

# *The Black Londoner Experience*



**Exploring Black Life through Records of the Court, 1720-1840**

---

*Edited by Dr Adam Crymble  
Illustrations by Manon Wright  
London, 2022*

## A Migrant History Book

First published by Adam Crymble 2022.

Dr Adam Crymble,  
G19 Foster Court, UCL  
Gower Street, London  
WC1E 6BT

The trial texts are reprinted with permission from the The Old Bailey Online - Proceedings of the Old Bailey (<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>), and are distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.



All editorial commentary in this edited collection by Dr Adam Crymble is similarly licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

### **You are free to:**

- **Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- **Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material

**Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**NonCommercial** — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

The following exceptions are granted for this edited collection: Use in educational contexts is permitted, including as learning material on courses, workshops, or in classrooms for which a payment is made by participants and students, as long as they are given free copies of the text and the educator adheres to the conditions of the ‘Payment of Respect’.

Illustrations © Manon Wright.  
Book design by Manon Wright.

**For London**





# *Table of Contents*

---

*The Payment of Respect* / 6

*Introduction to the Texts* / 7

*Statement on Language Use* / 8

***Text One***

John Humphreys, 1727 / 10

***Text Two***

John Cross, 1749 / 14

***Text Three***

Elizabeth Gift, 1755 / 20

***Text Four***

Esther Allingham, 1782 / 26

***Text Five***

John Thomas, 1786 / 32

***Text Six***

James Wallis, 1801 / 36

***Text Seven***

Dolby Jackson, 1808 / 42

***Text Eight***

Thomas Johnson, 1818 / 48

***Text Nine***

‘The Busker’, 1831 / 54

***Text Ten***

Louis James Grant, 1840 / 60

***Credits*** / 66

# 👁️ *The Payment of Respect* 👁️

**T**his book has been given to you by someone who wants to share the diversity of eighteenth and nineteenth century Black experience with you. Herein you will find historical records from London that showcase the lives of real Black people who walked the city's streets long ago. These people loved, laughed, tried, and cried just as you and I do. In order to connect with their experiences, these stories have been shared at no monetary cost to you.

However, a payment of respect must be made.

Following the example of the Indigenous guest-host protocol of the ʔaʔamin people of the Pacific Northwest of North America, you are a guest in this space. As ʔaʔamin Elder, Elsie Paul has reminded us, that comes with responsibilities:

*When we visit another place, we identify ourselves, describe our relationship to the host, make clear our intentions, and ask to come ashore. Once a guest is invited to come ashore, they are fed and well treated... and for the duration of their visit they abide by ʔaʔamin laws. In this case, we remind you that the stories, photos, videos, and language shared on this site are not simply content or information. Rather, they are our belongings, the intellectual property of either myself or the ʔaʔamin people.<sup>1</sup>*

The stories contained in this book belong to the memory of the people they describe. We each have a responsibility to treat that memory and their experiences with respect and a generosity of spirit.

As my guest, I welcome you to identify your intentions and to confirm your understanding and willingness to abide by Elsie Paul's guest-host protocol. By continuing with this text, you agree to do so with respect and generosity towards the people whose lives it describes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elsie Paul, 'Protocol for Being a Respectful Guest' *As I Remember it* (Ravenspace: 2019): <http://publications.ravenspacepublishing.org/as-i-remember-it/index>

# *Introduction to the Texts*

What follows are ten short accounts of real trials that were held in London's Old Bailey courthouse between 1727 and 1840. In each trial we get a few glimpses into the life of a Black person in London during the years when the triangular trade and the kidnapping and enslavement of African people was still active.

The texts have been selected from a much larger body of 698 trials with known references to Black or possibly Black people in London during the period. The ten lives are presented chronologically, but can be read in any order, or sampled to suit your needs or interests. Links are provided to the original primary sources, which can all be freely viewed online as part of the Old Bailey Online project.

They have been chosen to highlight the diversity of Black experience, capturing examples of men, women, and children. Of Black victims, Black defendants, and Black witnesses. Of people involved in the sailing industry, the entertainment business, and people just struggling to get by. Of people with deep local knowledge, and of newcomers freshly arrived in town. Of those treated fairly, and those treated with malice. They tell us about Black friendships, what Black people had in their pockets or on their person, what types of jobs they held, where they lived, what they did for fun, and what parts of town they visited.

The texts are written, but most of them represent dialogue, and are well suited to reading aloud as a way of understanding how the various actors of the courtroom may have felt while standing before the judge and jury. To make this easier, each text has been formatted as if it were a play, with extra details inserted where tricky terms or concepts that are now foreign to us may need further explanation.

## Statement on Language Use

This volume includes historic racialised language that readers may find offensive. I do not condone the use of this language but have retained it in its historic context only where it appeared in a primary source. Anyone teaching with this material is advised to take a sensitive approach towards the language and to apply best practices when teaching about race.

After consulting with self-identified Black people living in Britain, the term I have adopted is ‘Black’ (used as an adjective, not a noun – a Black person). I am grateful for their advice. I use ‘Black’ to refer to people who had a recent (in evolutionary terms) ancestral connection to sub-Saharan African indigenous populations. ‘Blackness’ is subjective and is a contested term with a meaning that changes across time and space.

This compilation and the interpretations in it is primarily the work of a white scholar (me) who has expertise in the history of migration, history of crime, and history of London, but who makes no pretense of being Black or experiencing life as a Black individual. I became interested in this material during my time teaching the history of crime at undergraduate level in the UK. During that work, I noticed students had trouble interpreting records involving Black stories, and it is my sincere hope that by sharing these better contextualised resources in supportive and sensitive learning environments, we can build a better London for tomorrow.

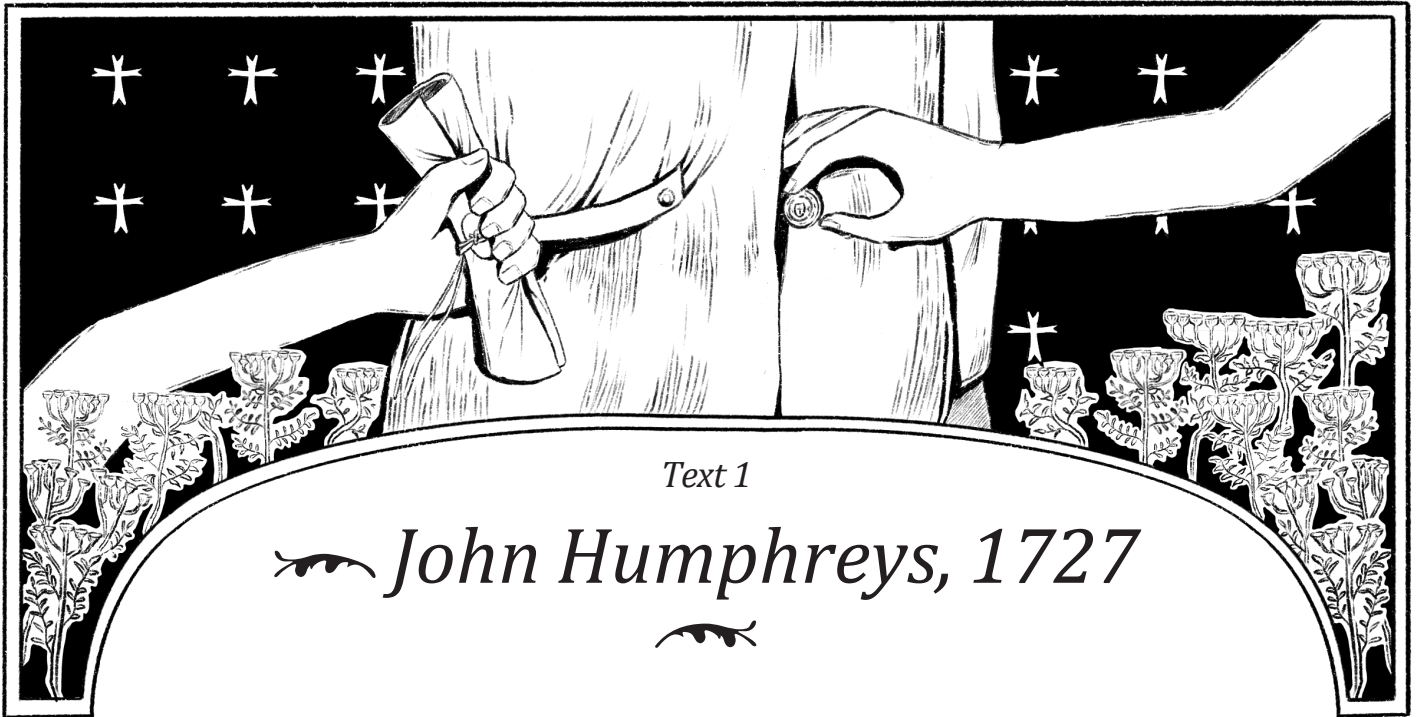
*Dr Adam Craymble*  
**London, Summer 2022**

