make more palpable the sense of African freedom, ironically not by claiming a positive freedom—as he does with English identity—but instead by suggesting that his origins in Benin left him innocent of any sense of belonging to a nation, of being subject to a national government or King.

Recent arguments have been made for the importance of African ethnicity and of African-American Protestantism to the sense of identity of New World blacks.[53] Compelling as these possibilities are, neither appears to have influenced Equiano's text—likely due to rhetorical considerations—as directly as did the British debate on the meaning of African culture and society. Within the British debate, however, it was only the proslavery writers who documented the specific ethnic and national identities of Africans, whether in arguing for a state of political slavery, or in alerting their fellow slave owners to the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing slaves from among such essentialized groups as the "docile" Whidaw, the "savage" and warlike Koromantyn, and the "desponding" Igbo.[54] Anti-slavery writers countered these categories with a vague, more generalized sense of Africans' status that presents Africans as the victims of European greed—and thereby feeds into the possibility of racial difference. Equiano, then, stands out for insisting on his right to a British identity and British political rights, while also emphatically pointing to the diversity and complexity of African identities in order to resist the unsavory implications of both the standard anti-slavery line and the proslavery tendency to essentialize African groups.

NOTES

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1. This sentence is meant to invoke the problems of identity "Equiano or Vassa" raises. Which name we as scholars choose to call him carries implications for the assumptions we make about who he was. I will follow recent scholarly convention and call him "Olaudah Equiano" throughout this essay. For an essay that charts the patterns of his name usage in his own life, and points out how infrequently he himself used the name "Olaudah Equiano," see Vincent Carretta, "Defining a Gentleman: The Status of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa," *Language Sciences* 22.3 (2000): 385–99.

2. For Carretta's presentation of the evidence about Equiano's place of birth, see "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery & Abolition* 20.3 (1999): 96–105, and a more concise version, "Questioning the Identity of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African," *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 226–35.

3. Chinua Achebe, who influentially situates Equiano as initiating traditions in Igbo or Nigerian writing in passing remarks in "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*," *Okike* 14 (1978): 25–33, 32, also sees Equiano as assimilated into European culture in "Thoughts on the African Novel," 1973, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 93–94. Those who frame Equiano's identity as deeply African include Wilfred Samuels, "Disguised Voice in The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African," *Black American Literature Forum* 19.2 (1985): 64–69; Robin Sabino and Jennifer Hall, "The Path Not Taken: Cultural Identity in the Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano," *MELUS* 24.1 (1999): 5–19 and Chinosole, "Tryin' to Get Over: Narrative Posture in Equiano's Autobiography," *The Art of Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*, ed. John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois Univ. Press, 1982), 45–54. Catherine Acholonu in "The Home of Olaudah Equiano—a Linguistic and Anthropology Survey," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 22.1 (1987): 5–16 and *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano: An Anthropological Research* (Owerri, Nigeria: AFA, 1989) controversially claims to find evidence of Equiano's Igbo heritage in his text and in present-day Igboland.

4. Two Nigerian scholars have strongly rejected Acholonu's arguments: O. S. Ogede in "The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 61.1 (1991): 138–41, and S. E. Ogude in *No Roots Here: On the Igbo Roots of Oluadah* [sic] *Equiano* (Ibadan, Nigeria: RELS Monographs, 1989), 14. In earlier essays, Ogude denies that Equiano's text demonstrates first-hand knowledge of West Africa, and places *The Interesting Narrative* instead in relation to Western authors, especially Anthony Benezet and Daniel Defoe: "Facts into Fiction: Equiano's Narrative Reconsidered," *Research in African Literatures*, 13.1 (1982): 31–43; "Olaudah Equiano and the Tradition of Defoe," *African Literature Today* 14 (1982): 77–90; and *Genius in Bondage: A Study of the Origins of African Literature in English* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Univ. of Ife Press, 1983), 130–45. Tanya Caldwell takes a similar position in "'Talking Too Much English': Languages of Economy and Politics in Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative*," *Early American Literature* 34.3 (1999): 263–82. For readings insistent on framing Equiano primarily through British religious traditions, see Adam Potkay, "Olaudah Equiano and the Art of Spiritual Autobiography," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27.4 (1994): 677–92 and "History, Oratory, and God in Equiano's Interesting Narrative," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.4 (2001): 601–14; and Katalin Orban, "Dominant and Submerged Discourses in *The Life of Olaudah Equiano (or Gustavus Vassa?)*" *African American Review* 27.4 (1993): 655–64. Several scholars respond by seeing Equiano's conversion as itself syncretic: see Eileen Razzari Elrod, "Moses and the Egyptian: Religious Authority in Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *African American Review* 35.3 (2001): 409–25; Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 226–54; and William Mottolese, "'Almost an Englishman': Olaudah Equiano and the Colonial Gift of Language," *Bucknell Review* 41.2 (1998): 160–71.

