



Newman, S. P. (2019) Freedom-seeking slaves in England and Scotland, 1700-1780. *English Historical Review*, 134(570), pp. 1136-1168.

(doi: [10.1093/ehr/cez292](https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cez292))

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Deposited on: 22 October 2018

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## Freedom-Seeking Slaves in England and Scotland, 1700–1780\*

Liverpool, October 6, 1738.

RUN away, a Gold Coast Negro, about five Foot six Inches high, with three Marks down each Cheek belonging to his Country, with a cross Pettee, and an R branded on his left Shoulder, which is the Plantation Mark; he had on when he went away, an old Fustian Frock with Brass Buttons, and a green Freze Waistcoat, both lined with yellow, and Leather Breeches. Whoever will apprehend and send him to the next Gaol, and give Notice to Mr. Jeremiah Riley, in Liverpool, or to Mr. John Boys, at the Golden Bull in Surry-Street in the Strand, shall have Two Guineas Reward, and all reasonable Charges.

Note, He is an Apprentice for seven Years, and a Slave.

*Daily Advertiser* (London), 11 October 1738, p. 1.

We do not know the name of this man who absconded from his master in Liverpool in the autumn of 1738, and his age and personal characteristics are a mystery to us. But we do know that he came from the region of West Africa known as the Gold Coast, where he may well have been born into a Fantee, Akan, Ewe, Ga or Andangme-speaking community. The scarification—known to the British as ‘country marks’—that marked his cheeks proved his African birth, for these rituals were not continued in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> He had endured the Middle Passage, most likely as a child or young man, and the letter R and cross *pattée* branded onto his left shoulder provided evidence that a colonist in the Americas—quite likely a planter—had purchased the man and set him to work. He was then taken to Britain, most probably by a master who employed him as a personal servant. This man’s brass-buttoned frock coat, green waistcoat and leather breeches suggest that he was no longer undertaking the manual labour most commonly associated with the enslaved.

\* Research for this article was supported by a Research Project Grant awarded by the Leverhulme Trust; see *Runaway Slaves in Britain: Bondage, Freedom and Race in the Eighteenth Century* (Univ. of Glasgow, 2015–), available at <https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/>. The author is grateful to the other members of the project team, Nelson Mundell, Roslyn Chapman and Stephen Mullen, for their help and advice. Earlier versions of this paper were presented as the Webb Lecture at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County, at the Atlantic History Seminar at New York University, at the Slavery Studies Group at Dartmouth College, and at the Folger Institute of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC. The author is grateful for all feedback and suggestions, including the comments of the anonymous reviewers.

1. For more on ritual scarification, see P.E. Lovejoy, ‘Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora’, in A. Apter and L. Derby, eds., *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 99–138; M.A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), pp. 39–42, 97–8, 121–4.

What we do know is that in the autumn of 1738 this man chose to escape from his master and seek self-determination and a new life for himself; the appearance of this notice in a London newspaper indicates how far his master believed the man might have gone. The advertisement's final sentence indicated that the runaway 'is an Apprentice for seven Years, and a Slave'—a seemingly contradictory combination of the voluntary service of an individual bound by an apprenticeship agreement with the hereditary bondage of the enslaved in Britain's New World colonies. Perhaps this man had been promised freedom if he served for a period of seven years; yet the wording suggests that, as far as his master was concerned, the man remained enslaved, at least for the time being. The offer of a significant reward of two guineas is suggestive of the runaway's value to his master.

During the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, white Britons returning from the Americas and South Asia regularly brought enslaved people with them. Some accompanied visiting colonists, while others came with merchants, planters, clergymen and physicians who were establishing or returning to homes in Britain. Still more were owned by army officers, or by the captains and officers of royal naval and merchant ships. Once on British soil, some of these bound workers moved away from enslavement towards freedom, working as indentured, apprenticed or hired servants and employees.<sup>2</sup> In the nature and conditions of their work, the lives of these people of colour appear far closer to those of white British servants than of non-white enslaved people: working as a gentleman's manservant, a lady's maid, a coach driver or even a carpenter or craftsman in Britain was a world away from labour on sugar or tobacco plantations. By bringing enslaved people to Britain, white men and women necessarily entered a social and legal context entirely different from the colonies in America, the Caribbean and South Asia. Some masters and mistresses recognised this, legally freeing or promising freedom to those who accompanied them, and almost all slave owners in Britain were unable to exercise the full violent control available to slave owners in, for example, Jamaica.

Racial slavery in Britain might appear less rigid and less violent than in the colonies, but this did not mean that all slave owners in Britain had abandoned their claim to legal ownership of their bound servants. The use of words such as 'servant' in runaway advertisements for people of colour did not necessarily indicate that the subject was as free as a white person, and some of these 'servants' remained bound by the memory and the threat of a return to colonial slavery. Britons in the colonies commonly referred to enslaved domestic and household workers as servants, and probably brought such language back with them as part of their understanding of

2. K. Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales during the Period of the British Slave Trade, c.1660–1807* (Manchester, 2009), pp. 77–101.

the nature and status of people of colour. For example, in 1770 the *Virginia Gazette* published an advertisement for the sale of all of the property of the late Bernard Moore, including 'sixteen House Servants'. Similarly, an advertisement the following year in the *South Carolina Gazette* offered for sale 'A Young negro MAN servant', capable of doing 'his work as completely as any servant whatever'.<sup>3</sup> Evidence from British newspaper notices advertising enslaved people for sale, or seeking the recapture of runaways, suggests that the large majority of enslaved people transported from the colonies to Britain were domestic workers and personal servants. It is likely that white slave owners might continue to refer to such people as servants, although in the minds of many masters and mistresses this term did not, in and of itself, denote any change in enslaved status.

This article is based on newspaper advertisements which have been located as part of the research project 'Runaway Slaves in Britain'. These include eighty notices advertising enslaved people for sale, and 831 notices for enslaved or bound people who had absconded from their masters. The advertisements were identified by reading through thousands of issues of complete or partial runs of more than sixty English and Scottish newspapers, and since the completion of the first phase of the database more advertisements are appearing (usually from newspapers which have not been digitised, or for which digital searching is unreliable). It is likely that some masters did not bother advertising for runaways, and many enslaved people may never have attempted to escape, so these advertisements point to the existence of a much larger population of bound and enslaved people.<sup>4</sup>

Emblematic of a master's success in the plantations or in colonial trade, well-dressed and well-trained African or Asian domestic servants were racialised symbols of wealth. Representations of young black male, and occasionally female, domestics abounded in eighteenth-century British art. There was a cachet associated with ownership and public display of a liveried black servant boy or girl, as demonstrated by eighteenth-century portraits such as the painting of the duke of Devonshire and associates with an enslaved boy in attendance shown as [Figure 1](#).<sup>5</sup>

3. 'To be sold to the highest Bidders', *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 8 Nov. 1770; 'To be sold, for a Fault', *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 9 Apr. 1771.

4. The advertisements can be found on the *Runaway Slaves* project website, at <https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/database/>. (New advertisements will be added in periodic updates.)

5. See also, for example, the black boy pictured serving a white man and woman on a mid-eighteenth-century porcelain tea bowl and saucer (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum no. 414.1116/&tA-1885); Archibald McLauchlan's *John Glassford and his Family* (c.1767) showing a black servant boy to the side of a wealthy Glasgow tobacco merchant's family (Glasgow Museums, no. 2887); the young black boy standing beside the Jacobite James Drummond, duke of Perth, has a silver collar around his neck underlining his enslaved status in John Baptiste de Medina, *James Drummond, 2nd titular duke of Perth* (c.1700: National Galleries of Scotland, PG 1531); and the black boy polishing crystal goblets to the side of a family group in Gawen Hamilton, *Group portrait, probably of the Raikes family* (1730–32: Yale Center for British Art, B1976.7.32). Robert Raikes was a newspaper editor near Bristol, and closely connected to the slave and sugar-trading commerce of the port. See D. Bindman, 'The Black Presence in British Art: Sixteenth



**Figure 1.** Unknown artist, *Elihu Yale; William Cavendish, the second duke of Devonshire; Lord James Cavendish; Mr. Tunstal; and an Enslaved Servant* (c.1708; Yale Center for British Art, B1970.1). Image courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Andrew Cavendish, eleventh duke of Devonshire.

The principal aim of this article is to demonstrate that many enslaved Africans and their descendants who were brought to Britain as domestic servants, craftsmen and sailors remained bound by and vulnerable to the conditions of New World slavery, despite the fact that their daily lives and working environments were far removed from life and labour in the colonies. It argues that, despite apparent similarities in working conditions between white and black servants, the strictures of, the memories of, and the ever-present threat of a return to, the rigorous and legally sanctioned racial slavery of the Americas continued to define the lives of enslaved people in Britain. While Britain was never a ‘slave society’, like colonies such as Virginia or Jamaica, the ethos

and Seventeenth Centuries’, in id. and H.L. Gates, eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, III: *From the ‘Age of Discovery’ to the Age of Abolition*. Pt. 1: *Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 235–70; G. Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), pp. 29–89. We know far less about enslaved or bound workers brought to Britain from South Asia: Emma Rothschild describes Bell or Belinda, an enslaved South Asian woman in eighteenth-century Britain, while Ellen Filor briefly considers South Asian servants in the early nineteenth century. See E. Rothschild, *The Inner Lives of Empire: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), pp. 87–91, 291–9, 295–9, and E.S. Filor, ‘Complicit Colonials: Border Scots and the Indian Empire, c.1780–1857’ (Univ. College London Ph.D. thesis, 2014), pp. 205–14.

of those plantation societies was carried over to Britain in the lives of enslaved people—people who sometimes sought to resist their bondage by escaping.<sup>6</sup>

## I

In 1757, Benjamin Franklin and his son William travelled from Philadelphia to London. Like others of their class and wealth, the two men brought with them enslaved personal servants: Peter for Benjamin, and 11-year-old King for William. Benjamin wrote to his wife Deborah that Peter ‘behaves as well as I can expect’, and that ‘we rub on pretty comfortably’. North America’s most famous colonist had owned Peter and his wife Jemima for about seven years, and it is quite possible that Peter’s desire for reunion with his wife in Philadelphia provided a powerful disincentive to escaping from his enslavement and finding refuge in London’s growing black community.<sup>7</sup>

King, however, was a different proposition. Within a year of their arrival in London he took advantage of William and Benjamin’s absence to run away from their lodgings on Craven Street. In a letter to his wife Deborah, Benjamin would later report that King ‘was soon found in Suffolk, where he had been taken into the Service of a Lady that was very fond of the Merit of making him a Christian, and contributing to his Education and Improvement’. Noting that King had been ‘of little Use, and often in Mischief’, Benjamin reported to Deborah that William had ‘consented to her [the unnamed woman in Suffolk] keeping him while we stay in England’.<sup>8</sup> But when it occurred to him that King’s new custodian might ‘persuade Billy to sell him to her’, Benjamin made it clear that his son continued to claim ownership of the young enslaved boy. At some point between 1760 and early 1762, King left his new mistress and returned to London: perhaps she had died or had tired of her new charge; King may have again escaped, or perhaps William had reclaimed him. But if William had done so, it was not for long, for on 16 February 1762 he published an advertisement in the *Public Advertiser*, describing King and offering a two-guinea reward for his capture and return. Two months later, he published a second and more detailed advertisement in the *London Chronicle*. Writing and

6. Some runaways were from South Asia, and their experiences of enslavement and service probably differed from those of African or indigenous enslaved people from the Americas. However, it was Africans and their descendants who dominated, and almost all discussion and debate about both individual enslaved people and the larger institution was shaped by New World slavery. This essay focuses on African or African-descended bound workers in Britain.

