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The Racialization of Gratitude in Victorian Culture

Abstract:

Gratitude was racialised in Victorian culture. Drawing on a wide historical framework, which takes in eighteenth-century proslavery arguments as well as twenty-first-century anti-immigrant discourses, I explore how Victorian-era texts placed demands upon enslaved, formerly enslaved, and colonised peoples to feel thankful for their treatment as British imperial subjects. My article ranges over contexts and academic debates, and surveys nineteenth-century discourses, but it coheres around a case study concerning media reportage of the brief residence of a young West African, Eyo Ekpenyon Eyo II, in Colwyn Bay, Wales, in 1893. In a contextual examination of the press reaction to Eyo's decision to abandon his British schooling, this article draws attention to the implicit, submerged inequalities, exemplified in the demand for gratitude, through which Victorian Britain articulated the affective qualities of white hegemony.

Keywords: Race; Slavery; Empire; Affect; Victorian

1. Introduction

On 27 May 1893 Alfred Jones, Director of the Elder Dempster shipping line, received a letter from an Efik child named Eyo Ekpenyon Eyo II. Eyo was from the west African town of Akwa Akpa, or Old Calabar, which since 1884 had been occupied by the British as an administrative and trading hub of the Niger Coast Protectorate. He explained that his father had been a 'chief', but, after losing both parents Eyo had become, in his own words, 'a poor boy now. I am thirteen years old. Since my mother left me I commence to lose what I been learn'. He asked Jones to 'redeem' him, fearing that 'one of my father's brethren [...] want

me to be his slave.’ On the advice of a ‘gentleman’ in Old Calabar he sought Jones as a ‘good master’. In a pitiful postscript Eyo underlined that he begged for financial support ‘because I got no silver and gold. I am a little beast’.¹

The ‘gentleman’ had no doubt thought of Jones because his ships had been offering free passage for new recruits of the Congo Training Institute in Colwyn Bay, Wales, also known as Congo House.² Jones was a patron of this school, which had been established in 1889 by a

¹ Eyo Ekpenyon Eyo II to Alfred Jones, 27 May 1893. This and a follow-up letter dated 9 June 1893 are reprinted in ‘A Prince in Slavery’, *Fraternity* 1.4 (October 1893), 5-6.

Nineteenth-century sources I have consulted tend to spell the name ‘Ekpenyon’ though ‘Ekpenyong’ is a common spelling in more recent accounts of independent rulers of Akwa Akpa. Ekei Essien Oku, *The Kings & Chiefs of Old Calabar (1785-1925)* (Calabar: Glad Tidings Press, 1989). One Prince Eyo Ekpenyon II is listed among members of the High Court of the Native Council for Old Calabar in a Foreign Office file from 1895: The National Archives, Kew, Foreign Office papers: FO 2/84: Niger Coast, Commissioners and Consul-General (July-Sept 1895). On Elder Dempster’s role in British imperialism, see Marika Sherwood, ‘Elder Dempster and West Africa, 1891-c.1940: The Genesis of Underdevelopment?’. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 30.2 (1997), 253–76.

² See Christopher Draper and John Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House: William Hughes and the African Institute, Colwyn Bay* (Llanwrst, Wales: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2012); Hazel King, ‘Mojola Agbebi: African Church Leader’, in *Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History 1780-1950*, ed. by Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg (Crawley, England: Rabbit Press, 1986), pp. 84-108; Neil Evans and Ivor Wynne Jones, ‘Wales and Africa: William Hughes and the Congo Institute’, in *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved*

former missionary in the Congo, Rev. William Hughes. Congo House was an educational charity which sought to import young Africans to north Wales for training in Christianity and in various practical skills. It was expected that students would return to Africa as missionaries. Hughes's premise was that traditional methods of missionary outreach were too expensive, costly to life, and ineffective. Flying in the face of convention, his scheme was beset with difficulties, including financial hardships. Between 1889 and 1910, however, almost 90 people of African descent were enrolled at Congo House, including a handful of girls and young women. Having initially recruited youths from King Leopold's Congo Free State, Hughes's reach expanded across West Africa, then beyond to incorporate small numbers from southern Africa, the Caribbean and the USA. Some students became missionaries in Africa, as expected. Others entered fields such as law and medicine, and spent all or much of their adult lives in Britain. By entering into higher education, some members of this small community connected to wider networks in the black population in late-Victorian Britain.³

Jones secured Eyo's onward travel to Colwyn Bay. Less than six months after his arrival, however, Eyo wrote once again to Jones seeking further support. While paying tribute to the kindness of Jones and his hosts in Wales, Eyo regretted relocating to Britain as he felt he could not withstand the cold weather. He begged for his train fare to Liverpool and offered to

Wales, revised edition, ed. by Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans, and Paul O'Leary (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), pp. 106-27.

³ See Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain, 1901-1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

work as a steward in exchange for his return passage to West Africa.⁴ It appears that he was then required to place on record his concerns to Hughes. Once again he apologetically recognised his and his fellow Africans' kind treatment by Hughes's wife, especially during a bout of fever. He noted his good relations with his classmates: 'I live among them like my brethren no quarrel'. However, he continued, 'the reason which I want to go home because I am not feel well about this cold, and I thought in my heart that I will not stand it because now in Africa is warm, that why I want to go home'.⁵

Congo House was by no means widely known in Victorian Britain. The travels of other African visitors to Britain drew more attention than Hughes's students, and even within the confines of Hughes's scheme other individuals were more highly feted than the young Eyo.⁶ Despite his obscurity, Eyo's protestations met with scorn and mirth in the local and national press. The story breezed through the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, *London Illustrated News*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and tens of regional newspapers printed across Britain.⁷ In a

⁴ Eyo to Jones, December 1893. The letter is widely reprinted in newspapers. For example, *Evening Express*, 2 January 1894.

⁵ Eyo to William Hughes, 16 December 1893, in *Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1894.

