

Chapter Title: Freedom seekers in Restoration London

Book Title: Freedom Seekers

Book Subtitle: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London

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Published by: University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research. (2022)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv293p4c5.11>

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3. Freedom seekers in Restoration London

... a little Negro Boy of about 13 years of age ... has been seen much to frequent Fleet Street and the Strand ... (1664)

A Negro Boy, his name Africa, by his growth seeming to be about 12 years old ... speaks some English, Dutch, and Blacks ... (1678)

Run away ... a Negro about 16 years of age, pretty tall, he speaks English, but slow in Speech ... he is called by the name of Othello ... (1685)

Run away the 30th of January, a Negro Man of Tawny Complexion, with Mosse Hair, middle stature, with a Down Cast Look, he walks with his Chin in his Bosom, having a piece of one of his Ears cut of, with a Brass Collar about his Neck, he talks very bad English, and is called Ned, and will readily answer to that Name. (1689)

An Indian black Girl, aged about 15, with a Brass Collar about her Neck, in a Drugget Gown and a Painted-Callico Petticoat ... (1690)

A Black Boy, an Indian, about 13 years old, run away... having a Collar about his Neck with this Inscription, the Lady Bromfield's Black in Lincolns Inn Fields ... (1694)

A Negro, named Quoshey, aged about 16 years ... run away from Bell-Wharf ... branded on his left Breast with E.A. but not plain, and shaved round his Head ... (1700)¹

There were many Africans and South Asians in Restoration London. During the second half of the seventeenth century English colonists, traders, sailors and adventurers brought more and more people of colour back to the British

¹ '... a little Negro Boy', *The Newes, Published for Satisfaction and Information of the People*, 8 Dec. 1664; 'A Negro Boy', *The London Gazette*, 12 Sept. 1678; 'Run away ... a Negro', *London Gazette*, 5 Jan. 1685; 'Run away the 30th of January', *London Gazette*, 7 March 1689; 'An Indian black Girl', *London Gazette*, 22 Sept. 1690; 'A Black Boy, an Indian', *London Gazette*, 10 Sept. 1694; 'A Negro, named Quoshey', *London Gazette*, 30 Dec. 1700.

Isles, and most especially to the metropole.² Restoration London was within, and indeed essential to, the contact zone between English investors, merchants, planters and bound Africans and South Asians, and as such it was a venue in which at least some English understandings and practices of racial slavery were constructed. How many of the men, women and children of colour brought to the seventeenth-century city were enslaved? Who were they and what can we learn of their lives and existence? We cannot fully answer these questions, and in many cases the only surviving records of these people are newspaper advertisements for those who escaped or were lost, short notices that reveal precious little about the individuals in question.

Some Africans and South Asians in London were enslaved, others were held in an often ill-defined state of bondage, while a few were or eventually became nominally free employees. Their status is blurred by the language people in England used to describe them, for during much of the seventeenth century the words 'slave' and 'slavery' were more commonly used by English people of themselves rather than applied to bound Africans and South Asians. During the Exclusion Crisis the earl of Shaftesbury declared in the House of Lords that 'Popery and Slavery, like two sisters, go hand-in-hand', and a sermon celebrating King William's displacement of James II enthused that his reign would prevent both the 'inslaving of

² There is a growing historiography related to people of colour in early modern London and England, although there has been less work on slavery and freedom seekers in the foundational later 17th century. See eg M. Kaufman, *Black Tudors: the Untold Story* (London, 2017); K. Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales during the Period of the British Slave Trade, c.1660–1807* (Manchester, 2009); G. Gerzina, *Black London: Life before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1995); C. Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); K. F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995); I. Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Aldershot, 2008); S. D. Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640–1700* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007); F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (Oxford, 1974); N. Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780–1830* (London, 1996); P. Fryer, *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984); J. Walvin, *The Black Presence: a Documentary History of the Negro in England* (London, 1971); *Slavery and the British Country House*, ed. M. Dresser and A. Hann (Swindon, 2013); P. D. Fraser, 'Slaves or free people? The status of Africans in England, 1550–1750', in *From Strangers to Citizens: the Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550–1750*, ed. R. Vigne and C. Littleton (Brighton, 2001), pp. 254–60; V. C. D. Mtubani, 'African slaves and English law', *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, iii (1981), pp. 71–5. We know far less about South Asians in 17th-century London, but there is a little more work in this field for the 18th century: see E. Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: an Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, N.J., 2011), pp. 87–91, 291–9, and E. S. Filor, 'Complicit colonials: Border Scots and the Indian empire, c.1780–1857' (unpublished University College London PhD thesis, 2014), pp. 205–14.

our Bodies ... [and] the Inslaving of our Souls'.³ When this new king had arrived in Exeter, his procession included '200 Blacks brought from the Plantations of the *Neitherlands in America*' to attend the horses of the cavalymen, wearing 'Imbroyder'd Caps lin'd with white Fur, and plumes of white Feathers'.⁴ Englishmen's celebration of their liberation from a more symbolic bondage was heralded by Africans whose enslavement was real.