7. G.B. Nash, ‘Franklin and Slavery’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, cl (2006), pp. 619–20; id., ‘Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., xxx (1973), p. 237.

8. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, IX: *January 1, 1760 through December 31, 1761*, ed. L.W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, CT, 1966), pp. 174–5 (Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, London, 27 June 1760).

placing these runaway slave advertisements would have been second nature to the Franklins, for the newspaper profits that had made Benjamin wealthy accrued in part from the fees which masters paid for newspaper advertisements for the sale or recapture of escaped bound labourers. By the time that Franklin transferred management of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to David Hall in 1748, these notices constituted almost one-quarter of all of the newspaper's advertisements.<sup>9</sup>

William's first advertisement indicated that 'a likely black BOY, named King, about Sixteen Years of Age' had run away from his master's home in Craven Street. In addition to 'a good Violin', King had taken with him a large quantity of clothes, including a good-quality hat, an old blue frock or tunic, a waistcoat, leather breeches, four shirts, three pairs of stockings and a new pair of shoes. Noting that King had left his servant's livery behind 'the better to pass for a free negroe', William thought it likely that the youth would attempt to join one of the many privateers recruiting crew members during the Seven Years War. What Benjamin had interpreted as King's 'Mischief' may well have been assertions of resistance and independence on the part of a young man who did not relish the idea of returning to America's slave society, and who thought his chances of securing liberty were greater in Britain. Benjamin returned to America for two years in 1762, and William followed him a few months later, taking Peter back to a society in which racial slavery was explicitly sanctioned by law. In his second advertisement, William inadvertently revealed the teenager's increased independence, noting that the enslaved boy had rejected the single name that had most likely been imposed on him by his mother's owner. While the Franklins continued to refer to him as King, the increasingly independent young man 'calls himself JOHN KING'.<sup>10</sup>

Like other enslaved Africans in Britain, John King came from a colonial society in which racial slavery was normative and enshrined in law. Enslaved Africans constituted approximately 70 per cent of the combined African and European arrivals to Britain's American and Caribbean colonies in the period up to 1776. Between 1600 and 1775, more than 1,811,000 enslaved Africans were brought to labour in England's and then Britain's colonies, their numbers supplemented both by tens of thousands of enslaved indigenous Americans and by the progeny of all of these enslaved people. Together, the enslaved massively outnumbered

9. *Ibid.*, p. 175; 'Absented from his Master's Service', *Public Advertiser* (London), 16 Feb. 1762, p. 3, and 'Absented from his Master's Service', *London Chronicle*, 10 Apr. 1762. For analysis of Franklin's reliance on income from advertisements for enslaved runaways or enslaved people being offered for sale, see D. Waldstricher, 'Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., lvi (1999), p. 250.

10. 'Absented from his Master's Service', *Public Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1762, p. 3, and 'Absented from his Master's Service', *London Chronicle*, 10 Apr. 1762; *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, IX, ed. Labaree, p. 175 (Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, 27 June 1760).

the approximately 789,000 migrants from Europe who arrived in Britain's Caribbean and North American colonies during these same years.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly in the plantation colonies, this huge imbalance created large numbers of potentially rebellious enslaved people, thereby prompting colonial legislatures to fashion slave laws and codes into essential foundations of colonial British society and economy. An early example was the Barbados Assembly's Act for the Governing of Negroes (1688), which was prefaced by the observation that the island's rapidly increasing population of enslaved Africans 'are of barbarous, wild and savage nature ... [which] renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the Laws, Customs and Practices of Our Nation'.<sup>12</sup> These colonial laws transcended English precedents in constructing and delineating legal categories of slavery and freedom, and of blackness and whiteness. Throughout Britain's American and Caribbean colonies, slavery was named, defined and enshrined in the law, imposing a form of 'social death' on the enslaved.<sup>13</sup> The situation was completely different in Great Britain itself, where a very small black population was of far less concern.<sup>14</sup> In Britain, there was no danger of slave

11. The numbers of European and African migrants have been drawn from J. Horn and P.D. Morgan, 'Settlers and Slaves: European and African Migration to Early Modern British America', in E. Mancke and C. Shammas, eds., *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore, MD, 2005), p. 24, Table 1.2. See also A. Games, 'Migration', in D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (2nd edn., New York, 2009), pp. 38–45; and 'Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade—Estimates', *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (version 3; Emory University, 2013–), available at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates> (accessed 20 July 2017).

12. *Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados, from 1643, to 1672, Inclusive; Carefully Revised, innumerable Errors Corrected; and the Whole Compared and Examined, with the Original Acts, in the Secretary's Office*, ed. Richard Hall (London, 1764), pp. 112–13.

13. A Maryland law made this clear as early as 1639, noting 'that all the Inhabitants of this Province being Christians (Slaves excepted[)] Shall have and enjoy all such liberties immunities priviledges and free customs ... as any natural born subject of England hath': 'An Act for the Liberties of the People', ed. William Hand Browne, *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland*, I (Baltimore, MD, 1883), p. 41. Orlando Patterson famously argued that, as one of the most extreme forms of social domination, slavery entailed the social death of its victims: *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1982). For a brief survey of the development of slave laws in early modern North America, see S. Hadden, 'The Fragmented Laws of Slavery in the Colonial and Revolutionary Era', in M. Grossberg and C. Tomlins, eds., *The Cambridge History of Law in America, I: Early America, 1580–1815* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 253–87; the development of slave law in Barbados, Jamaica, South Carolina and beyond has been delineated in E.B. Rugemer, 'The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., lxx (2013), pp. 429–58. For an introduction to the development of the *Code Noir*, see V. Palmer, 'The Origins and Authors of the *Code Noir*', in J. Schafer and W. Billings, eds., *An Uncommon Experience: Law and Judicial Institutions in Louisiana, 1803–2003* (Lafayette, LA, 1997), pp. 331–59.

14. For estimates of the black population of London, see K. Chater, 'Black People in England, 1660–1807', *Parliamentary History*, xxvi (2007), pp. 68–72; F.O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (Oxford, 1974), p. 203; N. Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780–1830* (London, 1996), p. 20, 35; Gerzina, *Black London*, p. 5. For more on the black population of eighteenth-century Britain, see Chater, *Untold Histories*; P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984; new edn., London, 2010), pp. 1–132; J. Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England* (London, 1971); J.W. Cairns, 'Slavery without a *Code Noir*: Scotland, 1700–78', in F.M. Larkin and N.M. Dawson, eds., *Lawyers, the Law and History* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 148–78; I. Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756–1838* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 9–40.



rebellion or social disorder occasioned by a large free black population, and neither England nor Scotland passed any kind of slave codes. Eighteenth-century Britain was a society with occasional slaveholding, in stark contrast with the slaveholding societies of Britain's colonies, which were constructed around, and dependent upon, large-scale and strictly controlled enslaved labour forces.

Contradictory legal opinions and court decisions relating to slavery created confusion and uncertainty about the status of enslaved people in Britain, an uncertainty exacerbated by the variety in practices of mastery among men and women who brought enslaved people to England and Scotland. In England, the Cartwright Case of 1569 and Chief Justice Sir John Holt's 1701 ruling that 'as soon as a Negro comes into *England*, he becomes free' declared against slavery. Paradoxically, however, a quarter-century after Holt's judgement, Sir Philip Yorke and Charles Talbot (the attorney-general and solicitor-general respectively) announced that 'We are of Opinion, That a Slave by coming from the *West-Indies* to *Great Britain* or *Ireland*, either with or without his Master, doth not become free, and that his Master's Property or Right in him is not thereby determined or varied'. In 1768, Sir John Fielding's legal commentary took issue with the argument that baptism and marriage in Britain entitled enslaved people to freedom.<sup>15</sup> The legal status of slavery and the enslaved was equally confused in Scotland. In 1687, the Lords of Council and Session ruled in the case of *Reid v. Scot* that 'we have no slaves in Scotland, and mothers cannot sell their bairns'. Yet in *Sheddan v. Montgomery*, a case about the right of Robert Sheddan to return an enslaved boy named Jamie Montgomery to perpetual bondage in Virginia, a different result seemed likely. A manuscript note added to some of the court documentation recorded that Montgomery 'having

15. For the Cartwright case, see John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* (8 vols., London, 1721), ii, 468, available at *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol2> (accessed 24 May 2018). The original records of the case have been lost. For John Holt's ruling, see the report on *Smith v. Brown and Cooper* (1701) in *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench: With Some Special Cases in the Courts of Chancery, Common Pleas, and Exchequer*, ed. William Salkeld (6th edn., London, 1795), p. 666. For the Yorke Talbot ruling, see 'Case of the Planters and Negroes', *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), xi (1741), p. 186. John Fielding, *Extracts From Such of the Penal Laws, As Relate to the Peace and Good Order of this Metropolis* (London, 1768), p. 144. Miranda Kaufmann has expertly outlined this confusion in English law: 'English Common Law, Slavery and', in E. Martone, ed., *Encyclopedia of Blacks in European History and Culture* (2 vols., Westport, CT, 2008), i, 200–203. See also G. Van Cleve, 'Somerset's Case and its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective', *Law and History Review*, xxiv (2006), pp. 601–45, and the other essays in 'Forum: Somerset's Case Revisited', in the same issue. See also J. Oldham, *The Mansfield Manuscripts and the Growth of English Law in the Eighteenth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), and id., *English Common Law in the Age of Mansfield* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), pp. 305–23; W.R. Cotter, 'The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England', *History*, lxxix (1994), pp. 31–56; R. Paley, 'Mansfield, Slavery and the Law in England, 1772–1830', in N. Landau, ed., *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660–1830* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 165–84. For a discussion of the agency of enslaved people in striving for freedom, often via the courts, see D.A. Lorimer, 'Black Slaves and English Liberty: A Re-examination of Racial Slavery in England', *Immigrants and Minorities*, iii (1984), pp. 121–50.

died during the dependence of the Cause, no decision was ever given in it—But it seemed to be the Opinion of the Lords, that he ought to go back to his Master’, and presumably on to Virginia.<sup>16</sup>