⁶ See Neil Parsons, *King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen: Victorian Britain through African Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Ham Mukasa, *Uganda's Katikiro in England*, ed. by Simon Gikandi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); on Prince Peter Lobengula, see Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 144-46.

⁷ For example, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1894; *Illustrated London News*, 13 January 1894; *The Referee*, 7 January 1894; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 January 1894; *Manchester Guardian*,

similar tone, inferring some of the same supposed ironies as their Victorian sources, the authors of a history of Congo House remark that '[w]ithin weeks of his arrival in Britain the ungrateful little prince had decided that suffering slavery and destitution in Africa was preferable to enduring an education at Colwyn Bay.'⁸ Returning to nineteenth-century print sources, this article establishes a critical understanding of the overblown media response to Eyo's brief sojourn in north Wales. I examine media representations of Eyo in a long-term discursive context of racialized representations of African gratitude and ingratitude. Having shaped perceptions during nineteenth-century debates on slavery, these representations recirculated in commentaries on British imperialism in Africa, and African travel to and residence in Britain. The minor tale of an individual child's travels opens out into an enduring discourse in which gratitude operates as a form of indebtedness that is expected to be repaid by those whose right to equal treatment is undermined by prevailing racial prejudices. Media sources on Eyo's change of heart redeployed a set of deeply rooted notions of racialized inferiority based paradoxically on both Africans' supposed capacity for, and lack of, gratitude. While my focus will be on the nineteenth century, it has been instructive to consult writing on the continued resonance of these tropes amid rising anti-immigration sentiment in the twenty-first century. The poet and journalist Musa Okwonga's recent

4 January 1894; *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 3 and 6 January 1894; *Leicester Chronicle*, 6 January 1894; *Leeds Mercury*, 2 January 1894; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 January 1894; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 4 December 1894; *The Western Mail*, 5 January 1894; *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 11 January 1894; *The Weekly News and Visitors' Chronicle*, 4 January 1894; *The Cambrian*, 5 January 1894; *The Cardigan Observer and General Advertiser*, 13th January 1894; *Wrexham Advertiser*, 6 January 1894.

⁸ Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, p. 97.

account of his early life, which was published in Nikesh Shukla's *The Good Immigrant* (2016), observes the ironic expectation of gratitude from migrants for whom British society often shows contempt, and a similar point has since been articulated about US culture from the very different perspective of the American-Iranian novelist Dina Nayeri, a former child refugee.⁹ Gratitude is one of the affective measures by which certain minority groups are made to feel what the editors of *Locating African European Studies* (2019) describe as a sense of conditional and 'contingent belonging'.¹⁰ There was an attempt to ratify these feelings when, in 2019, shortly before its collapse, the coalition Austrian Government announced plans for a 'Ten Commandments of Immigration', which included showing gratitude to Austria.¹¹ For the most part, however, gratitude works as a fuzzy, cultural expectation operating outside, and in spite of, legal requirements.

⁹ Musa Okwonga, 'The Ungrateful Country', in *The Good Immigrant*, ed. by Nikesh Shukla, (London: Unbound 2016), 224-34; Dina Nayeri, 'The ungrateful refugee: "We have no debt to pay"', *The Guardian*, 4 April 2017.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/dina-nayeri-ungrateful-refugee>> [accessed 23 October 2019]. For another contextually very different study, see Carolina Moulin's analysis of Palestinian refugees in Brazil, 'Ungrateful subjects? Refugee protests and the logic of gratitude', in *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*, ed. by Peter Nyers and Kym Rygiel (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 54-72.

¹⁰ Felipe Espinoza Garrido, Caroline Koegler, Deborah Nyangulu, and Mark U. Stein, eds. *Locating African European Studies: Interventions, Intersections, Conversations* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹¹ *Newsweek*, 4 September 2019. <<https://www.newsweek.com/austria-immigrants-refugees-10-commandments-rules-gratitude-integration-1423714>> [accessed 23 October 2019].

Few attempts have been made to trace the historical dimensions of this desire, among supposed natives, for the thanks of first-, second-, or later-generation newcomers.¹² In what follows I seek to draw connections across centuries of writing about colonial and postcolonial inflections of gratitude. This swooping approach risks lumping together many varied experiences over time and place. My focus on Africans and peoples of African descent might falsely give the impression that only these groups experienced this demand, whereas it was both racialized and widespread. I mean, then, only to note that the demand of gratitude is one facet of experience, sometimes internalised, which has been commonly experienced by colonial slaves, former slaves and post-slavery inhabitants of Britain and its colonies, and has been felt by more recent generations of migrants to Britain and the USA, and their descendants, in the postcolonial era. As well as providing a broad critical framework in which to understand the case study in this article, I hope my discussion will spur further work on the questions I raise.

In particular, this article might prompt further study of racism's role in the affective environments of Victorian literature and culture. Influential studies warn of the complexities of the meanings of 'race' and the specialised senses in which 'racism' operated in Victorian culture.¹³ As Patrick Brantlinger notes, Victorianists at times discuss racism in tentative and

¹² On the historical difficulty of separating 'natives' and 'newcomers', see Laura Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England, 1841-1939* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹³ For example, David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2002); Douglas Lorimer, *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

qualified ways.¹⁴ Yet few would query that prejudices based on or articulated through differences of skin colour were increasingly widespread in a society making sense of itself as an imperial power. Though rare, accounts by people of African descent in late-nineteenth-century Britain note instances of overt hostility.¹⁵ Their views have been affirmed in several analyses of both mainstream and specialist fields of Victorian culture.¹⁶ By focusing on gratitude, this article seeks to probe further into abstracted and implicit forms of racism. Besides prejudice that openly directed feelings of difference toward the evidence of physical appearance, culture, religion, and geography were forms of discrimination that appealed to apparently universally applicable characteristics, such as emotions and morality. Because these types of prejudice were less overt, they were, and arguably continue to be, less easily identified and censured. The history of affect whispers ideas about the hierarchical stratification of the races, and these ideas continue to serve as lubricants of structural racism.