---

<sup>2</sup> I recommend: the many resources from *Teaching Tolerance* (<https://www.tolerance.org>); Peggy McIntosh, ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack’ *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, (1989), 10-12; Binyavanga Wainaina, ‘How to Write About Africa’, *Granta* (92): 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For a historic account of the shifting nature of racial understanding, see: Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (W.W. Norton, 2010).





**E**arly in the eighteenth century, a Black man has his pocket picked on the streets of London. The culprit doesn't deny it, but surely it shouldn't be wrong to steal from an 'infidel'?

#### **Key Players**

- John Humphreys, *a Black man and the victim*
- Richard Rose, *a white man and the accused*

#### **Court Personalities**

- Unknown, *the judge*
- Unknown, *the courtroom reporter and publisher*
- Thomas Craddock, Allin Evans, Richard Wildair, George Shakespear, Arthur Rawlinson, Christopher Harris, John Hall, Bryan Payne, William Wood, John Wells, Thomas Bridgeman, Robert Matthews, *the jury*

#### **People Mentioned**

- Another person, *an individual who took receipt of the stolen goods*

#### **The Scene**

17 May 1727. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.

Concerning an event on 9 May 1727.

#### **Place of Event**

At an unknown location in London – possibly the West London parish of St Clement Danes, near Covent Garden market area.

#### **Source**

Trial of Richard Rose, May 1727, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17270517-4](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17270517-4)

## **The Trial of Richard Rose, 1727**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Richard Rose of St. Clement Danes was indicted for privately stealing a Linnen Handkerchief, value 3 shillings, from the Person of John Humphreys (a Black) on the 9th of this Instant.<sup>4</sup>

The prosecutor depos'd that he saw the prisoner take the handkerchief out of his pocket and gave it to another, upon which he apprehended him. The Prisoner could not positively deny the fact, but alledged that the handkerchief was not worth the money mentioned in the indictment. And he (being a good Christian) begged the court would consider the Prosecutor was but an Infidel.<sup>5</sup> But he proving the form of Baptism had been administered to him, this artifice was but of little effect.

### **Verdict**

The jury found him guilty to the value of 10 pence.

---

<sup>4</sup> The reference to 'instant' simply means 'this month' in this context.

<sup>5</sup> An infidel means non-Christian.

## **Key Evidence of Humphrey's Life**

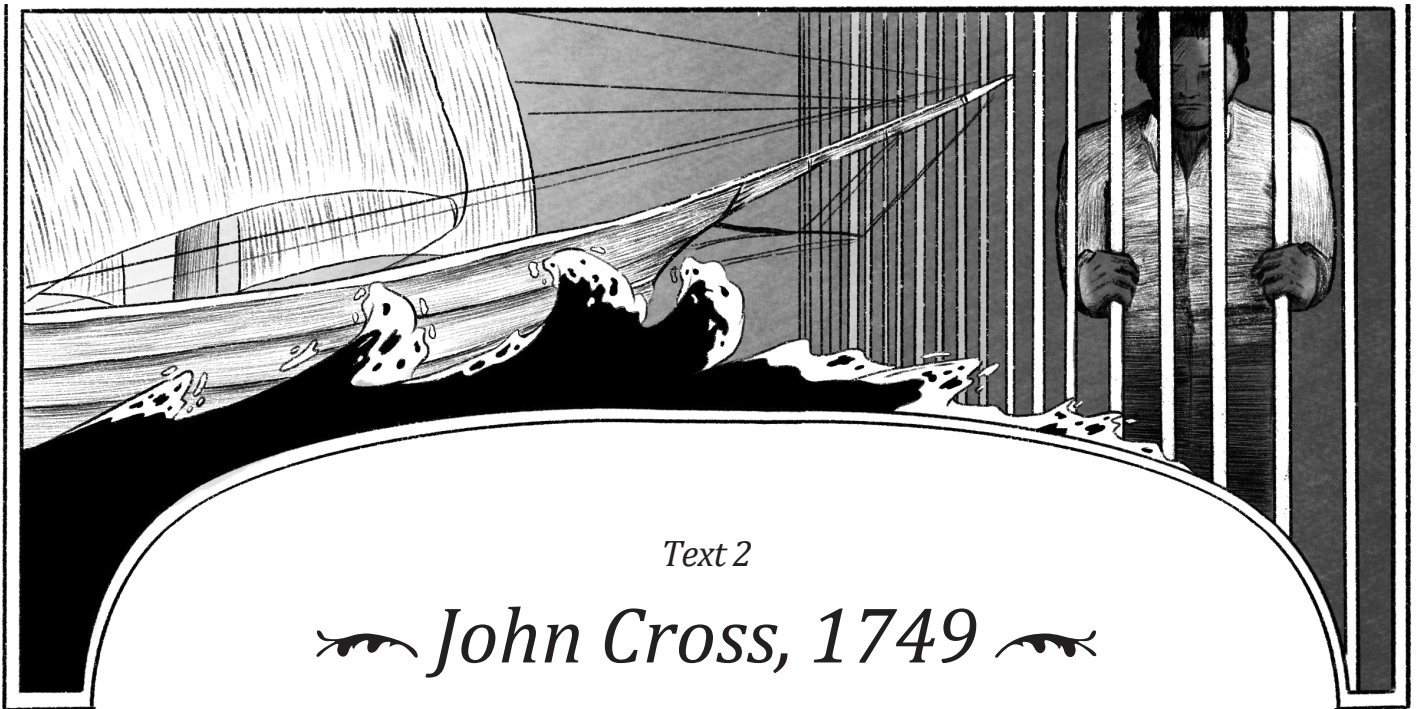
**The Protection of Baptism:** It may strike us as horrific for someone to suggest to a jury that it was ok to steal from a non-Christian. It wasn't ok, even by eighteenth century laws. However, the account shows that for Black men like John Humphreys, a baptism certificate that could be produced readily, gave one a level of social capital that in this case helped him to secure a conviction against a white perpetrator.