English onlookers may very well have regarded these Black attendants as servants rather than as enslaved. The most widely used English translations of the Bible had all but eliminated the word 'slavery', employing instead the word 'servant' to describe the various forms of service and bondage represented in Scripture. Tyndale's version of Deuteronomy XXIII: 16, for example, represented an enslaved person who had escaped as 'the servant which is escaped from the master', and the practice of using the word 'servant' in place of 'slave' pervaded the King James and the Geneva Bibles. Most strikingly of all, the Israelites in Egypt were described in these Bibles as servants rather than as slaves, and the language of service and bond labour almost completely replaced the language of enslavement. The Egyptians 'caused the Children of Israel to Serve', who were rescued when God bought his chosen people 'out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen'.⁵ The Bible was the most ubiquitous printed work in seventeenth-century England, and in its pages (as well as in thousands of religious tracts and sermons) the 'usages of "servant" to denote "slave" – following the Hebrew *'eved*, Greek *doulos*, and Latin *servus* – continued to be used throughout the seventeenth century'.⁶

In England service and servitude were a continuum encompassing both the nominally free labour of many young English men and women and the bound labour of Africans, some South Asians and some indigenous people. In contrast, the word 'slave' tended to appear in English polemics with reference to an English person's or a Protestant's loss of religious or political freedom. This included English sailors, merchants and others captured and held by

³ John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), p. III; *England's Call to Thankfulness for her Great Deliverance from Popery and Arbitrary Power by the Glorious Conduct of the Prince of Orange (now King of England) in the year 1688 in a sermon preach'd in the parish-church of Almer in Dorsetshire on February the 14th, 1688 by John Olliffe* (London, 1689), pp. 3–4.

⁴ *A True and Exact Relation of the Prince of Orange his Publick Entrance into EXETER* (London, 1688). I am grateful to Judith Spicksley for drawing my attention to this event.

⁵ Deuteronomy XXIII: 16, *Five Books of Moses [Pentateuch]* [Tyndale Bible] (Antwerp, 1530); Exodus II: 13, *The Bible: Translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke ...* [Geneva Bible] (London, 1611), p. 22; Jeremiah XXXIV: 13, *The Holy Bible ...* [King James Version] (London, 1611).

⁶ N. Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society, and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 100; see also pp. 82–118.

North African states, a cause célèbre in Restoration England. In his diary Pepys recorded meeting Captain Mootham and Mr Dawes, 'who have been both slaves ... [in Tangiers and] did make me fully acquainted with their condition there'. Throughout the seventeenth century Englishmen such as John Rawlins, William Oakeley and Thomas Phelps wrote accounts of their enslavement, while their stories spread still further through ballads such as 'The Algiers Slaves Releasement' or the catchily titled 'The Lamentable Cries of at Least 1500 Christians: Most of Them Being Englishmen ... [in] Turkish Slavery'.⁷

Of course, the language of slavery and servitude was starkly different in Barbados, Virginia and the other plantation colonies where it quickly became important to differentiate between White servants on the one hand and enslaved Africans and indigenous people on the other. In these colonies the difference between a White servant and a Black enslaved person was profound. But in seventeenth-century England the differences were less visible and linguistic imprecision far more common, with the result that during the second half of the seventeenth century the word 'servant' covered both White workers and bound people of colour. Consequently, although there are fleeting impressions of Africans and South Asian people of colour in early modern English records, it is often very difficult to determine their precise status. Some appear in parish records, others in runaway advertisements in London newspapers seeking the recapture and return of people of colour who had escaped. In London the Atlantic world's very first runaway slave newspaper advertisements conceptualized and defined the very concept of the runaway slave, though these notices seldom included the word 'slave'.⁸ In seventeenth-century English newspapers the word 'slave' was seldom applied to people of colour.