¹⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ For instance, Theophilus E. Samuel Scholes, *Glimpses of the Ages, or, The 'Superior' and 'Inferior' Races, So-Called, Discussed in the Light of Science and History*, vol. 2 (London: John Long, 1908), 175-9, 230-5; for other examples see Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 45-68.

¹⁶ For example, Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians*; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals*; Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*.

It is incumbent upon cultural studies to continue to identify and examine Victorian negotiations of questions of empire, race and immigration, the better to understand their impact on the past and their persistence in the present.

2. Race and the ‘debt of gratitude’

In the western philosophical tradition, gratitude has been subject to inquiry since Roman times. Early-twentieth-century psychological and sociological studies of the paradoxical and power-laden effects of gratitude have proven important to the development of critical theory, including work by the likes of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida.¹⁷ In understanding dominant Victorian (and post-Victorian) conceptions, however, the work of Adam Smith is of especial significance.¹⁸ In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith considers gratitude, alongside the contrasting state of resentment, to demonstrate that morality emerges from emotions rather than intellectual calculation. For Smith, gratitude cannot be demanded, it must emerge organically. If merited, then feelings of gratitude could expect to find sympathy among third parties with a shared sense of justice. The ‘debt of gratitude’ is then a familiar, virtuous disposition - ‘perhaps the most sacred of all those which the beneficent virtues

¹⁷ William McDougall, *An Outline of Psychology* (1923), 4th edition (London: Methuen, 1928), pp. 332-7; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1925), trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Polity Press, 1990); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Edward J. Harpham, ‘Gratitude in the History of Ideas’, in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. by Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 19-36.

prescribe to us’ - on which social relations can be based. ‘[B]lackest ingratitude’, conversely, endangers merit-worthy behaviour, and warrants the ‘disapprobation’ of the ‘impartial spectator’.¹⁹ But of whose dispositions does Smith speak? By the time that Charles Darwin’s theories enlarged the scope of ‘moral sentiments’ by observing appreciative behaviour in animals - in other primates, perhaps dogs, and even tentatively in elephants and ants²⁰ - the rising sciences of race had sought either to qualify and graduate the attainment of the higher emotions among racially ‘other’ peoples, or even to deny them entirely, pointing to their supposedly innate or acquired limitations. Though gratitude is not often specified in discussions of complex emotions in the major works on race, other discourses emerging out of contexts of slavery and empire over the long nineteenth century do show considerable

¹⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library 2005), pp. 172, 307, 171, in Eighteenth Century Collections Online <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eccodemo/K111361.0001.001?view=toc>> [accessed 30 January 2020]. For further discussion of Smith’s ‘debt of gratitude’ see Eun Kyung Min, ‘Adam Smith and the Debt of Gratitude’, in *The Question of the Gift*, ed. by Mark Osteen (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2002), pp. 132-46.

²⁰ On primates and dogs, see Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed. (1871; London: John Murray 1874), 79, 95-6. On elephants and ants, see extracts from Darwin’s notes on G. J. Romanes, *Animal Intelligence* (London: Kegan Paul Trench & Co, 1882), in Darwin Online <http://darwin-online.org.uk/EditorialIntroductions/Freeman_AnimalIntelligence.html> [accessed 4 February 2020].

uncertainty as to the capacity of Africans and peoples of African descent to feel the same types and degrees of gratitude as defined by Smith.

George Bouloukos examines representations of the grateful slave in the eighteenth century.²¹

The trope defended slavery with the ameliorative argument that kind treatment encourages appreciation among enslaved peoples, and contributed to the racialization of slavery by insisting on the essential differences in affective responses to exploitation among the races. To justify reform of slavery, in other words, peoples of African descent were understood as naturally subservient and accepting of other peoples' domination. Images of the grateful slave meant that 'independence, personal agency, and liberty' all were implied to be 'somehow more natural to the British than to West Africans'. African slaves were allegedly grateful in simple, unmindful ways. The African authors of the late eighteenth century, Ottobah Cugoano, Olaudah Equiano, and (to a lesser extent) Ignatius Sancho, would refute the stereotype. Cugoano, the most radical of these writers, challenged the notional reciprocity between slave and master, stating that the latter's 'tribute of thanks' is 'but a little restored to the wretched and miserable who they have robbed of their all'.²² Nonetheless, the grateful slave trope continued to be recuperated by apologists for slavery.

Bouloukos claims that '[i]n the Antebellum period...gratitude...sank from view as a primary marker of racial difference'.²³ In this period, however, as abolitionism ascended politically and culturally, the figure of the grateful slave was deployed to new positions, as the thankful recipient of mercy. This idea is integral to British anti-slavery texts. Marcus Wood's

²¹ George Bouloukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²² Ottobah Cugoano (1787), qtd. Bouloukos, *Grateful Slave*, p. 177.

²³ Bouloukos, *Grateful Slave*, p. 241.

extensive investigations of abolitionist art and writing determine that anti-slavery commitment in Britain entailed that the dynamics of gratitude were extended to the figure of the liberated ex-slave. The notion that the enslaving powers, having formerly denied freedom to their slaves, could then gift freedom to them is central to much abolitionist discourse.