5. In addition to the examples already cited, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s influential chapter, "The Trope of the Talking Book" in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 152–58 treats Equiano as one of the originators of the

African-American literary tradition, connecting him to other eighteenth-century slave-narrative authors. Houston A. Baker, Jr. reads Equiano as African-American in an economic sense, as "the pure product of trade . . . becomes a trader": "Figurations for a New American Literary History: Section V," *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 31–50; 35. Keith Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-Century Afro-English Writing* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna Univ. Press, 1988), 118–48; and Vincent Carretta, in "Introduction," Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, 1789, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995), ix–xxviii and *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*, (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2005) relate him primarily to African and British culture. Two readings of Equiano through a post-colonial lens are C. L. Innes, "Eighteenth-Century Letters and Narratives: Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, and Dean Mahomed," *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 36–46, who reads Africa or Igboland as Equiano's "imaginary homeland" or "imagined community" (37), and Srinivas Aravamudan in "Equiano and the Politics of Literacy," *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 233–88 who emphasizes Equiano's self-conscious position within British literary nationalism, but also mentions Equiano's flirtation with "separatist nationalism" (283).

6. Anthony J. Barker's *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550–1807* (London: Cass, 1978), examines the discourse on Africa and relates it to debates on slavery in broader terms than those I am pursuing here. Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550–1812* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969) discusses representations of Africa as a source for gauging racial attitudes in seventeenth-century Britain and the colonies, but only discusses the use of Africa in the slavery debate in passing; see 265–86, 305–7. David Brion Davis, in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966) discusses the writers who described West Africa and the slave trade for eighteenth-century British audiences, but he does not present them as taking polemical positions or as providing the basis for a debate, 181–7. Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850*, Vol. 1, (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964) begins his study of representations of Africa with the late eighteenth century and the emergence of colonialism. Two very useful recent studies have concentrated on seventeenth-century representations of Africa: P. E. H. Hair, "Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650," *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 43–68 and April Lee Hatfield, "'A Very Wary People in their Bargaining' or 'Very Good Marchandise': English Traders' Views of Free and Enslaved Africans, 1550–1650," *Slavery & Abolition* 23.4 (2004): 1–17. For analysis of eighteenth-century representations of Africa, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Roxann Wheeler, "Racializing Civility: Violence and Trade in Africa," *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 90–136; and Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56.2 (1999): 273–306.

7. Many critics of the *Interesting Narrative* attempt to explain Equiano's "contradictions" on the question of slavery, the key examples being his praise for slavery as practiced in Africa, and his anecdotes about participating in the British colonial slave system. Criticism notable for addressing these issues includes: Victor C. D. Mtubani, "The Black Voice in Eighteenth-Century Britain: African Writers Against Slavery and the Slave Trade," *Phylon* 45.2 (1984): 85–97; Paul Edwards' pamphlet, *Unreconciled Strivings and Ironic Strategies: Three Afro-British Authors of the Georgian Era: Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, Robert Wedderburn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1992); and Dwight McBride, "Speaking as 'the African': Olaudah Equiano's Moral Argument Against Slavery," *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2001), 120–50. In contrast to these scholars, Gary Gautier, in "Slavery and the Fashioning of Race in *Oroonoko*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Equiano's *Life*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 42.2 (2001): 161–79, suggests that Equiano's primary concern with confronting racial subjugation explains his apparently inconsistent attitudes toward varying forms of slavery.

8. I follow Helena Woodard in seeing Equiano as consciously responding to representations of Africa, although I am attempting to develop her argument further by providing a narrower context than the one that she establishes in *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 105. As Gates suggests in his introduction to *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), xi–xxxiv, the invocation of the question of the "authenticity" of slave narratives has long been linked to attempts to dismiss their value as historical evidence.

9. Africanus, *Remarks on the Slave Trade, and the Slavery of the Negroe: In a Series of Letters* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 8.