⁷ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: Daily Entries from the 17th Century London Diary*, 8 Feb. 1661 <<https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary>> [accessed 24 Jan. 2021]; J. Rawlins, *The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol, called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier* (London, 1622); W. Okeley, *Eben-ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy Appearing in the Miraculous Deliverance of John Anthony, William Okeley, William Adams, John Jephbs and John Carpenter from the Miserable Slavery of Algiers ...* (London, 1675); T. Phelps, *A True Account of the Captivity of Thomas Phelps, at Machiness in Barbary* (London, 1685); *The Algiers Slaves Releasement; or, The Unchangeable Bost-Swain* (London, 1671); *The Lamentable Cries of at Least 1500 Christians: Most of Them Being Englishmen (Now Prisoners in Argiers under the Turks) ...* (London, 1624), repr. in *Naval Songs and Ballads*, ed. C. H. Firth (London, 1908), xxxiii. 88–9, 31–3. See also R. C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 3–68.

⁸ Traditionally historians have used the term 'runaway slave' for those who attempted to escape enslavement. This term is somewhat problematic given that it labels the person as a 'slave' and therefore denies them individuality or even a small degree of agency by defining them as an object and property. Moreover, the term may be read as implying an almost unquestioning acceptance of the categorization of escape as an illegal act, a theft of property. The term 'freedom seeker' acknowledges the individuality and agency of the person who

Whether they were regarded as servants or as enslaved, these freedom seekers of Restoration London are as elusive to us as they often were to those who pursued them. In North America and the Caribbean it is occasionally possible to trace in great detail the lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century freedom seekers who were the subject of newspaper advertisements, sometimes in remarkable detail, as in the case of Ona Judge who escaped from George and Martha Washington.⁹ But, even beyond such well-documented individuals, freedom seekers in the English colonies and the early United States escaped from a system of slavery that has left numerous sources including plantation records, medical and military records, the diaries and personal papers of slave-owners, merchants and travellers; the log books and papers of crew members of slave ships; and so forth. Although it is only rarely possible to hear the voices of the enslaved in the voluminous records of slavery compiled by slaveholders, such records can nonetheless yield a great deal of information about racial slavery in the round, and historians have made use of them to deepen their understanding of freedom seekers, the kinds of slavery they escaped from, the particular reasons for their flight and something of their hoped-for destinations and lives. While the individuals often elude us, their situations and strategies may start to come into focus.¹⁰

There are precious few of these contextual records in seventeenth-century England, and in every instance freedom seekers in Restoration London can be glimpsed only in a single newspaper advertisement. These freedom seekers appear insubstantial, little more than archival ghosts who can barely be glimpsed in the few dozen words drafted by those eager to reclaim their human property. Sometimes we do not even know their names, and we know next to nothing of their lives before or after this moment of attempted escape. Were those who ran away, prompting these advertisements, seeking permanent freedom or *petit marronage*, a temporary absence from slaveholders and their working environments?¹¹ Often there was a delay of at least several days between the disappearance of a freedom seeker and the

resisted enslavement by escaping, although it too is problematic in that its more positive tone may obscure the very real risks taken by such people and their continued status as fugitives from their masters and the law. I prefer 'freedom seeker' and will use this more often but I shall use 'runaway slave' too, in the hope that using both will illuminate the tension between the agency and the objectification of those who escaped embodied by newspaper advertisements.

⁹ E. A. Dunbar, *Never Caught: the Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave Ona Judge* (New York, 2017).

¹⁰ One recent attempt is S. P. Newman, 'Hidden in plain sight: escaped slaves in late-18th and early-19th century Jamaica', *William and Mary Quarterly*, June 2018 <https://oieader.wm.edu/open_wmq> [accessed 5 Oct. 2020].

¹¹ One of the best studies of *petit marronage* is M. P. Nevius, *City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856* (Athens, Ga., 2020).

publication of an advertisement, perhaps reflecting a more than temporary absence. Did these freedom seekers try to find sanctuary in London's small community of people of colour or among White Londoners? These questions cannot be answered, and the challenge is to read between and beyond the lines of these advertisements and the related sources to which they lead, and endeavour to imagine the enslaved and to discern the actions, assumptions and attitudes of the English men and women who were at the metropolitan heart of a nascent empire built on slavery and exploited labour.