Josiah Wedgwood's famous picture of a kneeling, shackled slave encircled by the motto 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?', which in many of its derivatives also features an embodiment of Britannia granting liberty to this figure, exemplifies the problem that a condition deemed natural, freedom, if bestowed 'from above', might just impose new forms of obligation upon the slave, perhaps yoking her or him to a new servitude.²⁴

There appeared no paradox to those Britons and other Europeans whose efforts to eliminate slavery in Africa would lead them to extend imperial influence, and ultimately colonial control, over much of the continent. Anti-slavery measures such as the naval campaign against the international slave trade did result in new forms of unfreedom, including entry into colonial apprenticeships in Sierra Leone and the Cape Colony.²⁵ These developments were conceived from afar as part of the gift of empire, its creation of 'colonial subjects'

²⁴ Marcus Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation* (University of Georgia Press, 2010). See also Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

²⁵ Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, eds. *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2019).

through cultural assimilation, not least education.²⁶ Often this obligation was internalised, accepted. In 1822 a young boy named Ajayi was released from a Portuguese slave ship by HMS *Myrmidon*. Taken to Sierra Leone with his fellow ‘recaptives’, he briefly served on a naval vessel, was baptised in 1825, and educated in Sierra Leone and Britain in preparation for life as a missionary. Fifteen years after his rescue, in a biographical letter written for publication by the Church Missionary Society, the future bishop of the Church of England Samuel Ajayi Crowther could look back thankfully upon his enslavement as ‘blessed’, an act of providence that ‘marked out for me to set out on my journey from the land of heathenism, superstition, and vice, to a place where His Gospel is preached.’²⁷

Though conforming to the generic properties of the ‘release narrative’, as discussed by Gareth Griffiths, in which the formerly enslaved testify to their Christian redemption,²⁸ Crowther’s testimony is nonetheless unusual because the circumstances of its publication reflect the sudden, fated transformation in his life. In the case of the Bermudan Mary Prince, by contrast, her freedom was acquired gradually, despite the wishes of her British masters, and with personal sacrifices, including separation from her husband. Despite the vulnerability of her situation as a poor, semi-literate person whose future in Britain was unclear, and the

²⁶ Catherine Hall, ‘Making Colonial Subjects: Education in the Age of Empire’, *History of Education* 37.6 (2008), 773-87.

²⁷ Samuel Ajayi Crowther, ‘The Narrative of Samuel Ajayi Crowther’ [1837], ed. by J.F. Ajayi, in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Philip D. Curtin (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), pp. 298-314, p. 299.

²⁸ Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 55-62.

fact that her memoir was recorded with significant input from white patrons, Mary Prince's *History* (1831) ascribes very few remarks of general gratitude to her. She had little to be thankful for, of course, and her reservation is in keeping with recent critical examinations of Prince's quiet and dignified forms of noncompliance.²⁹ Both resentful and sympathetic responses to her narrative show some recognition of this aspect of her resistance by falling back upon eighteenth-century proslavery ideas about gratitude. Her former owner John Wood would charge her with 'the worst species of ingratitude' when she asked to return to her home as a free woman. Her benefactor and editor Thomas Pringle made light of Wood's remark, but at the same time admitted that thankfulness remained a desirable characteristic in freed slaves, by defending her as one that 'is capable of strong attachments, and feels deep, though unobtrusive, gratitude for real kindness shown her.'³⁰

In the eighteenth century apologists for slavery had maintained that the labouring classes were in a more invidious position than the enslaved because the latter could expect their masters to care for them.³¹ The 'gift' offered in exchange for appreciative enslavement was not freedom but kind treatment. This argument continued to be made, even where it is ultimately rejected, well into the nineteenth century, including in anti-slavery texts, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) demonstrates. As a best-selling work that inspired numerous adaptations, derivatives and other intertexts, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel created a veritable 'Tom-

²⁹ For example, Barbara Baumgartner, 'The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in "The History of Mary Prince"' *Callaloo*, 24. 1 (2001), 253-75.

³⁰ Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 43, 55.

³¹ Boulukos, *Grateful Slave*, p. 29.

Mania' on both sides of the Atlantic.³² Such popularity was achieved not by challenging readers' beliefs, but by tapping into widely shared, 'undenominational' preconceptions about the divisive topics of religion and race.³³ In appealing to a wide base of readers the text accumulates contradictions, as is the case in its discussion of gratitude. Though the narrator mocks cruel slave-masters such as Mr. Haley for demanding gratitude, the narrative also restages the ameliorations debate seriously in dialogue between more sympathetic characters, and Tom does express thanks to his more benevolent masters.³⁴ Gratitude is among those Christian values which Stowe believed enslaved African Americans would exemplify as a result of their enduring enslavement. Since the earliest reviews, African American critics have challenged Stowe's investment in Tom. '[I]f any man had too piety, Uncle Tom was that man', writes William G. Allen in 1852. Allen proposes 'resistance to tyrants, if it need be, to the death' as a more admirable stance than Tom's, thus discounting Tom's Christ-like defiance of his enslaver.³⁵ Critics such as Allen perceived, rather, that attributing

³² Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians*, pp. 82-91.

³³ Howard Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery, 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 226. See also Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. xvi; Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, p. 13.

³⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), pp. 192-93.

³⁵ William G. Allen to Frederick Douglass, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 May 1852. Rpt. *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture*, <<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/reviews/rere03at.html>> [accessed 26 January 2020].

indebtedness and supplication to the enslaved and formerly enslaved reinstated hierarchies of power by assigning agency and authority to the former slave master (-race). Famously, ‘Uncle Tom’ would become a byword for servility in US culture of the twentieth century.³⁶ The figure of the grateful slave was also contested from various anti-abolitionist and pro-slavery positions in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Essentialist arguments about the eighteenth-century ‘natural slave’ were redeployed as part of a war of representation over slavery and liberty. Surveying the colonial scene, unsentimental racists openly queried whether benevolent, fraternal acts could ever be valued by people of African descent. Thomas Carlyle’s grotesque parody of post-emancipation ‘quashee’ grinding his over-sized incisors on pumpkins while the past productivity of the West Indies is squandered casts a long shadow.³⁷ The image is also part of the discursive history behind Boris Johnson’s mention of Africans’ ‘watermelon smiles’ in a notorious speech in 2002.³⁸ Carlyle’s arguments resurfaced when his tract was reprinted upon the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and again in the 1860s when James Hunt founded the Anthropological Society in protest at a sentimental illustration of liberated Africans of Sierra Leone appearing in the *Transactions of the Ethnological Society*.³⁹ At that time the explorer Richard Burton could

³⁶ See James Baldwin, ‘Everybody’s Protest Novel’, in *Notes of a Native Son* [1955] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 13-23.

³⁷ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question’ [1853], in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, 30 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), 348-83.