The epochal cases of *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) in England and *Knight v. Wedderburn* (1778) in Scotland brought only partial resolution. In the former case, Lord Mansfield did not ‘intend to emancipate slaves in England’, yet his decision had a transformative effect on the law of slavery in England and beyond. It was a case in which the legal rights that slave owners enjoyed in the colonies clashed with the law and beliefs about freedom in England, and Mansfield ruled that certain inalienable rights extended even to enslaved Africans brought to England. These included protection against abusive punishments and against forced relocation to the colonies in which chattel slavery was legal (Mansfield ruled that a writ of habeas corpus could prevent such action). He did not, however, declare slavery illegal either in England or in the colonies.<sup>17</sup> Six years later, in the *Knight v. Wedderburn* decision, the Lords of Session in Edinburgh upheld a lower court ruling that any enslaved person entering the country became free. Yet even this seemingly conclusive decision papered over disagreements. Eight of the twelve judges concluded ‘That the State of Slavery is not recognis’d by the Laws of this Kingdom and is inconsistent with the principles thereof and Found That the Regulations in Jamaica concerning slaves do not extend to this Kingdom’. But two judges believed that Knight remained a slave, subject to the laws of Jamaica, and two others thought that service for life without wages was legal in Scotland.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, as this article will demonstrate, even in the aftermath of legal rulings that appeared to make colonial slavery unenforceable in England and Scotland, some slave owners continued to bring enslaved people into Britain. On occasion, a few even flouted the Somerset and Knight decisions by taking or sending enslaved people back to colonial slave societies. For most of the eighteenth century, masters who brought enslaved people to Britain tended to carry with them a strong sense of the validity and the legality of racial slavery, an institution they deemed to be essential to the success of the British colonies and the British economy

16. *Reid v. Scot of Harden and His Lady* (1687), in John Lauder of Fountainhall, *The Decisions of the Lords of Council And Session, From June 6th, 1678 to July 30th, 1712* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1759–61), i. 439; Edinburgh, Signet Library, Session Papers, vol. 58, no. 42, *Memorial for Robert Sheddan of Morrice Hill, Late Merchant in Glasgow* (9 July 1756), p. 1. For more on the law and slavery in Scotland see Cairns, ‘Slavery without a *Code Noir*’; J.W. Cairns, ‘After Somerset: The Scottish Experience’, *Journal of Legal History*, xxxiii (2012), pp. 291–312; id., ‘The Definition of Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Thinking: Not the True Roman Slavery’, in J. Allain, ed., *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 61–84.

17. Van Cleve, ‘*Somerset’s Case*’, pp. 602, 603. This article (and the forum accompanying it) adds weight to this ‘prevailing view’ of Mansfield’s decision (p. 602). See also Paley, ‘Mansfield, Slavery and the Law in England’.

18. Quoted in Cairns, ‘Definition of Slavery’, p. 80. See also J.W. Cairns, ‘Stoicism, Slavery, and Law’, *Grotiana*, xxii–xxiii (2001–2), pp. 224–30.

as a whole. Such masters saw nothing in English or Scottish law which invalidated their rights under colonial laws to hold enslaved men and women as chattel property on British soil. As a consequence, and despite occasional court rulings, the memory of colonial enslavement and the threat of a return to it shaped the experiences of many of the enslaved people who were brought to Britain during the eighteenth century.

The everyday experience of slavery in Britain differed dramatically from slavery in the colonies. In the Caribbean and America, the vast majority of enslaved people worked in the fields, and on tasks associated with the growing, harvesting and processing of staple crops such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo and coffee. Only a small proportion of enslaved people in the colonies worked as craftsmen or as domestic servants, but it was from this small and unrepresentative group that many of the slave owners chose favoured enslaved servants to accompany them to Britain. Judging by advertisements offering enslaved domestic workers for sale, or seeking the recapture of enslaved domestic runaways, the vast majority of enslaved and bound people brought to work in English and Scottish households were male.<sup>19</sup> This contrasted with both the enslaved domestic workforce in the colonies and free white domestic workers in Britain, for each of these groups was overwhelmingly female. Of thirty-three enslaved domestic and household workers advertised for sale in British newspapers, twenty-nine (88 per cent) were male and only four (12 per cent) female. Moreover, only 13 per cent of newspaper advertisements for runaways identified the escaped person as female. Some of these bound and enslaved children and youths may have been the children of the merchants, planters, doctors and even clergymen who brought or sent them back to Britain; if so, very few were legally acknowledged as such.<sup>20</sup> The vast majority of British domestic servants were female and therefore the young and predominantly male enslaved domestics and personal servants were quite distinctive.

The enslaved in Britain did not work under the whips of overseers and drivers in sugar-cane and tobacco fields. On first appearances, black labour in Britain did not look anything like New World slavery, and lawmakers and judges did not feel pressured quickly and definitively

19. In 1806 P. Colquhoun estimated that 800,000 of 910,000 servants in England and Wales were female. See C. Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 37.

20. While it is true that enslaved girls and women were less likely to run the risks of escaping, females nonetheless constituted approximately one-quarter of runaways in Jamaica; see S.P. Newman, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Escaped Slaves in Late-Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Century Jamaica', *William and Mary Quarterly*, forthcoming in 2019/20 and available at the time of writing from OI Reader (Open W&MQ), [https://oieahc-cf.wm.edu/wmq/browse\\_toc.cfm?issue\\_num=OpenWMQ\\_2018](https://oieahc-cf.wm.edu/wmq/browse_toc.cfm?issue_num=OpenWMQ_2018). For enslaved children in Scotland, see D. MacKinnon, 'Slave Children: Scotland's Children as Chattels at Home and Abroad in the Eighteenth Century', in J. Nugent and E. Ewan, eds., *Children and Youth in Premodern Scotland before the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 120–35. For an excellent discussion of domestic servants, including the enslaved, see Steedman, *Labours Lost*, pp. 36–64.

to delineate the status and rights—or lack thereof—of enslaved people in Britain. This has led some historians to conclude that slavery as we commonly understand it did not really exist in eighteenth-century Britain, for in many aspects of their daily existence black people in Britain were treated much like everybody else. Indeed, some of the formerly enslaved people brought to Britain were subsequently freed. If slavery is defined in terms of the everyday experience of enslavement and the laws which supported it in the Caribbean and American colonies, then these historians surely have a point. In 2007, one of the leading historians of the black presence in eighteenth-century Britain assembled a database of more than four thousand black people in the country, and found that ‘It is extremely rare ... to find anyone called a slave’. These historians conclude that, to all intents and purposes, slavery as we commonly understand it evaporated on British soil. Conditions, as we have seen, were enormously different from those of the enslaved in the Caribbean and North America, and as domestic servants and artisans most experienced what some historians have termed ‘near slavery’.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, it is clear that some slave owners changed the status of the enslaved people they brought with them to Britain. A few immediately freed their slaves, while others promised them freedom in exchange for a period of service. Yet there is little evidence that such promises were regularly protected by written legal contracts, and the word of a master was no cast-iron guarantee. Should a master return to the colonies and take a bound or enslaved person with them, colonial courts would have required full and proper legal documentation before accepting that a slave had been freed. Colonial courts would always take a master’s word over that of a slave, who was not even allowed to testify. Upon the death of a master, and in the absence of such documentation proving freedom, a master’s heirs might choose to view a slave as part of the estate rather than as a free person. Despite the seemingly benign nature of bondage in eighteenth-century Britain, many of the people who were bought and sold or who attempted to escape were still defined by their enslaved status. Perhaps traumatised by violent relocation from Africa, and by separation from communities there and in the Americas, enslaved people in Britain were subject to the whims of masters and mistresses who could, and sometime did, return them to the unrestricted slavery of the Caribbean and North America.

The path from New World slavery to liberty on British free soil was at best an uncertain one. Daily life, work and even the law in England and

21. Chater, ‘Black People in England’, pp. 82, 72; Van Cleve, ‘*Somerset’s Case*’, pp. 603–4. Chater’s database was created primarily from parish records, but also from newspapers, coroners’ court records, wills, diaries and correspondence. For a summary of work arguing that most enslaved people became free once resident on the free soil of Britain or other European countries, see S. Peabody and K. Grinberg, ‘Free Soil: The Generation and Circulation of an Atlantic Legal Principle’, *Slavery and Abolition*, xxxii (2011), pp. 331–9.

Scotland may often have allowed black people to live, work and worship in a state of relative parity with whites. Yet newspapers printed in England and Scotland during the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century reveal that many white masters were in no doubt that the black men, women and children they brought to Britain were still slaves and property. John Kiddoll expressed the opinion of many British slave owners when in 1765 he described a runaway 'Negro Man, by Name JOHN GIFT' as 'the real Property of the above Kiddoll', using language and principles common in the British Caribbean and Americas, where enslaved people were legally defined as a form of property akin to real estate.<sup>22</sup>

White slave owners who had experienced and benefited from New World racial slavery often shared an internalised racial dynamic which enabled them to accept as natural their right to own black people and dispose of them as they chose, whether in the colonies or in Britain. At the same time, African-born slaves who experienced the horrors of the Middle Passage and who had then endured Caribbean or North American bondage had undergone almost unimaginable psychological trauma. Transportation to the British Isles, and exposure to a radically different society, might enable the enslaved to begin to conceive of alternative lives. In Britain, it might be possible to live free in a multi-racial society, enjoying baptism, inter-racial marriage and other radical possibilities that were illegal acts, if not capital offences, in the Americas. But such new beginnings cannot have been quickly and easily adopted, for the mental and physical subjugation inherent in racial slavery, and the social death so memorably framed by Orlando Patterson, could not quickly or easily be cast off. Olaudah Equiano's autobiography provides eloquent testimony of the lengthy struggles in making not just a physical but also a psychological journey from slavery to freedom. Writing about being sold by his owner in Gravesend to the master of a ship bound for the West Indies, Equiano recalled that it was in England that this 'new slavery' had been initiated, and at the time he had felt powerless to resist. For the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, Britain may not have been a slave society like Jamaica or Virginia, but it was nonetheless a society inhabited by slave owners and by enslaved people. Newspapers provide telling evidence that enslaved people were bought and sold in the same fashion that they were in the colonies, but they reveal too the ways in which some of the enslaved sought to steal themselves from their masters and to escape from slavery to freedom.<sup>23</sup>

22. 'On Wednesday the 2d ... John Gift, absented himself', *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), 9 Jan. 1765, p. 1. See also R.W. Copeland, 'The Nomenclature of Enslaved Africans as Real Property or Chattels Personal: Legal Fiction, Judicial Interpretation, Legislative Designation; or, Was a Slave a Slave by Any Other Name', *Journal of Black Studies*, xl (2010), pp. 946–59.

23. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African: Written By Himself* (2 vols., London, 1789), i. 180; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

## II

As many as one in eleven people in eighteenth-century England were servants, rising to one in five or six in London. The figures include a great many domestic servants, who worked everywhere from modest tradesmen's and artisans' homes to the town and country houses of the elite. Perhaps 80 per cent of domestic servants were female, and for these women this choice of work could provide a degree of agency. In theory, domestic servants were protected by oral contracts, usually annual, which specified wages and terms of employment and notice. According to Carolyn Steedman, a servant 'in the eighteenth-century household was a contracted employee who possessed rights within the relationship that could be—and sometimes were—upheld by law'.<sup>24</sup>

Among the ranks of these domestic servants were people of colour, most of them of African origin, but including a few from India, and an even smaller number of indigenous Americans. In stark contrast to British domestic servants, these Africans, South Asians and occasional indigenous North Americans were overwhelmingly male, and while some were contracted or indentured servants a significant number were enslaved. On occasion, British newspapers included advertisements placed by people seeking to purchase such slaves, as when Henry Grey, third earl of Stamford, sought out 'Any Person that will sell a Negro Boy, strait legg'd and clean shap'd', or when 'Y.Z.' sought 'Two Negro Men and Two negro Women slaves'.<sup>25</sup> It was, however, far more common for newspapers to advertise enslaved people for sale, and a sample of eighty such notices published in English and Scottish newspapers between 1705 and 1779 offered a total of ninety people for purchase.<sup>26</sup>

The enslaved domestics offered for sale in English and Scottish newspapers differed from white British domestic servants in key ways. Not only were enslaved domestics usually male but most were children, and sixty (75 per cent) were under the age of seventeen or described as 'boy' or 'girl', while eight of these (10 per cent) were identified as being less than 10 years old. Most strikingly of all, of course, these enslaved servants had not freely entered into service on the basis of contracts, but instead were property whose bodies and labour could be bought

24. Steedman, *Labours Lost*, p. 28; B. Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 6–7, 101–4; P. Humfrey, *The Experience of Domestic Service for Women in Early Modern London* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 25–9. See also T. Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender, 1660–1750: Life and Work in the London Household* (Harlow, 2000).