To undertake such work is to accept the challenge of investigating and reconstructing the histories of these freedom seekers without implicitly reaffirming the violent theft of identity and humanity inherent in racial slavery. However, these surviving advertisements and other related records, taken together, afford some scope for speculation about the broader parameters of this community, about gender ratios, average ages, linguistic abilities, clothing and so on among the freedom seekers who featured in newspaper advertisements. From this schematic data we may be able to imagine an ecology of personal histories, experiences, motivations and attitudes among London's enslaved people.¹²

It is the gender disparity that is most striking in the 212 advertisements for freedom seekers published in London between 1655 and 1704 (see Table 1). Only thirteen (6 per cent) of the advertisements were for female freedom seekers, while 199 (94 per cent) were for males. The ages or age categories of 171 of the freedom seekers were included by the people writing and posting these 212 advertisements.¹³ When they are compared with

¹² Saidiya Hartman has written that every historian of the enslaved 'is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor' (S. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York, 2019), p. xiii). Hartman has been a major force in conceptualizing and articulating the problem of the 'violence' of the archive, leading with her tremendously powerful work on the Middle Passage in S. Hartman, *Lose your Mother: a Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, 2007). Since then historians like Marisa J. Fuentes have taken us further in trying to answer the questions she poses in the introduction to her powerful book on enslaved women in Barbados: 'How do we narrate the fleeting glimpses of enslaved subjects in the archives ...? ... How do we construct a coherent historical accounting out of that which defies coherence and representability? How do we critically confront or reproduce these accounts to open up possibilities for historicizing, mourning, remembering, and listening to the condition of enslaved women?' (M. J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2016), p. 1). For a variety of perspectives on this archival and historical challenge, see the essays featured in a special issue of the journal *History of the Present* entitled 'From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures?', edited by B. Connelly and M. Fuentes, vi (2016), 105–215.

¹³ The database of advertisements compiled by the author that form the basis of this study includes 212 freedom-seeking people of colour who escaped and were advertised for in London

Freedom seekers in Restoration London

| Characteristic of freedom seekers | London (1655–1704) | Jamaica (1775–1823) | Virginia (1730–1787) | South Carolina (1730–1787) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Males | 94% | 76% | 88% | 77% |
| Females | 6% | 24% | 12% | 23% |
| Age 8–19 | 60% | 37% | 17% | 26% |
| Age 20–29 | 31% | 33% | 45% | 44% |
| Age 30–39 | 8% | 19% | 26% | 20% |
| Age 40–49 | 1% | 9% | 10% | 9% |
| Age 50 + | 0% | 2% | 2% | 1% |

Table 1. Freedom seekers in London and in the colonies. Information about freedom seekers in Virginia and South Carolina has been drawn from B. G. Smith and R. Wojtowicz, *Blacks who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728–1790* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1989), table 1, p. 13. Data for Jamaican runaways is from the author's own research.

freedom seekers in the plantation colonies during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (when the earliest colonial newspaper advertisements make such a comparison possible), the higher gender imbalance and the striking youth of London's runaways becomes apparent. The youngest of London's freedom seekers was eight years old and the oldest a mere forty. A significantly greater proportion of London's freedom seekers were aged nineteen or younger than was true in Jamaica, while London's younger freedom seekers outnumbered those in South Carolina by a ratio of well over 2:1, and those in Virginia by a ratio of more than 3:1. When imprecise indicators of age such as 'boy', 'girl' or 'young' are included, the age groups of 175 of London's freedom seekers are known, and 107 (62 per cent) appear to have been aged nineteen or younger. As there were no newspapers and runaway advertisements in the colonies during the seventeenth century, it is impossible to compare seventeenth-century freedom seekers in London with those in the Caribbean and North America. However, we know that during these earliest years of the plantation system slave-traders and planters sought out adult males. The resulting gender imbalance and high mortality rates meant that stable families and children did not emerge quickly, and

between 1655 (when the first such advertisement appeared) and June 1704 (the date on which a runaway advertisement first appeared in a newspaper in Britain's New World colonies). These advertisements were gathered by means of research in digitized newsletters and newspapers from this era. Keyword searching proved unreliable as 17th-century printing does not always lend itself to optical character recognition, so review of each issue was required in most cases.

so an even higher proportion of seventeenth-century freedom seekers in Jamaica, Virginia and South Carolina was most probably adult.