**Assumptions About Religion:** The defendant makes a bold assumption about John Humphreys' religious status, basing his case on the notion that a Black man must not be Christian. While we cannot be sure how many people in the early eighteenth century felt it was ok to rob non-Christians on the streets of London, what Rose's assumption does tell us is that Humphreys likely met with many other strangers who made a similar presumption, pegging him as an outsider in a deeply religious community, rather than a member of their flock.

**The Value of a Handkerchief:** Humphrey is accused by Rose of over-estimating the value of his handkerchief. It may seem an odd point for Rose to press during his defence, but it made a big difference. The value of stolen items was largely determined by the victim who asserted it when presenting the case against the defendant. If the value crossed a certain threshold it became a capital crime, punishable by death. In this case, the jury has agreed that the crime took place, but also agreed to re-value the stolen handkerchief to spare Rose's life. Whether that accurately reflected the item's value, or whether they would have done the same for the Black victim, we will never know.







Text 2

## John Cross, 1749

An African-born man is taken from his home to Portugal before arriving in England. Many years later he sits in a jail cell in London awaiting his execution. His is a life that transcended boundaries, and yet met with a sad fate.

### Key Players

- John Cross, a Black African-born man, *one of the accused*
- Thomas Robinson, *a white man and one of the accused*
- Elizabeth Knot, *the victim*

### Court Personalities

- Unknown, *the judge*
- Unknown, *the courtroom reporter*
- M. Cooper, *and publisher*
- Unknown, *the jury*

### People Mentioned

- Edward Ward, *an accomplice of the accused*
- Henry Thompson, *a second victim*
- A Gentleman of the Romish persuasion, *a Catholic man who visits Cross in prison*

### The Scene

6 September 1749. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.

Concerning an event on 22 July 1749, and 17 June 1751 at Newgate Prison.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

The crime took place in the churchyard of St George in the East church in London, on a well-moonlit night in the summer of 1749. The account of Cross' life was recorded in Newgate Prison nearly two years later, as he awaited execution.

### **Source**

Trial of Thomas Robinson and John Cross, September 1749, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17490906-38](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17490906-38)

and

Ordinary Account of John Cross, June 1751, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=OA17510617](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=OA17510617)

## **The Trial of Thomas Robinson and John Cross, 1749**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Thomas Robinson and John Cross, were indicted for robbing Elizabeth, the wife of John Knot, on the king's highway, of sixpence, half penny, July 22.

### **Elizabeth Knot**

The 22d of July there were three men stopped me in the back lane over-against St. George's Church in the East, about a quarter of an hour after 10 o'clock at night. Robinson seised Henry Thompson, and I was running away, and one Edward Ward said, D - n you, madam, you are not gone, and flung me against a bank. Cross, the black, came up to me. Then Robinson called out help, saying the son of a bitch would be gone. Cross run back and struck Thompson several blows and took his hat and wig and ran away.<sup>6</sup> At the same time the other took six pence half-penny out of my pocket. Then they run away, and Thompson came to me with a stick in his hand which he took from the black. It was a very moonlight night and we were within three or four yards of each other.<sup>7</sup>

The prisoners owned the fact before the justice.<sup>8</sup>

### **Note of the Courtroom Reporter**

Henry Thompson and Edward Ward the accomplice deposed the same.

### **Verdict**

Both guilty. Death.

### **Note of the Courtroom Reporter**

There was another indictment against the prisoner, for robbing Henry Thompson, but being cast upon this, they were not tried upon that.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Wigs were commonly worn by men into the later eighteenth century. They had resale value on the second-hand market, and were therefore worth stealing.

<sup>7</sup>The moonlight is significant to a trial, because the victim is asserting that she could see well by the moonlight and therefore is confident of the identity of her assailants.

<sup>8</sup>By pleading guilty, the defendants automatically condemn themselves to death. This decision suggests they did not have legal advice.

<sup>9</sup>A second case against the pair wasn't heard because the men had already been condemned to death.

## **The account of John Cross's Life, 1749**

John Cross, (a Black) aged 25, was born in Guinea<sup>10</sup> and when very young brought to Lisbon, where he liv'd for some years, and came over to England in a packet. He was a gentleman's servant for some time here, but his behaviour not being such as was proper for one in his circumstances, he was sent to sea.

He has been in the service of the government, on board a man of war for several years.<sup>11</sup> He said he behaved well because a strict hand was kept over him. But on shore he was his own master and is said not to have been so very regular.

When I first spoke to him after conviction, he declar'd himself a Protestant. But a gentleman of the Romish perswasion coming to speak to him, he immediately became a Papist.<sup>12</sup>

He could not but own his share in the robbery for which he was convicted, but only said they swore his life away for the sake of the reward.<sup>13</sup> He struck Mr. Thompson several blows and took away his hat and wig. For robbing whom, a second indictment against Cross and Robinson was preferr'd, and the bill found;<sup>14</sup> but, as their guilt appear'd upon the evidence of the first indictment, the second was passed over, being only barely mention made of it.

---

<sup>10</sup> This may or may not correspond to the modern boundaries of Guinea, which were not set for another 150 years. Cross was probably born somewhere in West Africa.

<sup>11</sup> This means he was a sailor on a war ship.

<sup>12</sup> Cross was likely introduced to Catholicism when living in Portugal. His family in Africa probably had another religion entirely – possibly Islam, depending on where he came from.

<sup>13</sup> Government rewards of £40 were available for anyone who led a successful prosecution against a felon. It led many people to complain that they had become victims of reward-seekers.

<sup>14</sup> 'The bill found' means that the grand jury, during the initial pre-trial stage of the justice process, decided that the case was strong enough to go to trial. The alternative is 'no bill', in which case the defendant would walk away and no trial would take place.