25. 'Any Person that will sell a Negro Boy', *Whitehall Evening Post* (London), 28 Jan. 1731, p. 4; 'Wanted, Two Negro Men', *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser* (London), 3 Mar. 1759.

26. One advertisement was for a large group, presumably intended for shipment to the colonies. In an advertisement in 1766, George Drinkwater advertised the sale of 'Eleven Negroes imported by the Angola' and recently arrived in Liverpool: *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 12 Sept. 1766. These advertisements were discovered during the research for the *Runaway Slaves in Britain* project, and can be seen at [https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/for\\_sale/](https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/for_sale/) (accessed 6 June 2018).

and sold. Fifty-five advertisements included language about terms of sale, with thirty-two (58 percent) advertising people 'for sale' or 'to be sold', five (9 per cent) promoting sale of enslaved people by auction, and eighteen (33 per cent) referred to enslaved people who were 'to be disposed of'. This was the language commonly used in contemporary advertisements of property available for purchase.

Virtually all of these advertisements featured racial descriptors. Almost three-quarters of the people advertised for sale were described as 'negroes', as in notices for 'A well set Negro Girl, about ten Years of Age', 'A Negro Youth of about fifteen Years of Age' and 'A Very Likely young Negro Fellow'.<sup>27</sup> Such language echoed similar advertisements in Britain's slave-owning colonies. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* offered 'a young likely Negro man' and 'a likely young Negro woman'; the *Virginia Gazette*, 'a young, healthy, stout NEGRO CARTER'; the *South Carolina Gazette* touted 'SIXTY valuable NEGROES, mostly Country born', and the *Royal Gazette* 'SEVERAL VALUABLE DOMESTIC NEGROES'.<sup>28</sup> A further 19 per cent of British advertisements described the people for sale as 'black' or as 'black negro', while just over 7 per cent were for people described as being from the East Indies, although the terms 'negro' and 'black' were often used in conjunction with the geographical descriptor 'East Indies': enslaved status was all but synonymous with the terms 'negro' and 'black', overriding the niceties of racial difference between Africans and South Asians. While some were identified as having been brought from the Caribbean or North America, a few were identified as African-born. One such was a nine-year-old 'NEGRO BOY' from Angola, who was advertised to be sold by auction in Liverpool at 11 a.m. on 12 October 1768.<sup>29</sup>

Advertisements offering enslaved domestic and household workers for sale were phrased in remarkably similar ways on both sides of the Atlantic. A North American newspaper contained an advertisement for 'A Negro Wench, who is a good seamstress, cook and washer', while a British newspaper advertised 'a likely young Negro Man, about Nineteen Years of Age, that speaks English and Shaves well'.<sup>30</sup> Each of these advertisements featured both people and goods available for purchase, the former following the description of the enslaved woman

27. 'A well set Negro Girl', *Evening Post* (London), 25 Mar. 1727, p. 3; 'A Negro Youth of about fifteen Years of Age', *Public Advertiser*, 24 Aug. 1764; 'To be sold, A Negro Boy', *Public Advertiser*, 22 June 1754.

28. 'To be sold by publick vendue', *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 17 Apr. 1755, p. 3; 'A Team and Horses', *Virginia Gazette*, 8 Mar. 1776, p. 4; 'To be sold by public Outcry', *South Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal* (Charleston), 24 May 1774, p. 3; 'The Subscriber, intending to leave this Island ... has to be Sold', *Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), 1–8 Apr. 1780, p. 8.

29. 'To be sold by Auction ... A Handsome Negro Boy, from Angola', *Liverpool General Advertiser, Or the Commercial Register*, 7 Oct. 1768, p. 2.

30. 'To be sold by public Vendue', *South Carolina Gazette*, 23 Jan. 1769, p. 4; 'To be dispos'd of', *Evening Post*, 20 Nov. 1716, p. 3.

with a list of goods including 'a clock, a billiard-table, a chariot' and other items, the latter offering for sale 'a light plain Serviceable Chariot'. The identification of enslaved people as property, listing them as commodities to be bought and sold alongside other items, is abundantly clear, justified in part by the racial objectification of the enslaved as 'negroes'. When 'One Negro Man, and Two Boys' were advertised for sale in Liverpool in 1767, prospective buyers were promised that the slaves 'will be brought up to the Place of Sale to be view'd'.<sup>31</sup> Like livestock, the enslaved available for purchase could be viewed, their bodies and health checked, their language and other skills assessed. Attractiveness was a valuable attribute, and sellers used such terms as 'A beautiful Negro Boy', a 'handsome Negro Boy' and 'A Healthful Negro Boy' in order to render the people for sale more attractive to buyers.<sup>32</sup> This was clearly important to white masters who sought to display enslaved household servants in smart livery. The characteristics and skills of people for sale were listed as attributes that added value, and, again, the format was much the same in Britain and its colonies. Thus, in Britain a young 'Negro Boy' 'speaks English pretty well, has been bred to wait at Table and other parts of Footman's Duty'. Another boy was trained in 'Domestick Business; has no vices, has had the small-pox, and is fond of children', while a 12-year-old 'Creole Negro Girl' who had served a family in England for a year and could 'speak English very well' was described as being 'very tractable in household affairs'.<sup>33</sup> 19-year-old Peggy and her 4-year-old son were advertised for sale in Edinburgh in 1766: Peggy had been born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, 'speaks good English', was an 'exceeding good House-wench, and washer and dresser, and is very tender and careful of children'. Similar language was used in Philadelphia to describe a 19-year old enslaved woman who could 'wash, iron and cook, very well'.<sup>34</sup>

As far as their masters were concerned, enslaved domestic servants brought to Britain did not own their bodies, and thus masters regularly advertised enslaved domestics as being available for purchase. The very existence of these advertisements testifies to the particular status of their objects. While employers regularly advertised in newspapers when they required new white domestic servants, and white servants (and a few free servants of colour) themselves sometimes advertised

31. 'To be sold by Auction', *Liverpool General Advertiser*, 27 Nov. 1767, p. 2.

32. 'A beautiful Negro Boy', *Daily Post* (London), 26 May 1725; 'A handsome Negro Boy', *Daily Courant* (London), 26 Aug. 1719; 'For sale, A Healthful Negro Boy', *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register*, 17 Feb. 1758, p. 3.

33. 'To be sold, A Negro Boy', *Public Advertiser*, 16 June 1756; 'A lively Black Boy', *Public Advertiser*, 19 July 1764, p. 3; 'To be disposed of, a Creole Negro Girl', *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser*, 25 May 1765.

34. 'To be disposed of, A Negro Woman, named Peggy', *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 Aug. 1766, p. 3; 'To be sold by Robert Shewell', *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 15 June 1749.



their desire for new employment, the time and labour of white servants was seldom advertised for sale by third parties. It was more common for white men and women to offer their labour to potential employers at hiring fairs. Despite the power imbalances between employers and potential employees, these were nonetheless occasions for the negotiation of a contract, usually for a year of labour at an agreed rate of pay.<sup>35</sup> With imported enslaved people, by contrast, just as in the Americas, masters could separate families or those who had endured their bondage together. In 1740, Samuel Downes offered for sale a 14-year-old 'Negro Boy' and an 8-year-old girl. Both were, he claimed, 'well proportion'd', and 'the Boy is able to wait at a Gentleman's Table, the Girl handy in the House, and works with her needle'. Downes's advertisement made clear that the children could be purchased together or separately.<sup>36</sup>

These advertisements reveal the power of owners over their human property in multiple ways, for some made clear that masters could easily transfer their human property from domestic service in Britain to enslaved labour in the Americas. The owner of 'a Black girl' in London in 1768 advertised her for sale to 'ANY Lady or Family going to the West-Indies', while another master indicated that 'A Negro Youth of about fifteen Years of Age', 'fit either for a Family here or going to reside in the West Indies', could be purchased for thirty guineas. In short, unlike servants who were contracted for a year and could then leave, and who could not be forcibly relocated, enslaved domestic servants, for the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, could at the whim of their masters be transferred to the Caribbean or North American colonies, where life and labour in the household or fields was more arduous and far more dangerous. Once returned to the plantation colonies these enslaved people were chattel once more, and they and their descendants were subject to colonial slave codes and the brutal violence of the slave regime. One 'Negroe Servant' in England was in 1753 'threatened by his Master, for some Misconduct, to be sent to the Plantations'; the threat was real and horrifying enough for the man to hang himself in his owner's coal cellar.<sup>37</sup>

35. John Brand, Henry Ellis and James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain: Chiefly Illustrating the Origin of our Vulgar and Provincial Customs, Ceremonies, and Superstitions* (new edn., 3 vols., London, 1849), ii. 454–6; M. Roberts, "'Waiting Upon Chance": English Hiring Fairs and their Meanings from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, i (1988), pp. 119–60; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 57–63, 150–65.

36. 'Any Person dispos'd to buy a Negro Boy or Girl', *Daily Post*, 13 Sept. 1740.

37. 'Any Lady or Family going to the West-Indies', *Public Advertiser*, 24 Mar. 1768; 'A likely Black Boy', *Public Advertiser*, 19 July 1764, p. 3; 'Yesterday a Negroe Servant', *Derby Mercury*, 22 June 1753, p. 2. In only three cases were prices specified: a 15-year-old male was advertised at 30 guineas in 1764, a boy at £40 in 1768, and a 10–11-year-old boy for 50 guineas in 1769; see 'A likely Black Boy', *Public Advertiser*, 19 July 1764, p. 3; 'For sale', *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 18 Apr. 1768; 'A Negro Boy, To be disposed of', *Public Advertiser*, 8 Apr. 1769.