Female freedom seekers were somewhat older than their more numerous male counterparts. The ages of twelve of the thirteen female freedom seekers for whom advertisements survive were recorded in these newspaper notices, and the thirteenth was an adult recorded as 'a Negro Woman, named Minke'.¹⁴ Two were fifteen years old, two were sixteen, one was eighteen, four were twenty, and one each were twenty-five, thirty-five and forty (the latter is the oldest person in the entire data set). Three of the thirteen were South Asian: Sarah, the forty-year-old, was described as an 'Indian woman'; Corney as 'East-India tawney'; and an unnamed fifteen-year-old as an 'Indian black Girl'.¹⁵ The remaining ten were all African. Six of these were described in advertisements as 'negro', two of whom were aged twenty, two aged sixteen, one aged thirty-five and one described as a 'woman'. Two were labelled as 'Black', one of whom was aged twenty and the other fifteen, while two described as 'Blackamoor' were aged eighteen and twenty. South Asians thus constituted 23 per cent of female freedom seekers, which aligns with the 24 per cent of male freedom seekers who can be identified as coming from the same area. It is possible, perhaps even probable, that the ages of female freedom seekers indicate that some had been trafficked to London by enslavers who exploited them sexually: freely given consent would have been impossible in these circumstances and, whether or not the sexual acts imposed on them were violent, they would have constituted rape.

Among the males who eloped the age profile was rather different. Of 159 males whose ages were recorded, 62 per cent appear to have been aged nineteen or younger. At least some, perhaps a majority, had been young boys transported from Africa who were retained by ship captains and officers rather than being sold to planters and colonists, and twenty three had escaped from ships. Other boys and young men served planters and colonists as domestic servants, and continued this work when they accompanied their masters to London, a practice that would continue for more than a century.

During the second half of the seventeenth century racial slavery and the enslaved themselves were strongly associated with London, and advertisements for freedom seekers associated most of them with particular parishes and wards in and around the capital. A total of twenty-five appear to have escaped from outside London, and the advertisements associated them specify locations

¹⁴ 'RAN away from her Mistress, Penelope Meade, a Negro Woman, named Minke', *London Gazette*, 3 Jan. 1703.

¹⁵ 'Strayed or spirited ... Sarah', *London Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1680; 'Run away ... an East-India tawney Maid', *London Gazette*, 6 Aug. 1691; 'An Indian black Girl', *London Gazette*, 22 Sept. 1690.

Freedom seekers in Restoration London



Figure 14. Map of London showing approximate locations from which freedom seekers eloped, 1655–1704. Not all newspaper advertisements reveal this information. Map by Anthony King.

from Ipswich to Bristol and from Plymouth to Wrexham. Locations such as Windsor, Sudbury and Kingston were fairly close to London: only seven were more than 100 miles from the capital, and ten were within fifty miles. It is possible that enslaved people were being taken to other places in the British Isles, and perhaps some escaped. But newspapers were rare outside London during most of this period, and the small number of advertisements for freedom seekers who eloped outside of the city tended to assume that the runaways either had escaped while in London or were heading there. Beyond the twenty-five who appear to have eloped from outside London and the twenty-three from ships (almost all anchored on the Thames), the remainder most probably ran away in and around London, and a total of 126 can be clearly associated with escape in the capital. Thirty-eight different wards, parishes and villages were mentioned as the places from which freedom seekers had eloped, from the village of Chelsea to Greenwich (Figure 14).

The City of London stretched east of the Tower of London, encompassing little more than one square mile, yet it accounted for twenty-six (28.6 per cent) of the 126 freedom seekers who eloped from named areas in the greater London area. Although urban growth was uniting the City of London with Westminster, the two areas remained differentiated and, along with neighbouring areas such as Chelsea, Westminster and the area west and north of the City, accounted for a further nineteen (20.9 per cent) freedom seekers. The third focal point of early modern London was south of the Thames and centred on Southwark and, together with areas as far west as Putney and especially the fast-growing mercantile and shipbuilding centres of Rotherhithe, Deptford and Greenwich to the east, account for another thirteen (14.3 per cent) runaways. The most significant area was the fast-growing East End on the northern banks of the Thames, from St Catherine's immediately east of the Tower of London, north to Hackney and then east along the river to Poplar and the Blackwall shipbuilding yard. Encompassing Stepney, Limehouse, Shacklewell, Bromley-by-Bow, Shadwell, Ratcliff, Whitechapel and Wapping, this area accounted for twenty-nine (31.9 per cent) of the freedom seekers associated with particular parts of greater London; by the turn of the eighteenth century the proportion of London's freedom seekers escaping from the East End was growing fast.