## **Key Evidence of Cross' Life**

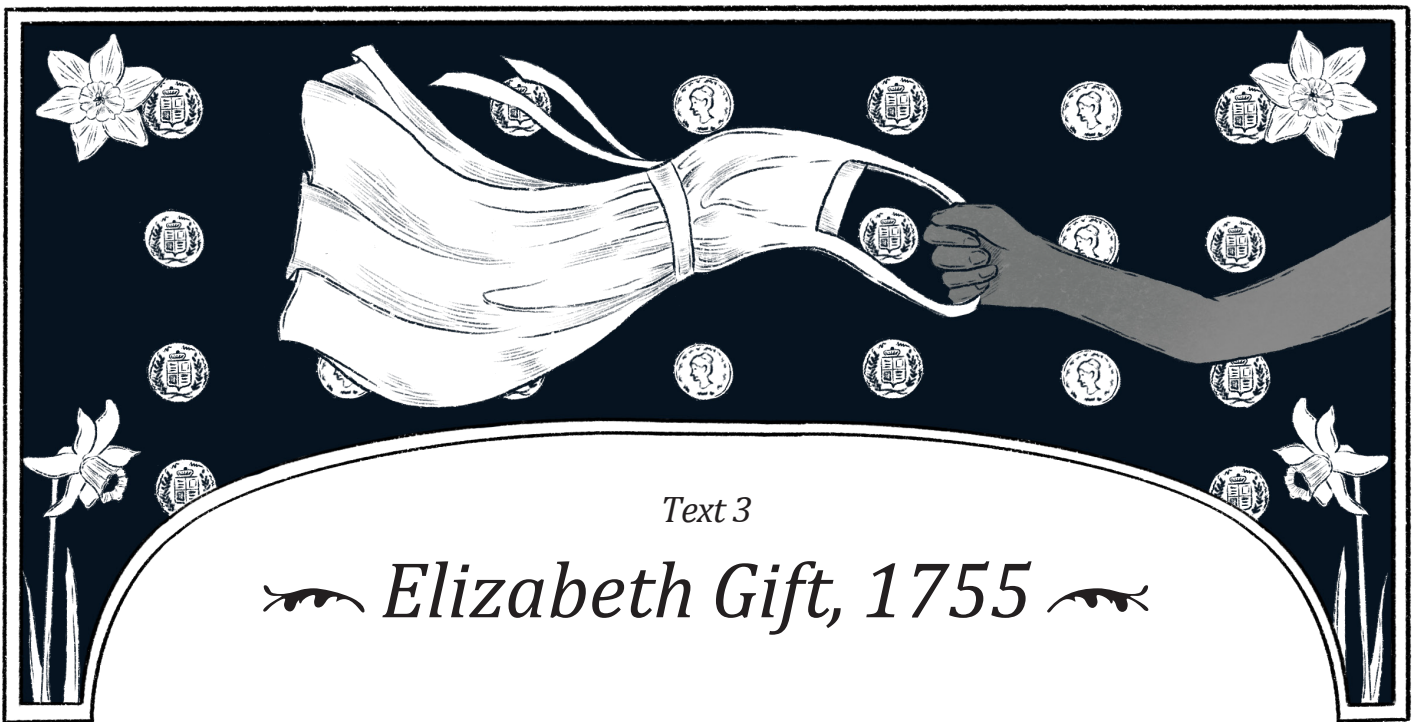
**Via Portugal and Africa:** Cross was born in West Africa, and his arrival in Portugal as a young man suggests enslavement. As much as a tenth of Lisbon's population was enslaved during the height of the slave trade, and Cross was almost certainly part of that unfortunate group. He arrived in England on a "packet boat" – commonly used to transport goods. Whether he absconded from his captors once on shore, or was sold onwards (or perhaps even free to make his own choice), we do not know. It is unclear from the account if Cross was paid while living in England, or if, like many Black people, he worked without wages.

**A Life At Sea and On Land:** Cross worked both as a domestic servant and a sailor at different points in his life. This would have given him exposure to very different environments, from the relative quiet of the wealthy household, to the wilds of the sea. In this case, it seems Cross preferred the sea, suggesting that the implied comforts, warmth, and regular food a servant might expect to receive in a domestic position, were not a draw for everyone.

**Testing Faiths:** After being condemned to death, the Protestant John Cross meets with a Catholic man while in prison, and is convinced to change his religious outlook. The nature of the conversations that changed his mind have been lost, but the fact that they happened at all shows that Black men like Cross took an interest in religion and ideas of Christian salvation. Whether he had ever been aware of the religious beliefs of his family in Africa, we do not know.

**Mixed Company:** Like many Black individuals appearing in the Old Bailey Proceedings, Cross keeps company with white individuals, showing that Black people in eighteenth century London could and did socialise and form business relationships across racial boundaries.





A poor Black woman in South London steals a pair of aprons from the workhouse where she's receiving food and shelter. She pawns the aprons for a small profit, but is almost immediately suspected by the workhouse overseers. She confesses her crime. Will her honesty be rewarded?

#### **Key Players**

- Elizabeth Gift, *a Black woman and defendant*

#### **Minor Players**

- Joseph Peck, *master of the workhouse*
- Benjamin Hatwell, *the local church warden*
- Elizabeth Sweetman, *the woman who bought the stolen aprons*

#### **Court Personalities**

- William Moreton, Esq. Recorder, *the judge*
- Thomas Gurney, *the courtroom reporter*
- M. Cooper, *the publisher*
- William Jones, John Porter, William Mills, Henry Smith, John Jones, Thomas Forbis, Richard Faulk, John Hartwell, Charles Stevens, William Cook, William Carpenter, Samuel Taylor, *the jury*

#### **People Mentioned**

- Jane Walker, *acquaintance of Gift*
- Alderman Alexander, *the magistrate*

#### **The Scene**

16 January 1755. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.  
Concerning an event on 3 December 1754.



## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

Christ Church parish workhouse, London. There were two parishes with that name. Given the location where she sold the aprons, it is most likely Christ Church, Southwark, south of the River Thames. The pawn broker was based in Long-lane, a road in Southwark not far from Christ Church parish.

### **Source**

Trial of Elizabeth Gift, October 1755, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17550116-16](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17550116-16)

## **The Trial of Elizabeth Gift, 1755**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Elizabeth Gift, spinster,<sup>15</sup> was indicted for stealing two check'd linen aprons, the property of the parishioners of Christ-church, December 3.

### **Joseph Peck**

I am the master of the work-house of the parish of Christ-church. This woman was brought in as one of the poor of the parish, the 2nd of December last. On the 4th the people of the house missed two check'd aprons. We suspected her being the person that had taken them. We took her up and charged her with taking them, she owned she had taken them and sold them in Long-lane for 1 shilling 4 pence. We took her before Alderman Alexander, he being the sitting alderman, there she owned the same, the gentlewoman is here in court to whom she pawned them.<sup>16</sup>

### **Benjamin Hatwell**

I am church-warden of the parish of Christ-church; the prisoner was in our work-house, about the 4th of December the master of the work-house came and told me she had stole two aprons belonging to a woman in the work-house. We sent for the constable and took her to the compter.<sup>17</sup> I heard her say in the compter, she did steal the two check aprons. I asked her where she had carried them, she said to Long-lane.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

To where there?

### **Benjamin Hatwell**

Where cloaths hung out. Accordingly I went to this place with the master of the work-house. We asked the woman of the house if a black woman had sold or pawned two linen aprons. At last she said she had bought two check aprons of a black, and one of them she had sold. We saw the other, it is here in court. Before the alderman she acknowledged she had taken the two check aprons, and had sold them to a woman in Long-lane.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Did you promise her to be favourable in case she would confess?

---

<sup>15</sup> This probably meant she was a single woman. However, it's not a given, as sometimes married women or mothers were also called spinsters.

<sup>16</sup> Before a case can be brought to trial at the Old Bailey, a defendant has to be brought before a magistrate, who will decide if there is enough evidence to send it to the grand jury. The grand jury then decides if the case should go to trial. The Old Bailey is the last of those steps.

<sup>17</sup> The compter is a lockup where prisoners can be kept short-term while awaiting justice.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Benjamin Hatwell**

I told her I would do all in my power for her if she would.<sup>18</sup>

### **Elizabeth Sweetman**

I live in Long-lane. The prisoner at the bar brought a couple of check aprons to me about a month, or better, ago to sell. I bought them of her, here is one of them.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Question to Peck. Look at this apron, do you know it?

### **Joseph Peck**

I know it to be an apron that belongs to our work-house. Here is a mark upon the string, it is the letter B, this was stole on the 3rd of December.

### **Elizabeth Sweetman**

The other apron I sold for ten-pence, that had a darker check than this.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Question to Peck. Had the other you lost a darker check than this?

### **Joseph Peck**

Yes, it had.