## III

In addition to the notices offering enslaved people for sale in both England and Scotland, many hundreds of advertisements were published by the owners of enslaved people who had challenged their bondage by escaping; the ensuing discussion draws on 831 such advertisements published in British newspapers between 1700 and 1780. Given that not all masters advertised for runaways and that other enslaved people did not escape, these advertisements suggest the existence of a significantly larger population of bound people of colour. Just as with the notices advertising the sale of enslaved people, runaways were generally young and male. A total of 769 (92.5 per cent) were male while sixty-two (7.5 per cent) were female. Of the 600 whose ages are specified, 284 (47 per cent) were 18 or younger, and forty-one (7 per cent) were 12 or below. If descriptors such as 'young', 'youth', 'boy' or 'girl' are included, a total of 515 (86 per cent) were aged 25 or younger. Only fifty-six (9 per cent) were aged between 26 and 35, and a mere twenty-one (3.5 per cent) were older than 35.<sup>38</sup> These statistics differ quite significantly from the demographics of runaways in the Americas and the Caribbean during the eighteenth century, where escapees tended to be older. In eighteenth-century Jamaica, for example, more than 67 per cent of those whose ages were recorded were between 19 and 55, while in Maryland 88 per cent and in Georgia 83 per cent of runaways were older than 19. Enslaved people in Britain, and those who attempted to escape, were significantly younger and even more likely to be male than were runaways in the Americas.<sup>39</sup>

The youth of enslaved people in Britain, those offered for sale or those who attempted to secure their freedom, sets them apart from the 'key slaves' identified in the early eighteenth-century British Caribbean by Keith Mason. Such enslaved people were skilled and experienced adults who owners believed could be trusted with supervisory roles on plantations.<sup>40</sup> Michael Tadman's analysis of 'key slaves' in the antebellum American South included both experienced adult field hands and domestic enslaved people 'with whom the master or mistress thought that he or she had close mutual ties of affection and respect'. The young enslaved people brought to Britain were closer to

38. 763 (91.8 per cent) of these advertisements related to English runaways, while 68 (8.2 per cent) appeared in Scottish newspapers. The ages of some runaways are not precisely known, because often they are identified by an age range, such as 11–12 or 20–21, and in other cases there is no indication of age. This information is derived from the *Runaway Slaves* project database (accessed 6 June 2018).

39. See M. Wada, 'Running from Bondage: An Analysis of the Newspaper Advertisements of Runaway Slaves in Colonial Maryland and Georgia', *Journal of the School of Letters*, ii (2006), p. 15, and Newman, 'Hidden in Plain Sight'.

40. K. Mason, 'The Absentee Planter and the Key Slave: Privilege, Patriarchalism, and Exploitation in the Early Eighteenth-Century Caribbean', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., lxx (2013), pp. 79–102.

Tadman's than Mason's 'key slaves'. Many were personal favourites of their masters and mistresses, and Tadman is quite probably correct in concluding that by treating these key slaves so well, owners could feel good about themselves while treating most of the enslaved people they owned with indifference. For example, in April 1765 John Wedderburn purchased a young West African boy of about 13 years of age from Captain John Knight of the slave ship *Phoenix*. Named Joseph Knight, this enslaved boy became a favourite of Wedderburn, who taught him to read and write and trained him as a personal serving boy. Three years later, Wedderburn returned to Scotland, bringing 16-year-old Knight with him. Joseph Knight was typical in that he was a favourite, but he was not a 'key slave' in the operation of either Wedderburn's large Jamaican plantation or its plantation household. Some enslaved runaways in Britain were sailors belonging to ship captains or officers, and as such they might be working as crew members or cabin boys, but neither were these key slaves in whom masters entrusted the running of large-scale agricultural or domestic operations.<sup>41</sup>

Of the freedom-seeking runaways in Britain whose race is identifiable, 740 (91 per cent) were West African or of West African descent, seventy-five (9 per cent) were South Asian, and only one was clearly an indigenous North American. Racial descriptors regularly coloured the advertisements: 553 were identified as 'negro,' 174 as 'black,' forty-two as 'tawny' and five as 'mulatto'. However, descriptions of colour did not necessarily indicate race, as a few South Asian runaways were described as negro, black or even mulatto.<sup>42</sup> Seventy-two runaways were identified as African-born, including fifty-seven who bore 'country marks'. It is likely that there were more African-born people among these runaways but that this was not made clear in the advertisements.

The runaways were a cosmopolitan group, many still speaking the languages and dialects of West Africa and South Asia. Moreover, they had experience of life drawn from the ships and colonies of diverse European and New World nations and colonies. While many spoke English (some well, some poorly), occasionally with regional accents, others were described by their owners as speaking French, Spanish and Portuguese. John Henry, 'a negro Molatto', was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish and Arabic.<sup>43</sup> Yet, despite the breadth of their experiences, or their linguistic abilities, many of these enslaved runaways had been

41. M. Tadman, research report on 'Slavery and Freedom: Racialised Relations in the American South, c.1790 to 1900', available at <https://www.researchcatalogue.esrc.ac.uk/grants/RES-000-27-0113/outputs/read/9e45460a-9bca-485a-81f9-93cdbcde7f57b> (accessed 25 Sept. 2018), p. 13. For Joseph Knight, see Cairns, 'After Somerset', pp. 291–2.

42. We know relatively little about enslaved South Asians who were brought to Britain during the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, and what little scholarly work exists tends to focus on the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See, for example, Filor, 'Complicit Colonials', pp. 206–14.

43. 'John Henry, a Negro Molatto...', *Post-Boy* (London), 6 Feb. 1720, p. 2.

demeaned by the imposition of classical, humorous or other names intended to belittle the bearer. Of the 595 identified by name, sixty-six (11 per cent) bore classical names such as Caesar, Hector, Scipio and Hercules, while a further forty-two (7 per cent) were named for places (presumably important to the masters who had named them), such as Cambridge, Oxford, Norwich, York, Dover, Limehouse, Windsor and of course London. A few must have endured ridicule as a result of a wide range of unusual names, perhaps amusing to their masters, such as Sugar, Othello, Pickle, Lothario and Paradise. Only some thirty (5 per cent) were able to retain their African birth names, such as Cudjoe, Cuffee, Quaco and Quashy. Enslaved runaways known as Edward, John, Flora or Peter at least shared Christian names with the white Britons they lived and worked among, but the fact that many lacked surnames marked them out as different too.

**Table 1: Runaway advertisements in British newspapers, 1701–80.**

Source: *Runaway Slaves* database (accessed 6 June 2018).

Date of advertisements	Number
1701–10	69 (8%)
1711–20	85 (10%)
1721–30	89 (11%)
1731–40	85 (10%)
1741–50	135 (16%)
1751–60	123 (15%)
1761–70	169 (20.5%)
1771–80	70 (8.5%)

The number of runaway advertisements published in British newspapers fluctuated over the course of the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century (see [Table 1](#)). They appeared in roughly comparable numbers during each of the first four decades of the century before rising dramatically during the middle years of the eighteenth century, perhaps reflecting the return to Britain of large numbers of successful merchants and planters, as well as the visits to Britain of the slave-owning officers of an ever-growing mercantile and military fleet. During the disruptions caused by the American War for Independence and the rise of abolitionist sentiment, the number of runaway advertisements then dropped back to a level not seen since the beginning of the century. The English and Scottish court cases ruling against slave owners in the Somerset and Knight cases combined with the American War for Independence to decrease the clear and visible presence of enslaved people in Britain. It had become legally impossible to return enslaved people from Britain to the colonies against their will, making it far less likely that slave owners would bring enslaved people to Britain unless

they intended to make them free. At the same time, the struggle of American Patriots for a liberty they denied to the enslaved (some of whom had fought for Britain and now had relocated to London), along with a growing popular sense of the depravity of Caribbean slavery, had put slave owners in Britain on the defensive.<sup>44</sup>

Advertisements for runaway slaves appeared alongside others in which masters sought to recover white servants and apprentices, and husbands sought the return of wives who had abandoned them. This has led some historians to suggest that British advertisements for people of colour who had escaped had more in common with advertisements for delinquent white servants than with American and Caribbean advertisements for escaped black slaves.<sup>45</sup> But analysis of these advertisements confirms what is suggested by the notices offering people for sale: New World racial slavery helped shape the parameters of the bondage of people brought to Britain, and the threat of return to Caribbean or American enslavement was all too real. When Robert Cunninghame Graham returned from Jamaica to Scotland with his wife Anne, the couple brought with them two enslaved house servants. However, one of these, Martin, did not settle into life in Scotland, and Graham wrote about him to Angus MacBean in Jamaica:

By Capn. Campbell you will also receive your old friend Martin he is too lively & sprightly to accommodate his disposition to the sedate Gravity of this Climate—dispose of him to the best advantage, & put part of the proceeds into a pipe of the best Madeira to be sent me as soon as you can. I was offered £100 for him before I left Jama. & think he is now worth a good deal more...<sup>46</sup>

It is impossible to know for certain what Graham meant when he described Martin in this way. Perhaps Martin resented his enslaved status. Whatever the cause, a year after England's Somerset decision, but five years before Scotland's *Knight v. Wedderburn* case, Graham determined to remove Martin from his position as a well-dressed and well-fed domestic servant in Scotland and send him back to Jamaica, where he would be sold and quite likely put to work in the fields of a sugar plantation. There is nothing to suggest that Graham gave any thought to the life to which he was condemning Martin, and he appears to have been more concerned with the madeira that he would acquire from the proceeds of Martin's sale. Having made a fortune in Jamaica, Graham became a leading Scottish gentleman, a reforming Whig MP and an accomplished writer,

44. C.L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), pp. 33–153; C. Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA, 2006), pp. 75–88, 103–21.

45. Chater, *Untold Histories*, pp. 92–5.

46. National Library of Scotland, Acc 11335/18, Correspondence and Papers of Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham and family, letter book 1772, fo. 41, Robert Cunninghame Graham to Angus MacBean, 24 Mar. 1773.

servicing in a variety of offices including the Rectorship of the University of Glasgow, which he held between the tenures of Edmund Burke and Adam Smith. Graham, and others like him, did not appear in the least concerned about owning enslaved people, bringing them to Britain and then returning them to New World slavery.<sup>47</sup>

The fate of the enslaved boys who were brought to Britain is far from clear. While we are familiar with portraits of elite British families attended by young black servants, there are far fewer portraits showing adult domestic servants of colour. Some young male enslaved domestics continued in service but were perhaps less appealing as subjects of portraiture. Others may have been legally freed and continued as paid employees, or sought employment elsewhere, while others may have remained in a liminal state, perhaps fearful of return to formal enslavement in the colonies. Such was the fate of those, like Martin, who were returned or returned with their masters to the colonies, to societies where the law allowed for no doubts over their enslaved status.

In only a few cases did advertisements make it clear that runaways were nominally free labourers working under indenture or contract. Yet even in these cases such people may have been less free, or at least more vulnerable to a loss of freedom, than white workers. Even if an enslaved person had been promised by his or her master that they would be freed after a specified period of service, it remained possible that the master might renege, selling the person or taking or sending them back to the colonies where permanent enslaved status could be reasserted with no hope of legal recourse. While the enslaved and servants could and did prevail against masters in court, the odds were stacked against them.

What did it mean when a runaway was identified as 'an Apprentice for seven Years, and a Slave'? In instances like that of Jamie Montgomery, subject of the 1756 Scottish legal case, it may have meant that an enslaved boy or young man was being trained in a craft, which would increase his value and utility whether kept and employed by his master in Britain or in the colonies. It is possible, too, that an advertisement such as this was recognising that an enslaved person had been promised liberty at the end of a specified period of labour. But even if such promises of freedom after a period of service had been made to him, what might they mean to a man taken into slavery in Africa, sold to whites and shipped across the Atlantic to the plantations, and then brought to Britain and apprenticed out? Such a man would have known how easy it was for his slavery to be reinstated, especially in a port such as Liverpool from which he could be shipped to Africa or the colonies with little effort or notice.<sup>48</sup>

47. R.B. Cunninghame Graham, *Doughty Deeds: An Account of the Life of Robert Graham of Gartmore, Poet and Politician, 1735–1797, Drawn from his Letter-Books and Correspondence* (London, 1925).