³⁸ Pippa Crerar, ‘I didn’t mean to be racist, claims Boris’, *Evening Standard*, 22 January 2008.

³⁹ George W. Stocking Jnr. *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), p. 376.

opine that the ‘kneeling negro’ of anti-slavery propaganda, ‘properly speaking, should have been on all fours’.⁴⁰ He saw in the image not gratitude but bestiality. While most schools of scientific thought were coming to emphasize differences between the races in the degrees of intellectual, moral, and emotional attainment, writings by the likes of Hunt and Burton proposed differences of kind.

Radical and populist writings on behalf of the exploited and disenfranchised British labouring classes also challenged the figure of the freed slave.⁴¹ They approached the subject from a material viewpoint, regarding anti-slavery compassion as an indulgence, which, perhaps deliberately, shielded the middle classes from exploitation ‘closer to home’ through projections of sympathy which Charles Dickens famously termed ‘telescopic philanthropy’.⁴² Anticipating anti-immigrant positions in which vague nationalist understandings take precedence over legal rights, this rhetoric questioned black peoples’ equal rights to ‘native’ Britons, the latter being generally figured as white regardless of the complex migration history of the British Isles, which includes long-term residence of peoples of colour predating

⁴⁰ Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome* [1864] (London: Tylson and Edwards, 1893), p. 5.

⁴¹ See, for example, Patricia Hollis, ‘Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform’, in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, ed. by Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Folkestone, Kent: Dawson, 1980), 294–315; Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 3–35; Ryan Hanley ‘Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814–1833’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 103–123.

⁴² Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), Ch. 4.

the existence of the ‘English’.⁴³ Despite prominent black political figures such as the London Chartist William Cuffay, the image of the genuflecting, ‘imploring Negro’, could be contrasted negatively, and in essentialising terms, with the upright, ‘indignant Englishman’.⁴⁴ Wedgewood’s image had again been upended to suggest the lack of manly and brotherly similarity between enslaved and emancipator.

An obscure Chartist poem called ‘The Land of Freedom’ (1840) is worth spending some time with at this juncture because of the similarities between its image of an ungrateful African and that in my case study, the tale of Eyo. As the example of Cuffay reveals, Chartism was not divorced from questions of race equality, in Britain or the wider Atlantic World. Kelly J. Mays details that Chartist poetry often drew upon the language of enslavement, either in literal references to transatlantic slavery, or in abstraction.⁴⁵ A number of poems published in the Chartist papers imagined conversations between Africans, sometimes formerly enslaved, and British labourers coming to terms with their own ‘enslavement’ under disenfranchised industrial capitalism. In some examples of this trope, such as Edward Polin’s ‘The Freeman and the Slave’ (1840), the two figures come together to express their mutual suffering and

⁴³ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

⁴⁴ The words of Major John Cartwright, as reported in *Cobbett’s Political Register*, 1816, qtd. Hanley, ‘Slavery’, p. 112. On Cuffay, see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 303-11.

⁴⁵ Kelly J. Mays, ‘Slaves in Heaven, Laborers in Hell: Chartist Poets’ Ambivalent Identification with the (Black) Slave’, *Victorian Poetry* 39.2 (2001), 137-63.

sympathy.⁴⁶ In ‘The Land of Freedom’, by ‘A.M.P’, the African Mohab, though a slave, is an unsympathetic character who ventures to ‘a shore | Where the poor and the stranger were free’, Britain. Having been shown by his ‘Englishman’ guide the press gang, the treatment of deserters in the army, the corrupt press, the poor house, and the starving masses, Mohab quickly changes his opinions, ironically ending the poem by thanking ‘the great God my fathers that I | Am a child of the regions of slavery!’.⁴⁷

The poem reverses the logic of the ‘release narrative’, such as Crowther’s, which look back appreciatively upon enslavement as part of a journey toward Christian assimilation. In gleefully returning to slavery Mohab rather articulates his difference to Britons and failure to attain their alleged moral standards. In a manner which recalls proslavery rhetoric, this gratitude suggests Mohab’s fitness for slavery. If innocence is an important requirement of humanitarian sympathy, as Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown claim, then this poem illustrates what happens when that innocence is lost.⁴⁸ Having shown insufficient appreciation the African is denied sympathy and even becomes a figure warranting resentment. At the heart of the comedy of Mohab’s flight is a presumption of native entitlement which may itself serve in the tenuous work of establishing nativity on the grounds of race. It is symptomatic of post-Abolition developments in British attitudes that Mohab’s

⁴⁶ Edward Polin, ‘The Freeman and the Slave’, *Chartist Circular*, 10 October 1840; Mays, ‘Slaves in Heaven’, 149.

⁴⁷ A.M.P., ‘The Land of Freedom’, *Chartist Circular*, 27 June 1840; Mays, ‘Slaves in Heaven’, 148.

⁴⁸ Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, ‘Introduction’, in *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, ed. by Wilson and Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-28, p. 21.

inability to appreciate his freedom accentuates the suffering of the British working classes, whose claims to freedom are implicitly more merited. Racism served to restore, on an emotional and moral plain, the belief in difference which, before abolition, had been effectively enshrined in law.

Carlyle's complaint that the free populations of the Caribbean will waste their apparent gift finds echoes in 'The Land of Freedom' as well as in reportage of the 'African Prince' in Colwyn Bay, Eyo, who found 'the weather here worse to endure than the sufferings he was familiar with at home'.⁴⁹ That Eyo's 'ingratitude' revolved around inclement weather perhaps provided a farcical and safe topic, one of proverbial distracted passion in Britain, on which the press could round.

3. 'the ungrateful little prince'

North Wales was no more immune to racism than other regions in late-Victorian Britain. The appearance of a 'Nigger's Minstrel Benefit', described in the press as 'one of the most popular events in the year', which featured 'ever welcome coon songs and dance', in Colwyn Bay in September 1904 indicates that the presence of a devout school of Africans did not dislodge mainstream entertainments.⁵⁰ Despite, and perhaps because of, broad interest in African exotica, Congo House received considerable financial support from Colwyn Bay, and beyond. Local and national press coverage up till the early 1890s had been quite benign, moreover, and was often supportive. The Dominican pioneering antiracism journalist Celestine Edwards's publication of letters from Eyo, a 'Prince in Slavery' on his way to the

⁴⁹ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 6 January 1894.