### **Elizabeth Gift**

I had been there but two days, there was a woman that I been acquainted with before I came there, she had a couple of aprons to sell, her name is Jane Walker, she desired me to sell them for her. I went and sold them for sixteen-pence, and out of that she gave me 6 pence.

### **Verdict**

Guilty. Sentence: Transportation.

---

<sup>18</sup>This is a deceitful promise given the nature of the law. As soon as Gift confesses she's guaranteed to receive the harshest punishment under the law.

## Key Evidence of Gift's Life

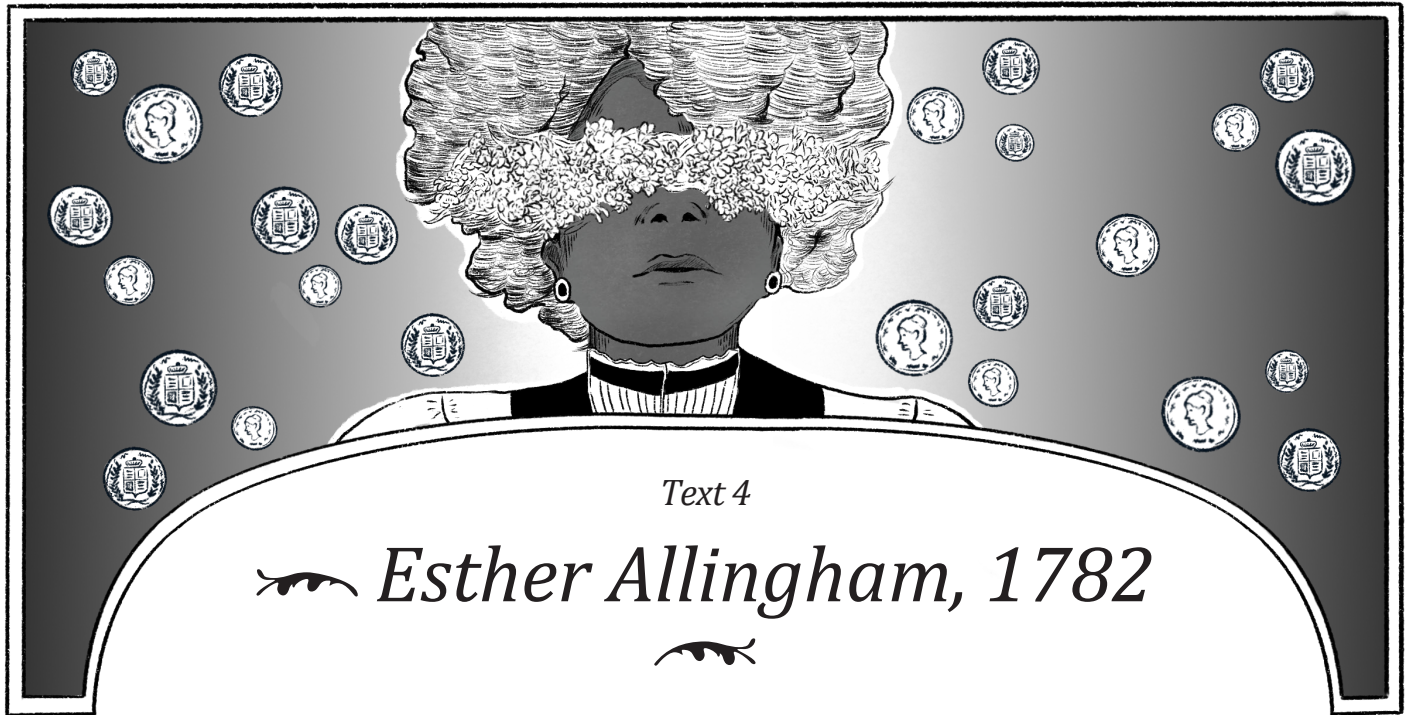
**Local Rights:** Gift is described as a temporary inmate in the local workhouse. The workhouse was a locally-run space where the poor could turn during their time of need. At this time, depending on the workhouse, it might offer food, accommodation, or perhaps a small stipend to allow people to get by while they found their feet. Importantly, the workhouse was only open to locals who met strict legal criteria known as 'legal settlement'. This prevented a heavy financial burden for the local taxpayers who had to fund the support for each and every person who came through the doors of the workhouse. The fact that Gift is eligible (we know she was staying there) means that she was viewed by the legal authorities in the community as a member of their parish – at least on paper. Parishes often worked hard to prove otherwise, so a Black woman receiving this support is a key sign of legal integration into London society.

**The Meaning Behind a Name:** The name Gift is unusual. Many Black people living in Britain or America at the time were given Anglicized last names by their 'owners' in the slave trade. These rarely corresponded to names they may have had in Africa, or those of their ancestors. We cannot know for certain, but it is possible that Elizabeth was gifted to someone as a present and was given the name as a tongue-and-cheek reminder by her white owners. It is also possible that Elizabeth was 'gifted' her freedom by her legal owner and given the name as a reminder of what he thought was his generosity.

**Locations:** The parish where the crime occurred is 'Christ Church'. Even within London there were multiple parishes with this name. Since we know Gift sold the aprons on Long-lane, the most likely location of her parish is Christ Church, Southwark, just south of the River Thames, and not far from where Shakespeare's Globe Theatre would have once stood.

**Transportation:** Gift is found guilty and sentenced to transportation. In 1755, this sentence would have taken her across the Atlantic to America, where she would be sold to someone for a period of seven years, to act as an 'indentured servant' – an unpaid labourer who would work off her crime. We don't know exactly where Gift ended up, but the sad reality is that her life thereafter most likely resembled that of her enslaved compatriots in the American South. Transportation was certainly not a kind sentence for the court to impose on a Black woman in the 1750s.





Text 4

## Esther Allingham, 1782

**A** Black woman engaged in sex work is accused of stealing from a client. She admits to her line of work, but she isn't going down without a fight. She saved up that money one shilling at a time, and she'll be damned if that man is going to take it from her.

### Key Players

- Esther Allingham, *a Black woman accused of stealing*
- John Baptista, *a foreigner (possibly Portuguese) and the prosecutor*

### Minor Players

- Samuel Hatton, *a constable*
- Mary Bateman, *a servant in the house where the episode took place*
- Ann Gagg, *the landlady of Allingham*

### Court Personalities

- Mr Baron Perryn, *the judge*
- Unnamed, *a translator for John Baptista*
- Joseph Gurney, *the courtroom reporter and publisher*
- John Gregory, Richard Atkins, Joseph Wood, James Small, William Pilton, John Golden, George Locket, William Lockwood, William Fell, George Holmes, John Crompton, James Lee, *the jury*

### People Mentioned

- A Black woman, *another woman in the company of Baptista*

### The Scene

15 May 1782. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.  
Concerning an event on 10 May 1782.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

At various locations in St Ann Soho parish in London's fashionable West End. Including the Orange Coffee House (on Orange Street), the defendant's house in Litchfield street a few blocks to the north, and at a house for hire in Gloucester Court.

### **Source**

Trial of Esther Allingham, May 1782 Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17820515-27](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17820515-27)

## **The Trial of Esther Allingham, 1782**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Esther Allingham (a negro) was indicted for stealing nine guineas and two half-guineas in monies numbered, the property of John Baptista, privily from his person, May the 10th.

### **Note of the Coutroom Reporter**

(The prosecutor not understanding English, an interpreter was sworn).