The racial delineators used by the White men and women who placed newspaper advertisements were vague and imprecise in comparison with those that would become common in the eighteenth century as the British empire solidified and racial slavery and racial inequality became institutionalized. Racial denominators of various kinds appear in all 212 advertisements, and some 24 per cent of those who can clearly be identified as either African or South Asian appear to have come from India. Advertisements featured

a variety of terms to describe these people, often in combination as in 'East India Mallatto', 'East India tawney' or 'Indian black'. Twenty-one of the forty-seven South Asians were described as 'Black', twenty simply as 'Indian' or 'East Indian', and six were described in advertisements as 'tawney' or 'mulatto', perhaps an indication of skin tones that were often not as dark as those of first- or even second-generation Africans. It is possible that there may have been indigenous Americans among these forty-seven, but other evidence within the advertisements makes clear that most if not all of the freedom seekers labelled as 'Indian' were South Asians. Only one of the 212 advertisements may have been for an indigenous American, 'a Spanish Indian man called Diego or James, of Low Stature, Tawny Complexion, flattish Nose' who had eloped from William Smith in Battersea.¹⁶

The use of 'Black' for both South Asians and Africans is a clear indicator of the linguistic imprecision around race during these early years of slavery and empire. Fifteen of the 212 freedom seekers who appear to have been bound servants of colour were labelled as 'black', two as 'mulatto' and one as 'tawney', but, with no other information within the advertisements or that can be discovered about the people from whom they escaped, there is no way of telling whether they were of African or South Asian origin. Indeed, the word 'black' was itself no clear guide, for seventeenth-century English people continued to use 'black' to describe some White English men and women with reference to their complexion or dress. When two servants named Richard Cleyton and Robert Ekin escaped in 1658, a newspaper advertisement described them as 'proper black men, about 26 years of age'.¹⁷ At this time the term 'black man' or 'black woman' might refer to people wearing black, especially those who were clothed in this way in their capacity as paid professional mourners. The advertisement for Cleyton and Ekin went on to note that both men were dressed 'in Mourning', confirming that what might at first appear a racial label actually referred to their profession. Sergeant Warren advertised for 'Owen Crane a black man with lank Hair', one of six soldiers who had deserted from the army, including their names and a brief description. His name and the description of Crane's hair suggest that in this advertisement the word 'black' referred to complexion or appearance and not to race.¹⁸ In many cases the word

¹⁶ 'Run away from his Master ... Diego or James', *London Gazette*, 10 Aug. 1685.

¹⁷ 'Richard Cleyton and Robert Ekin', *Mercurius Politicus, comprising the Sum of Foreign Intelligence, with the Affairs now on foot in the Three Nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland, for Information of the People*, 25 March 1658.

¹⁸ 'William Chamberlain... Owen Crane', *London Gazette*, 9 May 1689. For more on the use of the word 'black' to describe the complexion of White British people see M. S. Dawson, 'First impressions: newspaper advertisements and early modern English body imaging, 1651–1750,' *Journal of British Studies*, 1 (2011), 277–306, at 292–5, 302–6.

'Black' was capitalized when referring to South Asians and Africans, while the uncapsalized 'black' more often referred to White English people.

By the mid eighteenth century, when slavery and accompanying constructions of race had solidified, British newspaper advertisements occasionally identified South Asians as 'Negro', a racial othering of all subordinated people of colour across the far-flung British empire. Thus Peter Paul, who escaped in London in April 1746, was described in a newspaper advertisement as 'an East-Indian Negro, or Lascar'.¹⁹ However, during the earlier period between 1655 and 1704 Englishmen's ideas of colour and race were still developing and the term 'Negro' appears to have been applied by advertisers almost exclusively to Africans. One hundred and forty-six (75 per cent) of the 194 runaways whose race can be identified were African, while forty-seven (24 per cent) were South Asian. Among the African freedom seekers 62 per cent were labelled 'Negro', a further 4 per cent as 'Black Negro' or 'Negro Black', 9 per cent as 'Black', 16 per cent as 'Blackamore' or 'Moor', 3 per cent as Madagascan, 2 per cent as being from Guinea or the Gold Coast, 3 per cent as a 'tawney'-coloured 'Negro' or 'Blackamore', and under 1 per cent as 'Mulatto'. There were no doubt mixed-race children born on slave ships, in the plantations and perhaps even in Britain who might have been described as 'Mulatto' or 'Tawney', but during this early period of English involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery a majority – probably a large majority – of the enslaved were African born. Only one possibly South Asian freedom seeker was identified as 'A Tall Slender Negro' in the opening words of an advertisement that went on to note that he 'came from the East-Indies in the [ship] Loyal Merchant'.²⁰ Perhaps this thirty-year-old man was an African seafarer who had served aboard this ship that had just returned from the Indian Ocean, or perhaps he was one of the first South Asians to be identified as a 'Negro' in an English runaway advertisement. But this advertisement appeared in 1701, and the seventeenth-century advertisements in this database identified only Africans with the term 'Negro'.