⁵⁰ Qtd. King, 'Mojola Agbebi', p. 101.

‘praiseworthy’ Congo House, for example, is a sign of its acceptance and good standing among informed, conscientious audiences.⁵¹

At the same time, Hughes claimed local apprehensions about his school’s impact upon tourism, and even local fear of the threat of miscegenation.⁵² His responses to these concerns betrayed his own race anxieties. For example, he responded to one rebuttal of his scheme by insisting it was aimed only at the most talented Africans, a strategy which anticipates later, official migration policies based on merit (and chimes with notions of ‘talented tenth’ of the African American population, as voiced by W.E.B. Du Bois). Fears of mass migration were massaged. ‘Of course,’ the local paper noted, Hughes and his colleagues ‘wanted the cream of the boys of Congoland. If they took all they could get without discrimination, they would soon have not only Colwyn Bay, but all England, full of such boys.’⁵³ In response to criticism from field-based missionaries in Africa, Hughes reacted against another late-nineteenth-century racial trope by insisting that measures were in place to ensure his pupils would not be ‘spoiled’ by their experience in Britain.⁵⁴ African youths brought to Britain by missionaries had previously been indulged as if pets, Hughes noted. Thereafter they associated civilisation with idleness and had failed to prosper upon their return home. He pledged that his intakes were trained in the ways of conscientiousness, and the location of his school in north Wales, he felt, provided a calm and pious environment away from the trappings of the metropolis.

⁵¹ ‘A Prince in Slavery’, *Fraternity* (October 1893), 5.

⁵² *The Weekly News and Visitors’ Chronicle*, 23 November 1894; William Hughes, *Dark Africa and the Way Out; or, A Scheme for Civilizing and Evangelizing the Dark Continent* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1892), p. 100.

⁵³ *The Weekly News and Visitors’ Chronicle*, 2 June 1892.

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Dark Africa*, p. 25.

The debate on entitlement and the risk of indulgence are reminders of the ways in which race cut across other aspects of social identity, not least class. It is not clear where mention of Eyo's claims to the title of 'prince' first arise. His own letter makes clear that his father and uncle were powerful members of Old Calabar society. Besides his actual status, though, his repeated description as a 'prince' also owes something to the British imperial imaginary. As Wylie Sypher noted in 1941, the visiting African prince was an emblem of 'savage virtue' in British imperial literature long after 'the Oronoko legend' can be called upon solely to explain the phenomenon. Tales of African princes redeemed from slavery and spirited to Britain had stirred sympathetic responses since at least the 1730s, decades before pity for the enslaved would translate into anti-slavery actions.⁵⁵ A string of relatively high-profile visits to Britain by African dignitaries had revived this trope in late-Victorian culture. A.B.C. Merriman-Labor, the Sierra Leonean whose *Britons Through Negro Spectacles* (1909) cast a wry gaze on London society, was amused to report that so many Britons 'still believe that every Negro with a decent overcoat and a clean collar is an African prince'.⁵⁶ By this time, however, the spectacle of African royalty had acquired varied new meanings reflecting a wide range of views on race and empire, many of them less supportive than their eighteenth-century forebears. While sympathetic depictions continued in humanitarian circles, they were increasingly queried. British officers' and diplomats' negotiations with African potentates, for example, were reported in terms of amusement, inspiring dismissive attitudes among lay

⁵⁵ Wylie Sypher, 'The African Prince in London', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2.2 (1941), 237-247 (p. 237).

⁵⁶ A.B.C. Merriman-Labor, *Britons through Negro Spectacles; or, A Negro on Britons, with a description of London* (London: Imperial and Foreign Company, 1909), p. 134.

commentators and sceptics of humanitarianism such as Dickens.⁵⁷ The Jamaican Scholes's account of university students in Scotland attacking a Nigerian ruler, the Alake of Abeokuta, during his tour of Britain in 1908 confirms that high social rank did not guarantee respect.⁵⁸ Sympathetic audiences might have noted considerable ambiguity in the fledgling English speaker Eyo's statement to Hughes that 'I want to go home because I am not feel well about this cold'. He had already suffered from an unspecified fever and may, not unreasonably, have doubted his health prospects at Congo House. Hughes confessed to initial doubts about the adaptability of Africans to the British climate.⁵⁹ Three of the 21 youths who had enrolled at the institute before Eyo had died in Wales and a fourth perished on his journey back to Africa. Given that Congo House was founded partly on the notion that the tropical climate of Africa too often proved deadly for white missionaries - Hughes had retired from mission work on grounds of ill-health - Eyo's decision to withdraw, if based on the grounds of health, simply mirrored the reasoning of Hughes and his scheme.

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, 'Review: Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841 [...]', *The Examiner*, 19 August 1848.

⁵⁸ Scholes, *Glimpses of the Ages*, vol. 2, p. 177. One modern-day comparator- -if not outright legacy - of these contestations of African nobility are the '419 scambaiters' who draw huge followerships by deceiving internet fraudsters, often and proverbially identified as 'Nigerian princes', into acts of self-degradation and financial loss. See Avi Selk, 'Internet scammers are terrible. This troll is their nightmare', *The Washington Post*, 8 February 2018. <
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2018/02/08/internet-scammers-are-terrible-this-troll-is-their-nightmare/>> [accessed 23 October 2019].

⁵⁹ Hughes, *Dark Africa*, p. 10.