### **John Baptista**

Last Friday I had been at the Orange Coffee-house and was returning home about half past twelve. I met the prisoner. She came up to me and appeared very fond of me and desired me to go with her.<sup>19</sup> I went with her and by compulsion went to No. 2 in Gloucester-court.

When we came there, they let us into the house, but she smelt so strong and disagreeable, I had nothing to do with her.<sup>20</sup> She was enough to poison anybody. My breeches-pocket was open. I put my hands in my coat-pocket to take care of my pocket-book. It was a very valuable pocketbook. But I did not button my pocket. It is a very shallow one and I think I lost my money then, but I did not perceive her take the money. Afterwards she forced her way out and there was a struggle between her and the maid of the house. In a few minutes afterwards I perceived I was robbed.

I had never seen the prisoner before, nor did I see her again till she was in prison, which was on the Monday following. We were five or six minutes together in the room.

### **Samuel Hatton**

I am a constable of St. Ann's. On Sunday near one o'clock I had an information of a person being robbed by a black woman and that she was concealed in Gloucester-court. I went there and apprehended the prisoner. I found a purse with six guineas and a half in it.<sup>21</sup> I asked her how she came by the money. She said she had saved it a shilling at a time.

### **Mary Bateman**

I am servant at No. 2. Gloucester-court. The prisoner had been once in our house before. She came in with a gentleman. They both went into the parlour. I stood in the passage seven or eight minutes. Then the woman opened the door and called for some water. I went to get the water. She got to the door to go out. I went and said, Ma'am, you brought the gentleman in. Take him out with you. She

---

<sup>19</sup> Baptista claims that Allingham was 'fond' of him. More likely, she saw him as a potential client and attempted to solicit his business.

<sup>20</sup> Allingham was probably not the only poor smelling individual in London. Bathing facilities were very limited, and hygiene was not to a standard we would find acceptable.

<sup>21</sup> This was a substantial sum of money for a woman to be carrying on her while out soliciting for sex. Especially given the risk that she might be robbed. For an eighteenth century jury, this would have been suspicious.



## *The Black Londoner*

opened the door and rushed out. He held up his finger and put his hand in his pocket. He spoke, but I did not know what he said. He staid about ten minutes after the prisoner went away. Another young lady came in when he went out. She went into the parlour. He held up his finger and talked something and put his hand into his pocket.

### **Esther Allingham**

This money they swear to is my own. I have saved up at a shilling a time. When I met this gentleman first he was with a black woman with a white gown and white coat on. What he had was entirely unbuttoned.<sup>22</sup>

I was at a distance against the rails. I went down towards Pall-Mall. I stood upon the stone of a door in Gloucester-court. He asked if there was any house he could go into. I said there was a house there. I knocked at No. 3 and went in.

He said, my dear, I have no money. I have been with a black woman. My money is all gone. He pulled out his pocket and said, I have got a snuff box<sup>23</sup> and a watch and a pin valued at so much and a pocket-book at so much, which he could not part with. I said if he had no money I would not go with him. I said as you have no money, I do not chuse to give my carcass up to you for nothing. And I hope you will give me liberty to get some water, for I am dry. He said yes but he would keep my cloak till I came back. What he offered to me was what is not fit. He is a man neither fit for God nor the devil. He is neither fit for a black woman nor a white woman. What he expressed to me put a shock upon my spirits and frightened me.<sup>24</sup>

I went to open the door. The maid said take this man with you. I said no, I do not chuse to have any more to do with him. I ran out at the door. I heard no more of the gentleman till I went out. And then the constable took me and said I had robbed him of so much.

It must be meer wickedness because when he took me into the house he said he had not any. And because I would not condescend to his will, he charges me with this. I did not come into close quarters. I was at arm's length from him.

### **Ann Gagg**

I keep a chandler's shop<sup>25</sup> close by Litchfield-street. The prisoner lived with me almost a twelvemonth. She has always behaved well in every respect.

---

<sup>22</sup> Allingham is attacking the character of the plaintiff, making him out to be a person of loose morals. Given the importance juries placed on a person's character, this is a good legal strategy.

<sup>23</sup> A small box for storing tobacco.

<sup>24</sup> For a prosecutor that apparently does not speak English, he seemed to be able to speak clearly to Allingham during their encounter.

<sup>25</sup> Candle dealer.

*The Black Londoner*

**Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Had she saved any money?

**Ann Gagg**

She lived upon bread and water to go with good cloaths. I have had two or three guineas at a time of her.<sup>26</sup>

**Unknown Questioner of the Court**

What way of life was she in?

**Ann Gagg**

I cannot tell.

**Verdict**

Not guilty.

---

<sup>26</sup> It was not uncommon for lodgers to leave valuables with the care of their landlords. This was especially common in houses where lodgers shared a room with others and thus did not have a secure place to store their goods. In that way, it was not surprising that Allingham's landlady could vouch that she did have savings.

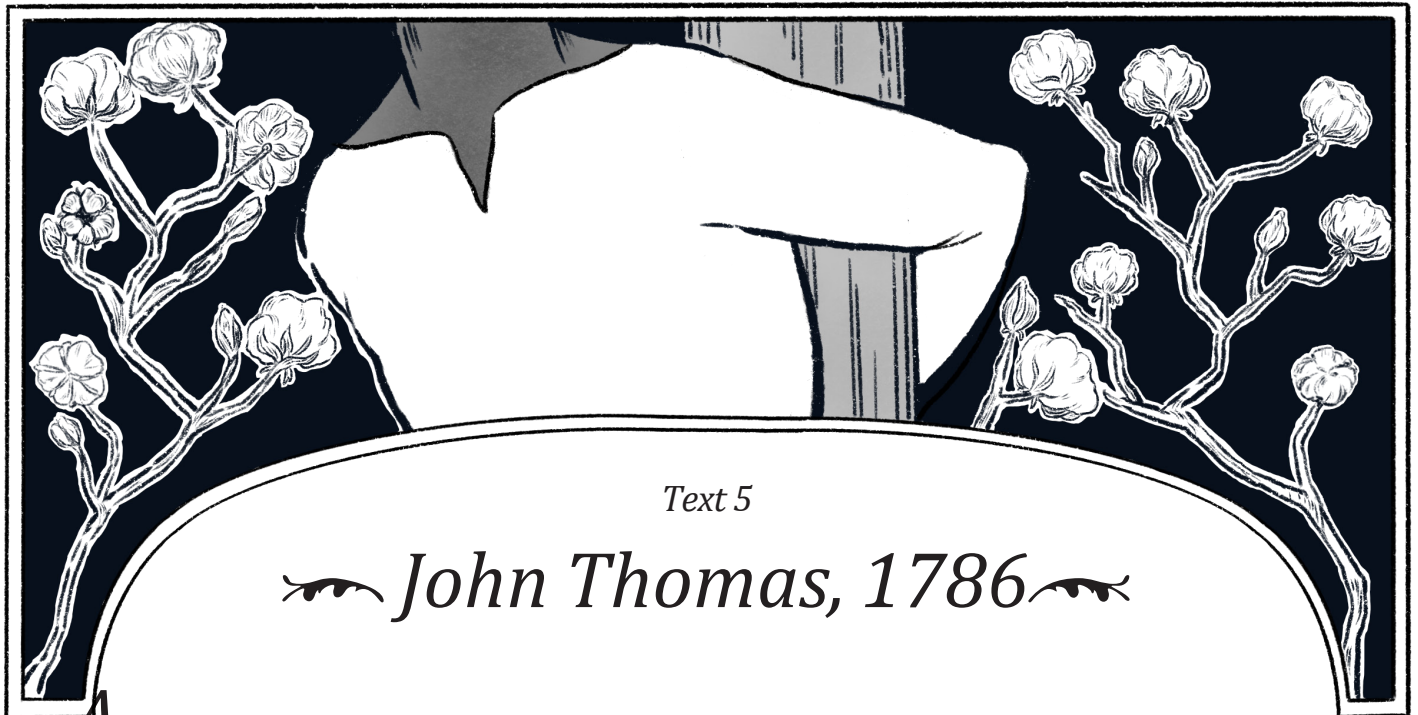
## **Key Evidence of Allingham's Life**

**Beauty Above All:** The testimony of Allingham's landlady tells us that Esther chose beauty over health, opting for "bread and water" so that she could wear nicer clothes. Far be it from a sign of her vanity, as a woman forced to sell her "carcass" as she called it, in the sex trade, a stable diet was one of many sacrifices she was forced to make in order to make ends meet.