There is no evidence of what became of the freedom seekers. Some were probably recaptured and remained enslaved, whether as personal servants, attendants and workers in England or back in the colonies. Others, no doubt, accompanied their masters on return trips to the colonies, and if they served the ship captains who owned them they might easily have been sold at a handsome profit in plantation colonies eager for new workers. Perhaps some were sent from England to the colonies when they were no longer needed or wanted: attractive young page boys might have been less

¹⁹ 'Whereas one Peter Paul', *The Daily Advertiser*, 21 April 1746.

²⁰ 'A Tall Slender Negro', *The Post Man: and The Historical Account*, 30 Sept. 1701.

desirable as they grew older. Quashy was one such unfortunate man. He was the property of Anthony Bigg, a doctor and Jamaican plantation owner who in the early eighteenth century had returned to Bristol. Bigg may have been the son of Abraham Bigg, who in the early 1660s had been listed with the duke of York, the earl of Carlisle, George Lord Berkeley, Sir James Modyford and Sir John Colleton as early shareholders in the Royal African Company monopoly of the transatlantic slave trade.²¹ When Anthony Bigg died in 1722 he left his Jamaican plantation, 'which was bought and purchased by my father', to his wife and his niece, as well as large cash sums to his sister and other relatives. But his will also identified 'my Negroe Boy named Quashy', who was not destined to remain in England; instead Bigg ordered his executors to proceed 'with all possible speed after my death to transport and send away' Quashy 'to my Executors residing in the Island of Jamaica to be disposed of with my Residency'.²²

Although it was unusual for testators to make a provision of this kind, it was not uncommon for enslavers to send enslaved people from London to the colonies for sale or redeployment. Thus Samuel Pepys and his housekeeper grew tired of what he described as the 'lying, pilfering ... [and] other mischievous' behaviour of his enslaved servant Sambo, who was no longer a child. Believing him to have grown too 'dangerous to be longer continued in a sober family', Pepys contrived to have some Admiralty watermen kidnap Sambo and place him aboard HMS *Foresight*, a naval frigate built by Jonas Shish in Deptford that was at the time being fitted out for a voyage to the West Indies. On 11 September 1688 Samuel Pepys instructed Captain Edward Stanley of HMS *Foresight* to transport Sambo to the plantations and there sell him to a planter; after subtracting any costs incurred, the captain was to invest the proceeds in whatever goods he thought best and return them or any profits they produced to Pepys. Nearly a decade earlier Stanley had helped capture and then taken control of the *Prize of Algier*, and while under his command an insurrection by enslaved people broke out on this captured ship during which several of them were killed. Captain Stanley knew well the force and violence needed to subordinate enslaved people.²³

²¹ Grant to the Royal African Company, 10 Jan. 1663, 'America and West Indies: January 1663', in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*: v, 1661–1668, ed. W. N. Sainsbury (London, 1880), p. 408 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp119-122>> [accessed 21 Jan. 2021].

²² Will of A. Bigg, of Bristol, Gloucestershire, 2 Nov. 1722, National Archives, PROB 11/588/6.

²³ For details of the slave insurrection on the *Prize of Algier* see Stanley, Lieutenant, HMS *Adventure*, on board the *Prize of Algier*, Court Martial Papers, Records of the Admiralty, National Archives, ADM 1/5253/13, ff. 13–15. For further information on Pepys and Sambo

While slavery in London was far removed from the extreme violence and horrors of the Caribbean and the southern colonies, being sold into colonial slavery nevertheless remained a very real threat to the enslaved in the capital. Perhaps Sambo had been one of the many enslaved boys transported to London who then grew into men who were less visually appealing to the English as personal attendants and who did not hide their resistance to the terms of their bondage. However benign bound service and slavery in Restoration England may appear, it was still slavery and the threat of a far worse and more violent form of unfreedom was always present.