10. *An Answer to the Reverend James Ramsay's Essay, on the Treatment and Conversion of Slaves, in the British Sugar Colonies* (Basseterre, St. Christophers: Edward L. Low, 1784), 30, 46. The Gentlemen cite a 1772 pamphlet (30) in their contention that the West Indian slave trade amounts to rescue, given the slaying of unsold slaves in African markets. Their quotation (although they provide only a vague citation) is from An African Merchant, *A Treatise upon the Trade from Great-Britain to Africa; Humbly Recommended to the Attention of Government* (London: R. Baldwin, 1772), 10. The African Merchant provides no citation, but his claims here closely resemble an anecdote in William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, 1734 (London: Cass, 1971), 47, 100–104, and a direct assertion on 160. I will argue below for Snelgrave's importance to the pro-slave trade vision of Africa.

11. *Slavery No Oppression; or, Some New Arguments and Opinions Against the Idea of African Liberty*, (London: Lowndes and Christie, ND), 12. Peter C. Hogg, in *The African Trade and Its Suppression: A Classified and Annotated Bibliography of Books, Pamphlets, and Periodical Articles* (London: Cass, 1973), 157, dates this pamphlet to 1788.

12. *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of Enslaving Africans. . .* (Boston: Boyle, 1773), 27, 29–30. This debater (designated "B") clearly echoes the positions of William Snelgrave and the "African Merchant," but provides (or is allowed) no citations in support of his position.

13. Ibid., 36. The anti-slavery disputant offers extensive quotations from a number of travellers in his footnotes to support his position. He quotes the travelers via Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (Philadelphia: Crukshank, 1771). I will argue for Benezet's centrality to the anti-slavery vision of Africa below.

14. Ogude, in *Genius in Bondage*, argues for "Equiano's deliberate purpose, though unstated, of reversing contemporary European image [*sic*] of Africa as a land of barbarous hordes of savages, the type of image which slave traders and plantation owners paraded in the popular press," 141–42; while I agree that Equiano opposes proslavery views of Africa, I want to demonstrate that such representations were far from universal or even dominant in the period, and that anti-slavery writers were the ones enamored of depicting Africa as primitive. For an overview of British positions on—and discomfort with—slavery even in the Augustan period, see John Richardson, *Slavery and Augustan Literature: Swift, Pope, Gay* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 2006). Both demonstrate the inadequacy of the scholarly commonplace that slavery was unthinkingly accepted for the first three quarters of the eighteenth-century in Britain. Daniel James Ennis, in *Enter the Press Gang: Naval Impressment in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2002), 49, shows the use of the analogy of "slavery" to protest naval impressment.

15. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1785, ed. Frank Shuffleton (New York: Penguin, 1999), 146–47.

16. For an example of a critic taking Jefferson's attitude towards Africa as a norm rather than a polemical position, see Dwight McBride, 130, 132.

17. Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, 1789, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995), 45. All subsequent references will be to this edition and made parenthetically in the text.

18. On Equiano's claim of a "British" identity, see Carretta, "Defining a Gentleman." For examples of scholars who see Equiano's stance on slavery as troublingly inconsistent, see Mtubani, Edwards, and Gautier; for examples of those who treat his positive attitude toward British identity as problematic, see Chinua Achebe, "The Uses of African Literature," *Okike* 15 (1979): 8–17, 14–15; Chinsole; Samuels; and Thomas Doherty, "Olaudah Equiano's Journey's: The Geography of the Slave Narrative," *Partisan Review* 64.4 (1997): 572–81, 579.

19. This is the argument of the central chapter of my book manuscript, *The Grateful Slave*. See also the sources cited in note 29 below for the distinction between monogenesis and polygenesis.

20. Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 270–73.

21. Ogude, *No Roots Here*, 1–2, 15; Felicity Nussbaum, "Being a Man: Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho," *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould, (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 61, contends that Equiano is "proud" to select only his own "countrymen," seemingly meaning Igbos, for the plantation he manages, but in later editions, Equiano adds the phrase "some of whom came from Libya" to the term countrymen in this passage; *Interesting Narrative*, 205, 292 nt 569; Aravamudan, 283; Innes, 37–38. Both Innes and Aravamudan invoke Benedict Anderson's concept of the Nation as an "imagined community," but both use the concept rather loosely, suggesting that Equiano, as an individual, imagines a possible but unrealized national community, rather than participates in a larger, shared process of nation-constructing through imagination. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991). Salman Rushdie's concept of the "imaginary homeland," which does not carry the same implications of practical Nation-formation, seems much more apropos with respect to Equiano; see "Imaginary Homelands," *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta/Viking, 1992), 9–21.