**Asserting Dignity:** Allingham's life was on the line as she stood in the Old Bailey courtroom. Yet despite the pressure, and most likely without legal representation, she delivers a strong defense and leaves the court with her head held high. Yes she engaged in prostitution work, but she was an honest dealer, a woman who respected her own limits, and someone who was not going to be pushed around. Few people are able to deliver a defense as powerful as Allingham's.

**Modesty?:** Not only do we learn that Allingham has limits to the services she's willing to provide, but we learn that (apparently) her landlady did not know about her trade. Despite living close to the Coffee House where she first encountered Baptista, she does not take him to her home, but to a neutral place where she could acquire a room. This shows some effort on Allingham's part to keep her private life and public work separate.

**A Foreign Quarter:** This altercation takes place in the west London parish of St Ann Soho. In the eighteenth century it was home to a cosmopolitan population, including a large number of French and Irish people, and close to a number of European embassies where foreign languages would have been commonplace.



Text 5

John Thomas, 1786

A Black dockside worker is caught allegedly trying to steal a small bag of cotton from the muddy shore. He's captured by the crew and strung up the mast as punishment. This vigilante lynching is very illegal, and the crew would have known so. Will the judge take Thomas's treatment into consideration?

**Key Players**

- John Thomas, *a Black dock labourer and the accused*
- John William Goss, *a wharf owner in East London*

**Minor Players**

- Joseph Newey, *a porter*
- W.P. Webb, *a constable*

**Court Personalities**

- Mr Baron Hotham, *the judge*
- E. Hodgson, *the courtroom reporter and publisher*
- Unknown, *the jury*

**The Scene**

13 December 1786. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.  
Concerning an event on 15 November 1786.

**Place of Event**

At the Bull Wharf in Queenhithe, London both on the shore, and on board a lighter (boat).

**Source**

Trial of John Thomas, December 1786, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17861213-27](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17861213-27)

## **The Trial of John Thomas, 1786**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

John Thomas, alias Williams<sup>27</sup> (a black) was indicted for feloniously stealing, on the 15th day of November, two pounds weight of cotton value 2 shillings 6 pence, the property of John William Goss.

### **John William Goss**

I am the proprietor of Bull Wharf Queenhithe.<sup>28</sup> On Wednesday the 15th of November, between five and six in the evening, I was informed a man had been seen stealing some cotton. I went out and at the bottom of the stairs<sup>29</sup> I observed the prisoner with a boat hook trying to pick a bag out of the mud. I found the bag contained some cotton. I went out and saw the prisoner at the bottom of the stairs. I took the prisoner into custody. (The cotton produced.) I cannot swear to it.<sup>30</sup>

### **Joseph Newey**

I am porter to the prosecutor. I saw the prisoner take the cotton out of the large bag into the small one on the 15th of November, about six in the evening.<sup>31</sup> I informed my master and he came and took him on the side of a craft that was laying under the wharf. He was endeavouring to pick up the cotton with a boat hook. I saw it was my master's bag that he took it out of.

### **W.P. Webb**

I took charge of the prisoner and the cotton. It was delivered to me by Newey.

### **Joseph Newey**

This was the same bag that he was hooking up.

### **John Thomas (read).<sup>32</sup>**

My Lord, I get my bread by working on the quays. I went on board a lighter to look for work, and coming back I met these gentlemen. They said I had got a prize. They made me jump in. Then they ordered me to be roped, and then they hoisted me to the crane, and suspended me in great torture. I leave it to your Lordship how far legal their conduct was.

---

<sup>27</sup> Why John Thomas also sometimes went by John Williams is unclear. It may suggest that he adopted the name of whatever master he had at a given time. Taking one's master's name was unusual for white servants, but many Black people acquired English or Irish names in this way.

<sup>28</sup> An unloading wharf in the City of London, accessible only by smaller ships.

<sup>29</sup> At low tide, stairs joined the muddy riverbank to the city above.

<sup>30</sup> Not being able to swear to the cotton means that it has no identifying features by which he could confidently testify to it being his property.

<sup>31</sup> At that time of year and that time of day, it was likely getting dark if not dark already.

<sup>32</sup> The fact that the defendant decided to read his defense tells us that he was both literate, and that he had planned his defense carefully.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Judge to John William Goss**

Is that true?

### **John William Goss**

He might be suspended to the diversion of those that were around him for a minute or two, but not more.

### **Judge to Jury**

Well, Gentlemen, this is a clear case. But I do not like people taking into their own hands this mode of punishing. The laws are open. It is a very serious thing, being craned up in this manner. The man might have fallen down and lost his life, and Mr. Goss must have answered for it if he had.

### **Verdict**

Guilty of stealing 10 pence (a reduced charge).

To be privately whipped and discharged.

### **Judge**

I would have punished him more if Mr. Goss had not taken the punishment into his own hands.