48. 'Run away, a Gold Coast Negro', *Daily Advertiser*, 11 Oct. 1738, p. 1.

Runaway advertisements in eighteenth-century British newspapers provide abundant evidence that the label 'servant' was applied to enslaved people. When John Gardner came from Jamaica to Britain he brought with him an enslaved man called Windsor, identifiable by 'His Master's Plantation Mark in the West Indies', for Gardner's initials were branded on Windsor's left shoulder. Following Windsor's escape in April 1757, Gardner advertised for 'A Negro Servant called Windsor, about five Feet four Inches high, slim made, and about 20 years of Age', ending his description of the runaway and all that he had taken with him with the affirmation that Windsor was 'the absolute Property of John Gardner'. Similarly, when Beatrix absconded in January 1724, an advertisement began by describing her as 'A Negroe Slave ... aged about 15 Years, tall of her Age, with a flat Nose... very thick Lips' and a 'Wooly Head'. The advertisement went on to add that Beatrix 'is also bound Apprentice', a status that in the eyes of her owner clearly did not invalidate her enslaved status. A runaway 17-year-old 'Negro Boy' named Jacko, or John Tortinsong, was identified by his master as 'his Apprentice as well as a purchased Slave'. Jamie Montgomery had been purchased in Virginia by Robert Sheddan and then sent to Scotland to be apprenticed to Sheddan's brother-in-law, a joiner named Robert Morrice. Once Jamie had been trained, Sheddan intended to send the now highly skilled and thus more valuable enslaved carpenter back to Virginia, but when Sheddan had Jamie bound and taken to Port Glasgow to join a Virginia-bound ship in 1756, Jamie escaped. In at least two newspaper advertisements, Sheddan identified Jamie as 'A NEGROE MAN' and 'a Virginia born Slave'. The fact that he had been apprenticed to a joiner and held a certificate of his Christianity and church membership did not, according to Sheddan, affect Montgomery's enslaved status. Following the young man's capture and incarceration in Edinburgh, Sheddan pressed his case in court, asserting that he had 'paid *L. 56 Virginia Currency*' for Montgomery and thus had the 'Right to retain him'. Had Montgomery not perished in an Edinburgh jail, the court appeared set to return him to Sheddan for transportation to Virginia.<sup>49</sup>

Jamie Montgomery was one of a number of runaway slaves revealed in advertisements to have become Christians. Sheddan asserted in court that Montgomery had 'got it into his Head, that by being baptized

49. 'Run away from his Master John Gardner', *Public Advertiser*, 14 Apr. 1757, p. 2; 'A Negroe Slave', *Daily Post*, 11 Jan. 1724, p. 2; 'Ran away from his master ... Jacko', *St. James's Chronicle* (London), 21 May 1768; 'Run away from the subscriber', *Glasgow Journal*, 3 May 1756, p. 3, and repeated in *Glasgow Courant*, 10 May 1756, p. 3; Signet Library, Session Papers, vol. 58, no. 42, *Memorial for Robert Sheddan*, pp. 15, 17. For a full discussion of Jamie Montgomery, see S.P. Newman, 'Rethinking Runaways in the British Atlantic World: Britain, the Caribbean, West Africa and North America', *Slavery and Abolition*, xxxviii (2017), pp. 55–61. Gardner and his properties are mentioned in J.P. Greene, *Settler Jamaica in the 1750s: A Social Portrait* (Charlottesville, VA, 2016), p. 235.

he would become free'. This master was well aware of the dangerous 'Fancies of Freedom which it might instill into his Slave'. Mary Vernon of Covent Garden, most likely the sister of Admiral Edward Vernon, advertised in 1746 for a 20-year-old 'Negro Wench, named Sarah', noting that she 'is suppos'd to have been lately christen'd'. In Bristol that same year, the merchant William Daniel advertised for 'a negro Boy' named Fortune, who 'pretends to be christened, and calls himself Thomas Clark'. Both of these advertisements may reflect their owners' belief that Mary and Fortune/Clark's Christianity might affect their enslaved status, and so mistress and master chose to cast doubt on the fact of that religious conversion.<sup>50</sup>

In London, and most probably throughout England and Scotland, legal authorities were often unsympathetic to enslaved people's claims to freedom. Sir John Fielding was the author of a 1768 legal commentary condemning any who might 'corrupt and dissatisfy' enslaved black people in Britain 'by getting them christened or married, which they inform them makes them free, ('tho' it has been adjudged by our most able Lawyers, that neither of these Circumstances alter the Master's Property in a Slave)'.<sup>51</sup> But of even more practical use to the owners of runaway slaves in and around London, Fielding was a magistrate who was sympathetic to their claims and active in ensuring that all crimes against property, including enslaved people who escaped, were quickly and efficiently dealt with by the courts. Between September 1756 and February 1774, at least twenty-four owners of runaway slaves included in their advertisements references to Fielding, encouraging any who took up the runaways to place them in Fielding's custody, safe in the knowledge that he would look favourably on masters' claims to their human property. The wording varied, but usually made clear, as in the case of a runaway 'Black Woman Slave', that 'If any person will apprehend and bring her to John Fielding, Esq.; in Bow-street, Covent Garden', then that person would receive the posted reward. Fielding was determined to make it easier for 'the Proprietor[s] of these Slaves to recover the Possession of them', and he endeavoured to marshal London's law enforcement apparatus, which was taking shape under him, to help realise that goal.<sup>52</sup>

50. National Records of Scotland, CS 234/S/3/12, deposition by Sheddan, dated Morrishill, 22 June 1756; 'Run away from her Mistress', *Daily Advertiser*, 4 Nov. 1746, p. 2; 'Elop'd from his Master, Mr. William Daniel', *Daily Advertiser*, 24 Mar. 1746, p. 2. Clifton is listed as a merchant in *The Trades of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. W.E. Minchinton, Bristol Record Society, xx (1957), p. 185, and as a subscriber to *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (4 vols., London, 1745–7), vol. i, p. xiv.

51. Fielding, *Extracts From Such of the Penal Laws*, p. 144.

52. 'Run away on Sunday', *Public Advertiser*, 18 Jan. 1757, p. 3. For more on Fielding's reforms, see J. Styles, 'Sir John Fielding and the Problem of Criminal Investigation in Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxxiii (1983), pp. 127–49.



With the legal authorities often on their side, masters were not coy about using advertisements in British newspapers to identify runaways as enslaved. Sir James Campbell, an army officer in Dublin, advertised in the *London Evening Post* in September 1770 for Hope, a 19-year-old boy whom Campbell believed to have escaped to London where he was passing as free under the name Robert Field. Hope/Field could be identified, his owner claimed, by the fact that Campbell's initials were branded onto his right shoulder. In another case, an advertisement was placed by the Royal African Company, a body by definition defiant in its assertion of its right to own slaves. White craftsmen and artisans sent to maintain and expand Britain's slave-trading posts on the West African coast quickly succumbed to disease, and the governors of Cape Coast castle regularly sent young, male, company-owned West African slaves back to London 'to be made Bricklayers, Carpenters, Smiths & Coopers'. One such was 'a black Lad, nam'd Quashy', who had been apprenticed to 'Mr. Negus, a Cooper, near Execution Dock, Wapping'. The newspaper advertisement naming Quashy as a runaway identified the young man both as an apprentice and also as a slave 'belonging to the Royal African Company'. There can be little doubt that the Company's purpose in bringing Quashy to Britain and apprenticing him out was eventually to return him to West Africa as an enslaved craftsman.<sup>53</sup>

'A Negro Man call'd London', who eloped from Covent Garden in 1714, was identified by his master as an African-born 'Gold-Coast-Slave', who 'speaks English very indifferent' but 'now goes by the Name of William Darby'. John Devonshire (or Black Jack) was identified as 'a Negro Slave ... the Property of Mr. Edward Masters', a London merchant, while the words 'RUN AWAY from Capt. Olyphant Kinloch, a NEGRO SLAVE' dominated the first line of an advertisement in both the *Edinburgh Advertiser* and the *Caledonian Mercury* in June 1768. Kinloch (or a previous owner) had named this 17-year-old 'stout lad' London. While most of the runaways who were explicitly identified as slaves were African, a small number were South Asians. The headline 'A BLACK SLAVE RUN AWAY' in a 1771 Edinburgh advertisement referred to 'a BLACK SLAVE a native of the East Indies called Caesar'. The advertisement was placed by Caesar's owner, Sir Hector Munro, who had been a senior army officer in India between 1760 and 1765, returning a wealthy man and no doubt bringing Caesar with him. Using the language of Atlantic World slave holders, Munro recorded that Caesar had been 'bred a cook': perhaps, like many British army

53. 'Run away from Dublin', *London Evening Post*, 13 Sept. 1770; The National Archives, T 70/30, Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading with Africa, inward letter book, 1753–1762, p. 271, Nathaniel Senior to the Royal African Company, Cape Coast Castle, 3 Feb. 1759; 'Whereas a black Lad, nam'd Quashy', *Daily Advertiser*, 20 Apr. 1736, p. 1. For more on the training of West African slaves in Britain, see S.P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), pp. 148–9.

officers, Munro had acquired a taste for Indian food, and Caesar had escaped from the kitchens of Munro's Ross-shire estate.<sup>54</sup>

Two 'Negro Men Slaves' named Joe and Chaptank absconded from a ship named *Planter's Friendship* in May of 1744. Perhaps neither of these men were pleased at the prospect of the ship's pending voyage from Britain to the Chesapeake slave society of Virginia and Maryland. Sambo, 'the Property of Mrs. Sarah Steele, of the Island of Barbadoes', escaped from the Berkshire home of Joshua and Sarah Steele in January 1752. Sarah was the widow of Robert Osborne, the owner of Springhead plantation in Barbados, which may be where this runaway had come from. Like Osborne, Joshua owned several plantations on Barbados, and some years later he moved to Barbados to manage his estates and his family's enslaved human property. Identified as 'a handsome tight-made black Slave', Sambo had apparently rejected his 'Plantation name' and 'assumed the Name of William Gardener'. Working life at Place Hall in Berkshire may have been comparatively pleasant compared with the horrors of slavery in Barbados, but Sambo/Gardener must surely have been well aware of how easily he might be transported back to Bajan slavery, perhaps with Joshua Steele when the planter moved from Britain to Barbados.<sup>55</sup>

References to runaways as 'a Negro Man Slave', 'a negro woman slave', 'a Black Slave', 'A Black Negro Slave', 'A NEGRO SLAVE', 'A Slave Negro Man', a 'Mulatto Boy Slave' or even a master's casual allusion to 'his Slave' all constitute defiant public assertions by masters that men, women and children who had escaped were enslaved property.<sup>56</sup> Less common, yet even more striking, were descriptions of people who had escaped while wearing collars and chains, perhaps the most

54. 'A Negro Man call'd London', *Daily Courant*, 7 Oct. 1714, p. 2; 'Whereas John Devonshire', *Daily Advertiser*, 18 July 1735, p. 2; 'Run away from Captain Oliphant Kinloch', *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 7 June 1768, p. 365, repeated in *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh), 8 June 1768, p. 1; 'A Black Slave run away', *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 June 1771, p. 3. For more information on Hector Munro, see E. Haden-Guest, 'Munro, Hector (1726–1805)', in L. Namier and J. Brooke, eds., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754–1790* (3 vols., London, 1985), i. 180–81, and G.J. Bryant, 'Munro, Sir Hector (1725/6–1805/6)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter ODNB].