But while the *Daily Telegraph* confessed to ‘pity as well as laughter’ in covering Eyo’s story, real sympathy was in short supply in the newspapers.⁶⁰ Eyo appeared in the press as a spoiled African child. His unwillingness to stay for a Welsh winter led to a racially informed attack based around his personal lack of fortitude and ungracious rejection of the opportunity that had been bestowed upon him. The account that featured in most papers reproduced Eyo’s December letter to Jones, which expressed Eyo’s thankfulness for ‘wonderful kindly’ treatment.⁶¹ Yet it framed Eyo’s words with comments that, despite the unusual mildness of the current winter, ‘it is, nevertheless, too severe for the sensitive young African Prince ... who was entirely destitute and even barefooted when in Africa’. In concluding that passengers on the *SS Nubia* ‘will have Royalty to wait on them’ the article detected amusing irony either in Eyo’s reversal of fortune or in his original claims to high birth.

The *Birmingham Daily Post* struck a tone of bemused resentment at Eyo’s departure in the form of ironic congratulations:

One cannot but felicitate the African Prince, EYO EKPENYON EYO II, who has, by this time, found in his own latitudes relief from the merciless temperature of Colwyn Bay. Had he stayed to undergo the further decline which has followed his departure, his lot must have been indeed a sad one. Most of us can sympathise just now with his whimsical letter of the other day, in which he complained, ‘I can feel even my fingers and my feet, and I seat beside the fire all the day long from morning to evening.’ Few of us, however keenly we feel the existence of our extremities, can arrange to sit by the fire all day, and it is probably well for us that we cannot.⁶²

⁶⁰ Qtd. Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, p. 98.

⁶¹ For example, *Evening Express*, 2 January 1894.

⁶² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 January 1894.

Similarly, *St James's Gazette* deigned to 'congratulate' Eyo for his 'piteous' and 'pathetic' appeal to return home. Enviously contrasting Eyo's respite with the imagined busy lives of its readers it grumbled that the fireside 'is where many of us would like to be.'⁶³ In both papers, the disparity between the African migrant's idling and 'our' unavoidable burdens of labour is a source of resentment.

In contrast to eighteenth-century sentimental depictions of the enslaved African prince, the press enjoyed Eyo's reversal of rank. A slightly later report in the *Illustrated London News* confused Eyo's ethnic identity, imagining that by now Eyo was 'probably on his way to the real Congo', before joking that:

Since Arthur's time no young prince has ever made a more pathetic appeal, only Eyo is afraid not of hot irons but of the cold. He admits the benefits of science and the glories of civilisation, but he will forego them all if he can but take ship and escape from this bitter weather, though it be as a steward or even a stowaway.⁶⁴

The Referee made the same jokes as other papers about this 'shivering son of sable sovereignty', and further offered three stanzas of comic verse titled 'Old Calabar' on the 'little Black Prince' who 'reckoned himself extremely 'cute ! When he came to the Congo Institute'. The final two stanzas interestingly follow conventions of earlier Chartist poetry in imagining the situation through the African prince's eyes, and even use Eyo's own, widely circulated words, 'I feel my fingers and feel my feet'. The finale tonally calls to mind the ironic wistfulness of Rudyard Kipling's 'Mandalay', which had been recently republished in *Barrack-Room Ballads, and Other Verses* (1892):

The land of Britain's a wondrous sight,

⁶³ *St James's Gazette*, 3 January 1894.

⁶⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 13 January 1894.

But I'm cold all day and I'm cold all night.
 My nose is red and my lips are blue,
 And the winds are keen and they cut me through.
 Though the change of home may my prospects mar,
 In future I'll winter on Old Calabar.⁶⁵

Irony defines all the press reports. Resentful of the child's modest display of agency, together they detected a humorous reversal of the logical or natural order in the princely African's refusal to fully appreciate British benevolence. Whereas for the Chartist poet A.M.P. the African's flight underlines the British worker's lack of 'prospects', in 'Old Calabar' Eyo's leaving Britain is an act of short-sighted self-harm and a measure of his difference. The comedy worked to reinforce long-held conventions of racism and proslavery rhetoric of the grateful slave. Curiously, while Hughes steered clear of the Eyo debacle in his own reports, he does seem to have been inspired by the publicity to publish a handful of other 'amusing' letters in broken, misspelt English asking for a place at this school, including ones from children claiming to be orphans, which were picked up in local newspapers.⁶⁶

The final update on Eyo's tale in the British press came in the form of a response from a fellow intake at Congo House, one who pointedly did not complain. Joseph Ebakise Burnley arrived in north Wales from the Cameroons in 1892 and would stay for three years before

⁶⁵ *The Referee*, 7 January 1894.

⁶⁶ 'Tropical English', *The Globe*, 12 June 1894; *The Weekly News and Visitors' Chronicle*, 15 June 1894; *The Weekly News and Visitors' Chronicle*, 14 September 1894; *Report of the Congo Training Institute, for African Students, in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, 1895-6* (Colwyn Bay: R.E. Jones, 1896), p. 22.

returning to Africa for a long and successful career as a missionary.⁶⁷ He was a high-achieving student who obtained a first-class mark in an externally examined Latin test, a certificate in First Aid, and training in tailoring and photography.⁶⁸ Hughes inspired loyalty among a number of his students for whom residence in Congo House provided opportunities for social ascent, and Burnley was one of several students employed on promotional events and tours. Burnley appears to have served his teacher again by writing a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, which was published in an article titled ‘An African Prince Homesick: The English Winter as an Excuse’. Because this article reprinted Eyo’s letter to Hughes, it seems to have been orchestrated by the Welshman. In his letter Burnley opined that Eyo ‘went home through his own foolishness and nothing else: because some of us have been here for three years and we have nothing to complain of the English weather. I am sure he would have stood it as well as any of us’.⁶⁹

Burnley’s letter helped Hughes to defend his scheme against negative publicity, and perhaps especially to appeal apologetically to Jones, whose free shipping for students was vital to its economic working. The ability of young Africans to withstand the British climate, in contrast to so many white missionaries who had perished on African soil, was one of Hughes’s main arguments in favour of his plan. Congo House depended on charitable support from the public, and it struggled to secure this resource in the crowded marketplace of late-Victorian philanthropy that included the venerable missionary societies against which Congo House

⁶⁷ Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, pp. 198-200.