Just occasionally we glimpse the possible paths of freedom seekers, as in the case of Tom Black, 'A Black Boy about 15 or 16 years of age' who eloped from Covent Garden in June 1686. Three months later another advertisement was placed by Sir Thomas Janson of Tunbridge Wells, announcing that he had possession of 'A Black Boy, about 15 years old, supposed to have Run away from his Master'.²⁴ Tunbridge Wells was about thirty miles south-east of the City of London, nestled in the countryside of West Kent. Was the young boy taken up by Janson the same one who had escaped three months earlier, and if so what had taken him down into Kent? Had he travelled alone or with others? What these advertisements suggest are the possibilities for freedom seekers: while escape was difficult and forging a new life challenging, there appear to have been possibilities for some who challenged their status. The case studies in Part II detail individual freedom seekers and those who claimed them, sometimes exploring the possible outcomes of their bids for freedom.

If we can glimpse freedom seekers and their lives and experiences in the aggregate, we can see their enslavers in far greater detail, an interlinked community of ship captains, merchants, investors and colonial speculators, gentry and aristocrats who were engaged together in the development of racial slavery in the English Atlantic World. While this imbalance of knowledge implicitly replicates the power dynamics of enslavement itself, it can nonetheless reveal a good deal about the enslaved and slavery in Restoration London, providing a firmer foundation for speculation about these all but forgotten victims of the early stages of English, and then British, transatlantic slavery.

The development of racial slavery was as much an English as a colonial story, and it was a London story in particular. However different slavery may have appeared in the metropole, during the early years of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial plantations the institution was as real and as present

see C. Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys: the Unequalled Self* (New York, 2002), pp. 177, 405–6; A. Bryant, *Samuel Pepys: iii, The Saviour of the Navy* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 270. These events took place well after Pepys had ceased keeping a diary.

²⁴ 'A Black Boy about 15 or 16', *London Gazette*, 28 June 1686; 'A Black Boy, about 15 years old', *London Gazette*, 20 Sept. 1686.

in the capital as it was in the colonies. And, as racial slavery was a feature of Restoration London, so too was resistance by escape. During the seventeenth century escape from slavery was constructed, defined and dealt with by slaveholders in two important ways: through the laws and slave codes created in the colonies that determined how this crime against property should be recognized and punished, and in the runaway advertisements published in London newspapers that detailed these individual acts of rebellion and promised rewards for the recapture and return of those who rebelled by escaping.

The story of how freedom seekers were constructed by Londoners in newspaper advertisements as 'runaway slaves' reflects the larger narrative of the significance of London and Londoners in the creation of plantation slavery. An interconnected web of aristocrats, gentry, merchants, bankers, coffee shop owners, craftsmen, shipwrights, ship captains and their families in the capital emerge from these newspaper notices, revealing the connections between those who owned or directly benefited from the traffic in and exploitation of enslaved people both in the colonies and in London. The merchant trading offices and coffee shops around the Royal Exchange in the heart of the City of London, the dockland and shipping communities hugging the northern and southern banks of the River Thames, and the wealthy sections of the fast-growing areas to the west of the City of London were all home to the people who owned or were complicit in racial slavery. Just as planters and colonial assemblies were in the process of creating and defining racial slavery through laws and legal codes, enslavers and their accomplices in London were participating in their own domestic process of defining slavery as they understood and practised it, circumscribing the lives of the people in London whom they claimed as property and moving against what they interpreted as theft, namely the act of escaping and stealing one's own body.

The runaway slave advertisement would become the most ubiquitous evidence of resistance by the enslaved in the English, and then British, societies of the Caribbean and North America, and later in the United States. We can never fully know the enslaved who inhabited Restoration London but we can see and learn from the world that held them in thrall, the people who owned and manacled them, the cold and alien city in which they found themselves, and the newspaper advertisements that spoke of but not really about them. Using our imagination, we can visualize something of their lives, their experiences, their hopes, their fears and their desperation. It is only when we look very hard and allow ourselves to wonder, to imagine and to feel that we can begin to see these people not merely as the subjects of enslavement and new metropolitan practices and understandings of slavery but, rather, as individuals who reacted against the people and the system that held them in bondage so very far from home.