22. Equiano describes meeting a black boy "transported at the sight of one of his own countrymen," 85, but the young Equiano in the scene does not appear to understand the boy's identification with him. For relevant analyses of this scene, see Nussbaum, 61, and Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 269–70.

23. See Snelgrave, 5–24 and passim. For an overview of the historiography of Dahomey in the eighteenth century and in the late twentieth century, see Robin Law, "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey," *Journal of African History* 27.2 (1986): 237–67. For Law's account of Dahomey in the eighteenth century see *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 261–344.

24. Snelgrave makes this point on 158 and 160, but develops it more forcefully in specific anecdotes, as we shall see below.

25. Gordon Turnbull, *An Apology for Negro Slavery* (London: Stuart and Stevenson, 1786), 11. Equiano's open letter to Turnbull, printed in *The Public Advertiser* February 5, 1788 , defending the anti-slavery writer James Ramsay, is reprinted in Carretta's edition of the *Interesting Narrative*, 330–32.

26. Snelgrave, 181–85. Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 2004), 129, 134 offers a portrait of a Jamaican overseer who, like Snelgrave, believes in violent racial subjugation without stressing essential racial difference.

27. The rescue of the child is on 9–13 of the unnumbered introduction; the old woman is on 104. A less specific scene of sacrifice is on 47. Barker comments on such scenes with wry wit that "Snelgrave had a suspiciously happy knack of finding or thwarting sacrifices," *African Link*, 136. Wheeler also analyzes the paradox of the sentimental slave trader in *The Complexion of Race*, 104. I discuss these scenes in more detail in the first chapter of my book manuscript, *The Grateful Slave*.

28. Snelgrave 49, 51–2.

29. John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies*, 1735 (London: Cass, 1970).

30. Barker, *African Link* 128–34; Daniel Cottom, *Cannibals and Philosophers: Bodies of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 138, 145; Geoffrey Sanborn, *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), 30–38, 70; Peter J. Kitson, "'The Eucharist of Hell'; or, Eating People is Right: Romantic Representations of Cannibalism," *Romanticism on the Net* 17 (2000) [July 21, 2005] <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/17cannibalism.html>. Several critics have considered Equiano's use of the imagery of cannibalism, although none connect it to this specific context. See Innes, 39–41; Alan Rice, "'Who's Eating Whom': The Discourse of Cannibalism in the Literature of the Black Atlantic from Equiano's Travels to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Research in African Literatures* 29.4 (1998): 106–21; and Mark Stein, "Who's Afraid of Cannibals? Some Uses of the Cannibalism Trope in Olaudah Equiano's Interesting Narrative," *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760–1838*, ed. Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis, and Sara Salih (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 96–107.

31. For discussions of the place of polygenesis in the history of racial thought see: Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981), 39–42 and passim; Nancy L. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (Hamden, CT.: Archon, 1982), 1–5 and passim; Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 136–42; Hannah F. Augstein, "Introduction," *Race: The Origins of an Idea* (London: Thoemmes, 1996), ix–xxxiii; and Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 37, 296–99.

32. See for instance: Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Aboltion of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, abridged ed. (Wilmington: R. Porter, 1816), 65–68; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black,* 286; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), 208; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 303, 330, 467; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), 196.

33. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992); and Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2003) concur in seeing "nation" as replacing race as a primary form of identity, although Colley and Kumar are very interested in the overlap between religious and national identity.

34. Versions of this argument appear, for instance, in James Woods, *Thoughts on the Slavery of the Negroes*, 2nd ed. (London: James Phillips, 1784), 15; James Ramsay, *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784), 232, 234; William Belsham, *Essays, Philosophical, Historical, and Literary*, 2 vols. (Dublin: J. Moore, 1790), 2:200; Thomas Gisborne, *The Principles of Moral Philosophy Investigated*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Bensley, 1790), 149, 158; Zephaniah Swift, *An Oration on Domestic Slavery* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1791), 11. An early example is in Sarah Scott's novel *The History of Sir George Ellison*, 1766, ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1996), 10.

35. Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, 2nd ed., 1788 (London: Cass, 1968), 33. Benezet cites this quotation to 369 of Smith, whereas in fact it appears on 228. William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea*, 1744 (London: Cass, 1967).

36. James Field Stanfield, *Observations on a Guinea Voyage* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 21.

37. Stanfield, 21, 20.

38. Robert Norris, *Memoirs of The Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomy*, 1789 (London: Cass, 1968). Given the publication date, Equiano may not have consulted this book directly. However, the book does include an earlier pamphlet, Norris's 1788 pamphlet, *Short Account of the African Slave Trade*, as an appendix. The pamphlet makes similar arguments, although in more general and less piquant terms.

39. Norris, 8

40. Ibid., 8

41. Ibid., 4.

42. On the concept of amelioration as a "third position," see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 87.

43. Philmore, *Two Dialogues on the Man-Trade* (London, J. Waugh, 1760), 17–18.

44. For the argument that "race" was still open-ended and under formation into the last decades of the eighteenth century, see Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race* and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 83–126.

45. Examples include Achebe, "Thoughts"; Chinsole; Mtubani; Mottolese; Samuels; Sabino and Hall; and Gautier.

46. Ogude, in *No Roots Here*, argues that "Benin" was a very vague term in West Indian and slave-trade discourses and suggests that Equiano invokes it in an equally vague sense, 4. However, in *Genius*

in Bondage, Ogude also suggests that Equiano derives his geographical understanding of Benin from European sources, 134–35. The example below would seem to connect Equiano's usage of the term to the Metropolitan discourse on Africa and slavery.

47. Jack P. Greene, "Liberty, Slavery, and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-Century West Indies," *Slavery & Abolition* 21.1 (2000): 1–31; on the development of "white privilege" in the colonies, see for instance Theodore Allen, *The Invention of The White Race Vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994), and *The Invention of the White Race Vol. 2: Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997); and Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997).

48. These contradictions were at the heart of the Somerset case which arguably initiated the late century debate on slavery; for the definitive history of the case and reactions to it, see F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), 77–176. Two recent books cover this case; both largely depend on Shyllon's account: Steven M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial that Led to the End of Human Slavery* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2005) and Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 44–53. Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, and the American Revolution* (New York: Ecco 2006) and Brown, *Moral Capital,* both treat the Somerset decision as a watershed event helping make palpable the contradiction between colonial slavery and British liberty.

49. A. E. Afigbo sees Equiano's suggestions of a connection between Igbos and Jews in the context of European biblical interpretations of the origins of Africans, including the "Hametic Hypothesis" and dismisses it as absurd; "Traditions of Igbo Origins: A Comment," *History in Africa* 10 (1983): 1–11. On the European context of these traditions, see Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103–42.

50. Key eighteenth-century texts arguing for colonialism as a solution to the problem of slavery include Ramsay's *Inquiry into the Effects of Putting a Stop to the African Slave Trade and of Granting Liberty to the Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784); Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Phillips, 1788); Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on Evils of Slavery*, 1787, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1999). For scholars who investigate the close link between colonialism and abolition in the late eighteenth century implied by such texts, see Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves"; Philip Curtin, *Image of Africa*; and Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

51. For a brief narrative account of the Sierra Leone expedition and Equiano's tempestuous involvement in it, see James Walvin, "Back to Africa," *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745–1797* (London: Cassell, 1998), 137–50. Aravamudan offers a reading of Equiano's involvement in the project, 253–69. Despite his problems with the Sierra Leone project, Equiano concludes the *Interesting Narrative* with a glowing vision of the benefits of colonialism in Africa; see 232–36.

52. See Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race* and Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* for dating of the emergence of modern racial difference to the end of the century. See Roxann Wheeler, "'Betrayed by Some of My Own Complexion': Cugoano, Abolition, and the Contemporary Language of Racialism," *Genius in Bondage*, 17–38 and Peter Kitson, "'Candid Reflections': The Idea of Race in Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition*, 11–25 for arguments connecting this dating of conceptions of race to the abolition debate.

53. See Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 1998) and Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native Literatures* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003).

54. Ascriptions of national character such as those quoted here are standard; these specific examples can be found in Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: J. Stockdale, 1793) 2:72. Edwards adapts the argument of the political slavery of Africans by making it a characteristic of specific groups—here the Whidaws or Pawpaws—rather than all Africans; 2:73.