⁶⁸ *Llangollen Advertiser Denbighshire Merionethshire and North Wales Journal*, 9 February 1894; *The Weekly News and Visitors’ Chronicle*, 29 March 1895; *The Weekly News and Visitors’ Chronicle*, 18 October 1895.

⁶⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1894.

was pitted.⁷⁰ Instances of failure and inefficiency could be seized upon to redirect sympathy away from the eccentric immigration scheme. But beyond the specific purposes and conscious motivations of Burnley's letter lies a deep-lying belief, one which was upheld by centuries of imperial discourses that sought to differentiate between rights on the basis of a colour bar. In reclaiming gratitude as a good behavioural characteristic of the non-native, Burnley's letter placed an especial onus on them, a sense of indebtedness which was itself constitutive of racial difference. Gratitude was not expressly sought nor prized above the many other positive characteristics of students which Hughes would highlight in reports on his school, but when it was evident in star pupils such as Burnley it helped foster support and confidence. Burnley and some of his classmates 'expressed themselves to that effect when they were leaving this Institution. They will never forget the kindness they received during their stay in England'.⁷¹ Eyo's apparent lack of gratitude, by contrast, revealed the implicit conditions on which support was based.

4. Conclusion

Greater notoriety awaited Congo House in the years after Eyo's departure. In December 1911, *John Bull* reported salaciously on the students' romantic relationships with local women, in particular the illegitimate child fathered by John Lionel Franklin, a 36-year-old Bermudan actor who had been hired by Hughes for promotional work and dubiously registered among the institute's students. The exposé led to a libel case that ruined Hughes.

⁷⁰ See Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870-1912* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

⁷¹ *Report of the Congo Training Institute for African Students, Colwyn Bay, North Wales* (Colwyn Bay: R.E. Jones and Bros, 1906), p. 6.

John Bull's proprietor Horatio Bottomley defended himself successfully and exposed Hughes's acts of deception, including his misappropriation of one student's personal funds.⁷² While the trial is regarded as the cause of the school's closure, the truth is that a more complex set of circumstances, including long-term financial mismanagement and the rise of independent African churches which did not need Hughes's support, also accounts for its downfall. Racist reportage of the Franklin affair nonetheless certainly irreversibly soured public opinion of Hughes and his institute. 'Colwyn Bay is delighted to be rid of Hughes and his niggers', averred Bottomley.⁷³

By focusing on the less momentous and more quickly resolved case of Eyo this article has probed some of the more subtle workings of discourses on race, empire, and immigration, through which British perceptions of black people were reaffirmed and regulated. It has reflected on the role of gratitude in determining British responses over a long period of time stretching from the eighteenth century to the present. Through images of grateful and ungrateful Africans Britain pondered its openness to otherness and its willingness to share freedoms, which were held to belong to Britons, with peoples who had previously been enslaved, or in other periods might have been enslaved in the Atlantic-world system.

Gratitude, in these contexts, has always been a marker of racial identity, for whereas grateful slaves of the eighteenth century proved their natural subservience by accepting their lot, in later, post-emancipation decades of the nineteenth century thankfulness was required from former slaves and their descendants whose rights were questioned on the grounds of science and politics. The woolly notion of the birth-right proved an important ingredient in channelling resentment toward those perceived to be lacking in gratitude, no matter their

⁷² Evans and Jones, 'Wales and Africa', p. 89.

⁷³ *John Bull*, 22 June 1912. Qtd. in Evans and Jones, 'Wales and Africa', p. 89.

legal rights to freedom from slavery or forms of persecution. The legal entitlements conferred by abolition indeed eventuated the reassertion of moral and emotional superiority from the mid-Victorian period onward.

As Caroline Shaw observes of the history of British charitable immigration, there is an ‘imperiousness’ in the ‘moral demands’ which Britain has long placed upon those people seeking ‘Britannia’s embrace’.⁷⁴ Part of this attitude is the lack of reciprocal recognition which Britain extends to others. The burden of gratitude has always been one-way, as British imperialism was fuelled by the very lack of gracious acknowledgement which it observed resentfully in its ‘subject races’. In 1905, Scholes observed how white colonial rule operated partly through a disavowal of its own historic debts:

although so deeply indebted to the ancients of the three races, particularly to the African race, for the earlier developments of science and art, not omitting in this latter category even the alphabet, with the bulk of the colourless race the practice now is, not only to ignore the obligation, although that had been bad enough, but, affecting an air of supercilious and disdainful incredulity, to inquire whether the darker races particularly the African are capable of scientific and artistic culture.⁷⁵

The failure of reciprocity has also been noted in more recent accounts of postcolonial identity in Britain. Okwonga observes that Britain demands thankfulness from those members of its society which entrenched racism leads it to regard with the least obligation.⁷⁶ And in the case of the Windrush generation of migrants whose lives have been upended by anti-immigration

⁷⁴ Caroline Shaw, *Britannia’s Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 143.

⁷⁵ Scholes, *Glimpses of the Ages*, vol. 1 (London: John Long, 1905), p. 378.

⁷⁶ Okwonga, ‘Ungrateful Country’.

government policy, the so-called 'Hostile Environment', gestures of thanks for their contribution to British society have trailed guiltily and belatedly in the wake of scandalous mistreatment.⁷⁷ In this context the story of Eyo shines a light on aspects of existence in Britain which were not commonly placed on record, a demand made on the conduct of some social groups that was unlike the stresses felt by other groups owing to its derivation from historical discourses on race. Through the experiences of Eyo and other students at Congo House, a discourse borne of empire and slavery was adapted to a different context, that of African education in the heart of the British Empire.

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⁷⁷ See Rebecca Speare-Cole, 'Theresa May announces Windrush generation memorial to be built at London Waterloo Station', *Evening Standard*, 22 June 2019. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/theresa-may-announces-windrush-generation-memorial-to-be-built-at-london-waterloo-station-a4173536.html> [accessed 23 October 2019].