55. 'Run away last Night from the Ship Planter's Friendship', *Daily Advertiser*, 17 May 1744, p. 2; 'Run away from Joshua Steele', *Covent Garden Journal* (London), 25 Jan. 1752. The *Planter's Friendship* was recorded as having sailed to Maryland in *Lloyd's List*, no. 893 (12 June 1744), and then again as having arrived from Virginia in *Lloyd's List*, no. 948 (21 Dec. 1744), p. 2; this was the voyage from which Joe and Chaptank sought to escape. For more on Joshua Steele, see L. Gragg, 'Steele, Joshua (c.1700–1796)', ODNB.

56. 'Run away from his Master, a Negro Man Slave', *Public Advertiser*, 29 Oct. 1757, p. 2; 'Whereas a Negro Man Slave', *Public Advertiser*, 20 Dec. 1766, p. 3; 'Absented yesterday from her mistress', *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 27 May 1756, p. 2; 'Run from his Master's Service, a Black Slave', *Public Advertiser*, 11 Feb. 1758, p. 3; 'Run away from the ship Susanna', *Public Ledger, Or, Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence* (London), 30 May 1761; 'Run away ... A Negro Slave', *Liverpool General Advertiser*, 2 Sept. 1768, p. 2; 'Ran away ... A Slave Negro Man', *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 7 Sept. 1769, p. 2; 'Stray'd or stolen ... a Virginia-born Mulatto Boy Slave', *Daily Advertiser*, 29 Jan. 1772, p. 2; 'Went away Yesterday', *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*, 24 Feb. 1764.

vivid emblems of enslavement. Pompe was 16 when in January 1704 he escaped from his master William Steavens, a merchant in Rotherhithe, Justice of the Peace and subsequently High Sheriff of Surrey. Wearing a blue waistcoat and a pair of light-coloured breeches, Pompe was most readily identifiable by the 'Iron Collar about his Neck.' Joe, a 'tall Negro Man' who spoke English well, escaped from Jeremiah Turner in 1713 despite the 'iron fastned on his Right Leg'. When the enslaved man named Bristol ran away from William Truclock, captain of the *Bermuda Packet*, just arrived from Virginia, the 35-year-old man had 'Irons on [his] Hands and legs'.<sup>57</sup> Masters and mistresses in Britain who had collars and chains fitted to their enslaved servants were either reacting to past attempts or anticipating potential escapes. There were circumstances in which white prisoners and convicts might be manacled, but the application of collars and chains to black and coloured men and women who were neither prisoners nor convicts had entirely different connotations. The steel, iron, copper and even silver manacles made escape even more difficult, and it seems likely that most of the shackled enslaved did not even attempt to free themselves, or were quickly recaptured without owners needing to advertise. Thus, it seems likely that the low number of newspaper advertisements mentioning collars and chains represents only a small proportion of the enslaved people who were fettered, while surviving items such as the silver collar made for John Crawford in the collections of Glasgow Museums provide further evidence of the practice. Inscribed with the words 'John Crauford of Miltoun Esqr Owner 1732', the collar had been made by the Glasgow silversmith Robert Luke, and was clearly intended for use in Scotland, displaying the wealth and power of the wealthy tobacco merchant Crawford while marking the person who wore it as enslaved property.<sup>58</sup> It was only in the 1780s that Josiah Wedgwood created his famous abolitionist image of a shackled supplicant enslaved man, after the Somerset and Knight cases had ostensibly all but ended racial slavery and thus at a time when shackled enslaved people would no longer be seen in Britain.<sup>59</sup>

It is particularly striking that collars such as these routinely named masters rather than the enslaved people wearing them. In the summer of 1723, an unnamed 20-year-old 'Negro young Man' escaped from

57. 'Pompe a Black Boy', *Daily Courant*, 8 Jan. 1704, p. 2; 'A tall Negro Man', *Daily Courant*, 14 Jan. 1713, p. 2. Steavens's offices are mentioned in a description of his tomb in 'London, Sept. 9', *Read's Weekly Journal, or British-Gazetteer* (London), 9 Sept. 1738, p. 3.

58. 'Run Away from onboard the Bermuda Pacquet', *Public Advertiser*, 9 Sept. 1765, p. 3; 'Arrived', *Lloyd's Evening Post* (London), 9 Sept. 1765, p. 248. For Crawford and Glasgow's Tobacco Lords, see C.M. Peters, 'Glasgow's Tobacco Lords: An Examination of Wealth Creators in the Eighteenth Century' (Univ. of Glasgow Ph.D. thesis, 1990), pp. 27, 42, 94, 356.

59. See, for example, D. Long, 'The Power of an Image: Wedgwood's Slave Cameo', *Oakland University Journal*, xiii (2007), pp. 159–74; M. Guyatt, 'The Wedgwood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-Century Design', *Journal of Design History*, xiii (2000), pp. 93–105.

his master Paul Moon, a soap-boiler in Bristol. According to Moon, the enslaved man was 'of a short Stature, full Face, Scars about both his Eye', which may have been the 'country marks' identifying him as African-born. Wearing a dark coat and waistcoat and plush breeches, it was the 'Steel Collar about his Neck, with his Master's Name engrav'd upon it; (Paul Moon in Bristol)' that most clearly identified the runaway as enslaved. The collar, and the engraving upon it, affirmed the social death of a person who was the chattel property of another man. Twenty-five years later, a 17-year-old 'Negroe Boy' ran away from an unnamed master in Ratcliff, between Limehouse and Shadwell in London. 'Jet black' and with 'thick Lips', this young man wore 'a strong Steel Collar' around his neck 'with this Inscription upon it, viz. *This Boy is an indentur'd Servant, belongs to Capt. ----- at Ratcliffe-Cross*'. The description of this steel collar furnishes perhaps the most tangible evidence that, for this boy and for other enslaved people, indentured servitude could be entirely different from the servitude of whites. While chains and collars might be used for convicts, they were never imposed upon white apprentices and servants as emblems and instruments of ownership. This runaway, however, was simultaneously a servant to, and a person who 'belongs to', the master who chose not to reveal his name in a newspaper advertisement, although it appeared on the collar worn by his property.<sup>60</sup>

When an 18-year-old 'Negro Woman' named Ann eloped from Dr Gustavus Brown's lodgings in Glasgow, she was identifiable by the brass collar fastened around her neck bearing the words 'Gustavus Brown in Dalkeith [*sic*] his Negro, 1726'. Brown had trained as a doctor in Edinburgh before migrating to Maryland, where he had established both a successful medical practice and a plantation worked by enslaved Africans. This was perhaps his first trip back to Scotland, and Brown was flaunting his success, wealth and power via the body and collar of Ann. As in the case of most runaways, we do not know whether Ann was able to escape Brown and remain in Scotland as a free woman, or if she was recaptured and forced to return to Chesapeake slavery. When Brown died in Maryland some thirty-five years later, his property included forty-five 'negroes, hogs, sheep, [and] cattle', with all moveable property and livestock listed in a single category, including the enslaved. One of the oldest of Brown's enslaved property at the time of his death was Nan, valued at a relatively low £35 because of her

60. 'A Negro young Man', *Daily Courant*, 23 July 1723, p. 2; 'Whereas a Commission of Bankrupt ... against Paul Moon', *London Gazette*, 23 July 1728, p. 2; 'Ran away on Saturday last', *Daily Advertiser*, 20 June 1748, p. 2. Scold's bridles were sometimes imposed on English and Scottish women between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries; see L.E. Boose, 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, xlii (1991), pp. 179–213; R.P. Dobash and R.E. Dobash, 'Community Response to Violence against Wives: Charivari, Abstract Justice and Patriarchy', *Social Problems*, xxviii (1981), p. 567.

advanced age. This may have been Ann, one of many enslaved people taken to Britain but then forced to return to live the remainder of their lives in slavery in the colonies.<sup>61</sup>

Fear of enforced return to colonial slavery clearly inspired some men, women and children to escape enslavement while in Britain. 19-year-old Sabinah, who was branded on both her shoulder and her breast, escaped from the *Hannah* on the Thames in London in June 1743, shortly before the ship was due to sail for Jamaica. Slavery in Jamaica was perhaps more violent and terrifying than anywhere else in the British Atlantic World, and Captain Fowler believed that Sabinah had been supported in her escape ‘by some other Black about Whitechapel, Rag-Fair, or Rotherhith’. 17-year-old Christopher Corydon absconded from Arthur Vaughan in Holborn in September 1732. Most advertisements were directed to the general public, but, quite unusually, Vaughan included in his lengthy advertisement a direct appeal to Corydon himself, undertaking that if the young man were to return ‘his Master absolutely promises him Forgiveness, and declares, that no Consideration shall induce him to send the said Corydon beyond the Sea, the Fear of which (’tis believed) occasion’d his leaving his Service’. In this direct communication from master to runaway, we can see evidence that for all that Corydon was identified as a ‘servant’, he nonetheless believed that his master might send him to colonies where vague oral promises of freedom were all but meaningless and certainly unenforceable. Moreover, Vaughan’s assurances were dependent upon Corydon voluntarily surrendering, and should the young man decline to do so, it was implicit in Vaughan’s statement that the master retained the right to do what he liked with Corydon, including sending him to the plantation colonies.<sup>62</sup>

While many runaways of colour laboured in British homes and workplaces, over 23 per cent of males in the sample had escaped from ships. Some were accompanying masters travelling between Britain and the colonies, but most were enslaved sailors. Hannibal, aged between 40 and 50, and speaking ‘English very imperfectly’, was ‘a Negro Slave’ belonging to Israel Alleyn, master of the *Cape Fear*. Wearing ‘a brown Sea Jacket’ and described—like so many sailors—as being ‘bandy legg’d’, Hannibal escaped from his master’s ship in

61. ‘Run away from the 7th Instant ... Ann’, *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 Feb. 1727, p. 4; La Plata, MD, Charles County Register of Wills, Charles County Inventories 1766–1773, CR 39,592–1 CM 386–5, pp. 203–9, inventory of Gustavus Brown’s possessions, taken 29 May 1762, recorded 20 July 1768. For more on Brown in America, see M.D. Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway* (2 vols., Boston, MA, 1904), i. 1–5; Horace Edwin Hayden, *Virginia Genealogies: A Genealogy of the Glassell Family of Scotland and Virginia* (1891; Baltimore, MD, 2004), pp. 147–8, 151–2.

62. ‘A Black Negro Woman’, *Daily Advertiser*, 17 June 1743, p. 2; ‘Whereas Christopher Corydon’, *Daily Post*, 28 Oct. 1732, p. 2.

May 1744, and was subsequently spotted in Bath and then Reading as he made his way toward London. Later that summer, Philip and William escaped from ships moored on the Thames, and four years later Jack, Thomas and Dick escaped from ships moored on the Thames: each of these men was described in the advertisements as 'a Negro Slave'.<sup>63</sup>

Yet ships could be refuges as well as prisons. Life at sea in the Royal Navy or the merchant marine, and even in the army, provided enslaved male runaways on both sides of the Atlantic with the opportunity to enter one of the few Atlantic World occupations with no real colour line. Olaudah Equiano considered himself 'as happily situated' when employed on board a royal naval vessel, albeit as the enslaved property of a ship's officer. In practice, though not in law, joining the army, the Royal Navy or the crew of merchant ships provided some runaways with a path to freedom. Ships' crews were perhaps the most racially and ethnically mixed workplaces of the age, and the deaths of so many white sailors on the coast of West Africa or in the Caribbean and the colonies of the American South meant that captains were very willing to enlist able-bodied black men who often had acquired a degree of immunity to the diseases killing white sailors. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, recruiting runaways, whites or blacks, whose labour was the legal property of other men, was a criminal act, so this could happen only when runaways were able to convince those who enlisted them that they were free men.<sup>64</sup>

When Joe, 'a Sailor Negro Man', escaped from his master in Bristol in December 1743, he had just returned from Jamaica in HMS *Lion*, a ship with a crew of about four hundred. But Joe appears to have been running from his master rather than from naval service, for he was 'suppos'd to be come towards London to ship himself for Carolina, or on board some Man of War'. 18-year-old Hampton escaped from Richard Field, a tobacconist in Bristol, in August 1762. Field believed that Hampton had 'gone off with a Recruiting Serjant in the Marine Service, to go on board the Romney Man of War at Chatham', a newly

63. 'Whereas a Negro Slave ran away', *Daily Advertiser*, 26 May 1744, p. 2; 'Run away on Wednesday the 1st', *Daily Advertiser*, 9 Aug. 1744; 'Run away on Monday Morning the 6th', *Daily Advertiser*, 13 Aug. 1744, p. 2; 'Run away the 17th instant', *General Advertiser*, 22 July 1748; 'Run away on Thursday last', *Daily Advertiser*, 27 Mar. 1749. 120 of 510 male runaways were identified as having run from ships. For more on enslaved and free black sailors of this era, see P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden Histories of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA, 2000); E. Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807* (Cambridge, 2006), and W.J. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

64. Bolster, *Black Jacks*, pp. 131–57; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, pp. 143–73, 211–47; M.J. Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680–1763', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., xlix (2002), pp. 585–622. For the eighteenth-century British army's recruitment of black soldiers, see M.A. Bollettino, 'Slavery, War, and Britain's Atlantic Empire: Black Soldiers, Sailors, and Rebels in the Seven Years' War' (Univ. of Texas Ph.D. thesis, 2009).

built ship launched a month earlier and in need of crew members for war with France. Perhaps recognising the difficulty he faced in retrieving his 'Property', Field undertook to free Hampton if he voluntarily returned and served his master a further two years.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps even more surprising is the case of James Teernon, 'belonging to Captain Terrence Teernon', who escaped in November 1760. Exactly one year later Captain Teernon advertised for James Teernon, reporting that 'Since the Negro runaway from his Master' he had changed his name to James Thompson and 'has been [on] a voyage to Guadeloupe'. Thompson had sailed on the slave ship the *Dragon* from London to West Africa, where it had taken on 250 enslaved people before sailing to the Caribbean and depositing the surviving 208 in Guadeloupe. As one of a crew of twenty, James Thompson would have been intimately involved in the running of this vessel, apparently seeing no contradiction between his own bid for freedom and the enslavement of others and their shipment in the Middle Passage. It is possible that the scar on Thompson's forehead was an African country mark, and that his language skills and familiarity with parts of West Africa enhanced his value as a sailor in this bloody trade. Two years later, Captain Teernon advertised for the runaway once again, having been unable to recapture a man who appears to have been readily able to achieve freedom through maritime employment, even if this did involve the transatlantic slave trade itself.<sup>66</sup>

#### IV

Organised abolitionism developed in Britain during the 1780s, after slavery had been curtailed by the Somerset and Knight cases. Focusing first on the transatlantic slave trade, and then on Caribbean slavery itself, some abolitionists utilised runaway slave advertisements published in the Caribbean and American colonies as evidence of the cruelty of racial slavery and the ways in which the institution was irreconcilable with British laws and liberties. Thomas Clarkson, for example, wrote a lengthy essay based upon advertisements published in the *Jamaica Gazette*, some offering enslaved people for sale, and others describing those who had escaped. Clarkson contrasted these advertisements with the situation in early nineteenth-century Britain, where people could

65. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, i. 131; 'Run away from his Master at Bristol', *Daily Advertiser*, 5 Jan. 1744, p. 2; 'Run away', *Public Advertiser*, 23 Sept. 1762, p. 3. For details of HMS *Romney*, see J.J. Colledge and B. Warlow, *Ships of the Royal Navy: The Complete Record of all Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present* (Newbury, 2010), p. 344. For HMS *Lion's* size at this time, see *The Naval Miscellany III*, Navy Records Society, lxiii (1927), p. 103.

66. 'Whereas James Teernon', *Public Advertiser*, 13 Aug. 1763. The *Dragon's* voyage can be found in *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/24527/variables> (accessed 13 Aug. 2017).

not be treated as property and bought and sold, or families broken up by sale. Nor were Britons branded with the initials of their owners, scarred by the marks of severe whipping, maimed and incapacitated, or made to wear metal collars and chains. 'What would be thought', Clarkson asked, 'what would come, *of a master in Great Britain*, who should attempt to use labourers, whether male or female, in this cruel manner?' Clarkson described the horrors of New World racial slavery as entirely separate and distinct from the home country, yet throughout much of the preceding century there had been enslaved people in Britain: men, women and children who, though living and working in markedly different conditions from the colonies, were nonetheless in a state of physical and psychological bondage, treated as the property of others, and often with no recourse to the law.<sup>67</sup> Even when the law and court decisions suggested otherwise, enslaved people in Britain were denied habeas corpus, held in varying states of unfreedom, and on occasion returned to the horrors of Caribbean or North American slavery.<sup>68</sup>

Slavery was as real for such people in Britain as it was for others in Jamaica or Virginia, and it is clearly problematic to assume that domestic service and life as the liveried personal servants of elite Britons transformed all men, women and children from chattel slaves into relatively free and independent servants. While conditions of life were significantly better for enslaved domestics in Britain than for either domestics or plantation slaves in the Americas, their comparatively easy condition did not nullify their enslavement.<sup>69</sup> Many of the predominantly young male enslaved who were brought to England and Scotland knew that they were vulnerable to the whims of masters and mistresses who might sell them or send them back into Caribbean or American slavery.

Even in the later years of the eighteenth century, well after the Somerset and Knight decisions, there were still enslaved people in Britain who might be returned to slavery in the Americas. When James Pinnock, a lawyer, slave owner and the Advocate General of Jamaica, returned to Britain in 1789, he and his family brought with them a man Pinnock identified as 'My Slave Charles Bibbie'. In his diary, Pinnock recorded that Bibbie 'had lived with me in the greatest of confidence

67. Thomas Clarkson, 'Negro Slavery: Argument, That the Colonial Slaves are better off than the British Peasantry, Answered, from the Royal Jamaica Gazette', *The Christian Observer ... for the Year 1824* (New York), 8 and 24 Aug. 1824, pp. 483, 479–87.

68. See, for example, Kaufmann, 'English Common Law', and Cairns, 'Slavery without a *Code Noir*'.

69. Emily West and R.J. Knight have argued that enslaved wet-nurses provide a powerful example of how women who some historians have seen as enjoying better food, clothing and general conditions than the majority of slaves were in fact ruthlessly oppressed and exploited: 'Mother's Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South', *Journal of Southern History*, lxxxiii (2017), pp. 37–68.



for 14 Years', but in 1790, 'hearing me speak of returning to Jamaica if there ever was a War, ran away to Town'. Annoyed, Pinnock '[h]ad him taken up' and punished, 'when sincerely I believe repenting his Folly, he was taken home'. In 1792 and 1793, Pinnock and his family travelled to Italy, and again Bibbie escaped: Pinnock believed that the runaway had joined a squadron of British ships in the Bay of Naples. For all that the Somerset Case had made it practical for enslaved people to challenge their masters' attempts to send them back to New World slave societies, not all masters accepted this. Bibbie found his freedom not through the courts but by taking action himself.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, when John Jay travelled from the United States to London in 1794, charged with negotiating a treaty between the two countries and preventing war, he brought with him an enslaved man. Formerly Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Jay was a leading New York merchant with extensive political and diplomatic experience, and he arrived in London with his teenaged son Peter and his enslaved manservant Peet (Peter) Williams. More than two decades after Lord Mansfield had ruled in *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) that a slave could not be forced to leave England against his will, Peter Williams was, in theory at least, free to remain in England when Jay returned to New York in 1795. Yet it is by no means clear that Williams knew this, and even if he did, choosing liberty in England over slavery in New York would have been a costly decision. Jay had purchased Williams several years earlier from a fellow New Yorker, Morgan Lewis, but the latter had retained ownership of Peter Williams's wife and their child. Jay's correspondence with his wife Sarah made it clear that Williams missed his wife and child, commenting in August 1794 that 'Peet begins to wish himself Home again', and in the following spring that 'Peet ... is anxious to be at home again'.<sup>71</sup> When Jay returned to the slave society of the Americas, Peet accompanied him.

Newspaper notices advertising enslaved people for sale, or seeking their recapture when they escaped, disappeared from the British press after about 1780, although the experiences of Charles Bibbie and Peter Williams demonstrate that this does not mean that there were no longer any enslaved people in Britain. In the early eighteenth century, a well-dressed enslaved boy with a collar had been an emblem of wealth and success, but by century's end such a display was likely to be viewed as inappropriate and distasteful, even before the development of fully fledged abolitionism. Once, enslaved people in British homes announced the pride of masters in the wealth they had gained in the

70. British Library, Additional MS 33,316, James Pinnock, 'Brief Diary, 1758–1794'. I am grateful to Vincent Brown of Harvard University for sharing this reference with me.

71. *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, ed. L.M. Freeman, L.V. North and J.M. Wedge (New York, 2005), pp. 230, 253 (John Jay to Sarah Jay, London, 16 Aug. 1794, and 13 Mar. 1795).

plantation colonies, but by the late eighteenth and then the early nineteenth centuries, those who had made money from slavery sought to hide the bloody foundations of their wealth.<sup>72</sup> This did not mean that enslaved people vanished from Britain after 1780, but there were certainly far fewer than had been present earlier in the century, and masters and mistresses were extremely unlikely to advertise for them if such people absconded. During the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, however, there were clearly many enslaved people in Britain, and although their bondage appears relatively benign compared to the conditions of plantation slavery, these people—many of them little more than children—were just as much enslaved as their brothers and sisters in the Caribbean. That many sought to liberate themselves, to seek new lives within British society and away from families they had known elsewhere, is powerfully revealing both about the horrors of racial slavery and about the social—rather than legal—possibilities of freedom that existed within Britain itself.

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72. This point has been illustrated by the research of the Legacies of British Slavery Project, and is developed in C. Hall, N. Draper, K. McClelland, K. Donnington and R. Lang, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 1–9, 127–202.