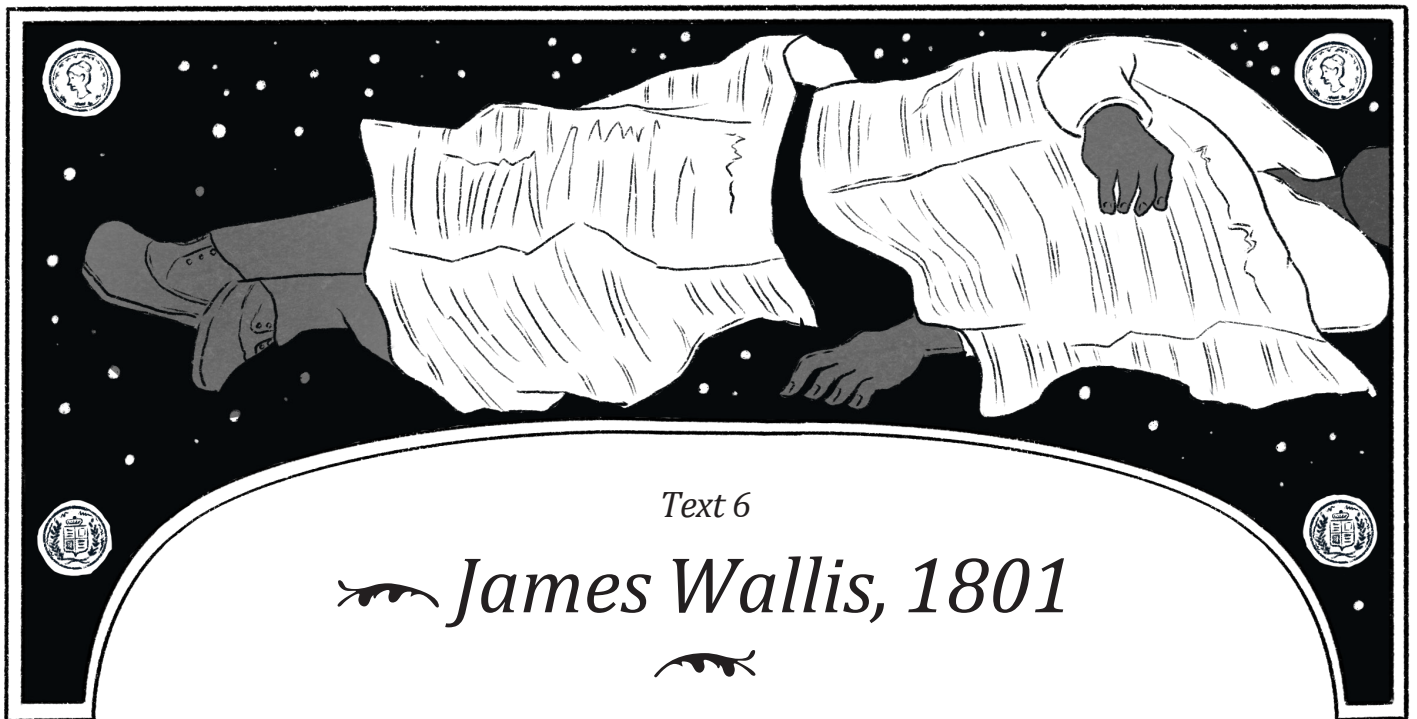
## Key Evidence of Thomas' Life

**Imported Punishments:** The attempted lynching that Thomas experienced at the hands of the sailors saw him hoisted up the crane to dangle high in the air. Similar extrajudicial hangings of Black men plagued the American South in particular, well into the twentieth century. As sailors working on a vessel moving cotton, it's likely that these men had seen first hand how Black men were punished in America, and brought that terrible experience to Thomas in London. It's a horrible example of importing a racist practice to Britain through the experiences of international sailors.

**Precarious Employment:** John Thomas tells the court that he works as a dockside worker. This type of employment was unstable and reliant upon incoming and outgoing ships in need of extra hands to load and unload cargo. Thomas was likely therefore always on the lookout for opportunities to secure his next pay packet.

**Deference:** Thomas never denies the attempted theft, but he does want the judge to know about the mitigating circumstances surrounding his treatment. In a society where hierarchy reigns supreme, he is careful to show deference to his social "betters", telling the judge that he will "leave it to your Lordship how far legal their conduct was". We might say, Thomas knew his audience and chose his approach well, given the circumstances.

**Punishment Enough?:** The judge reduces the charge, finding Thomas guilty of stealing to a lesser value. This means that he seems to have taken the lynching into account. But we might ask: was not his terrifying experience on the crane punishment enough? Most importantly, why is the prosecutor not arrested for admitting to violence against a poor Black man?



Text 6

## James Wallis, 1801



An out of work American man has recently arrived in London after a stay as a French prisoner of war. With the winter set in and no ships hiring crew, he's forced to struggle through London life, sleeping rough and taking what work (or goods) he can manage, to keep himself alive. Will he find sympathy in Londoners?

### Key Players

- James Wallis, *a Black American sailor recently arrived from a stay in a French prison*
- Joseph Lifford, *a ropemaker who caught Wallis in the act*
- William Lifford, *brother of Joseph and co-owner of the business*

### Minor Players

- Robert Brown, *a constable*

### Court Personalities

- Mr Baron Hotham, *the judge*
- William Ramsey, *the courtroom reporter*
- W. Wilson, *the publisher*
- Unknown, *the jury*

### People Mentioned

- Joseph Lifford's foreman

### The Scene

18 February 1801. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.  
Concerning an event on 5 February 1801.



## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

The rigging (rope making) house of Joseph and William Lifford, in the middle of the night in February 1801. A black American sailor shelters overnight and is caught stealing rope in the morning.

### **Source**

Trial of James Wallis, February 1801, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18010218-16](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18010218-16)

## **The Trial of James Wallis, 1801**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

James Wallis was indicted for feloniously stealing, on the 5th of February, forty-six pounds weight of rope value 5 shillings, the property of Joseph Lifford and William Lifford.

### **Joseph Lifford**

I am in partnership with my brother William. I had missed a quantity of new rope from my rigging-house, and Thursday the 5th, between one and two o'clock in the morning, I went into the rope-ground and listened if I could hear any body in the premises and I heard some person walking in the rigging-house. I immediately went in doors to the man who had the keys of the rope-ground. I unlocked the wicket<sup>33</sup> and as soon as I went in I saw a man's coat tied up with rope in it, about thirty-five yards from the rigging-house door. I then went up the ladder into the rigging-house with a candle and lantern in my hand and found the door open.

As soon as I went in, I saw the prisoner lying upon some yarn, asleep. I immediately went down again. I did not wake him, and went into my yarn-house.<sup>34</sup> About four o'clock the man awoke and came very softly down the ladder. He stopped about five minutes listening if any body was about and then he went on past where I was, very slowly, to the gate where I had seen the property. He stopped at the gate a little time and then came back again, past where I was standing. He then went very softly again past where I was, down to the gate. I then heard a creaking, as if somebody was getting over the gate.

I went down very softly and the property was gone. I then unlocked the wicket very gently and went out. The prisoner was standing outside the gate with the bundle tied up at his feet. I immediately caught him by the collar and asked him what he had got there. He said he had only got a little rope to buy him some bread. I told him if he offered to stir I would knock him down. He rushed from me and I stepped before him and knocked him down with a stick that I had in my hand. I made him take the rope upon his back and I took him to the watch-house.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Did he work for you?

### **Joseph Lifford**

I never saw him at work myself. But I understand from my foreman he did work two days for me two months ago. The rope that I found in the bundle was old rope, such as we used to bind new rope with.<sup>35</sup> We are rope makers.

---

<sup>33</sup> Gate or door.

<sup>34</sup> The twisted fibers used to make the rope. Yarn was not only made of wool, and in this case, almost certainly was not.

<sup>35</sup> A good example of early nineteenth century recycling.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Note of the Courtroom Reporter**

(Robert Brown, the officer, produced the rope).<sup>36</sup>

### **Joseph Lifford**

I have no doubt of the rope being mine, but I cannot swear to it.<sup>37</sup>

### **Robert Brown**

He told me that it was his coat, and he had no coat on when he was brought to the watch-house.

### **James Wallis**

I am a stranger here, and I did not know where to get a lodging. I had been trying to get on board a vessel. I went that night to lie down in the rope-walk, and found this rope. I thought it might get me a piece of bread in the morning and after I had had some sleep I came away, and this gentleman knocked me down. I had been nine months in a French prison and came from there here. I am a native of Boston, in America.

### **Verdict**

Guilty. Judgment respited to go to sea.

---

<sup>36</sup> The rope was shown to the jury.

<sup>37</sup> Because the rope has no distinguishing features, the prosecutor is asserting that it is his, but cannot point to anything on the rope itself to prove that.

## **Key Evidence of Wallis' Life**

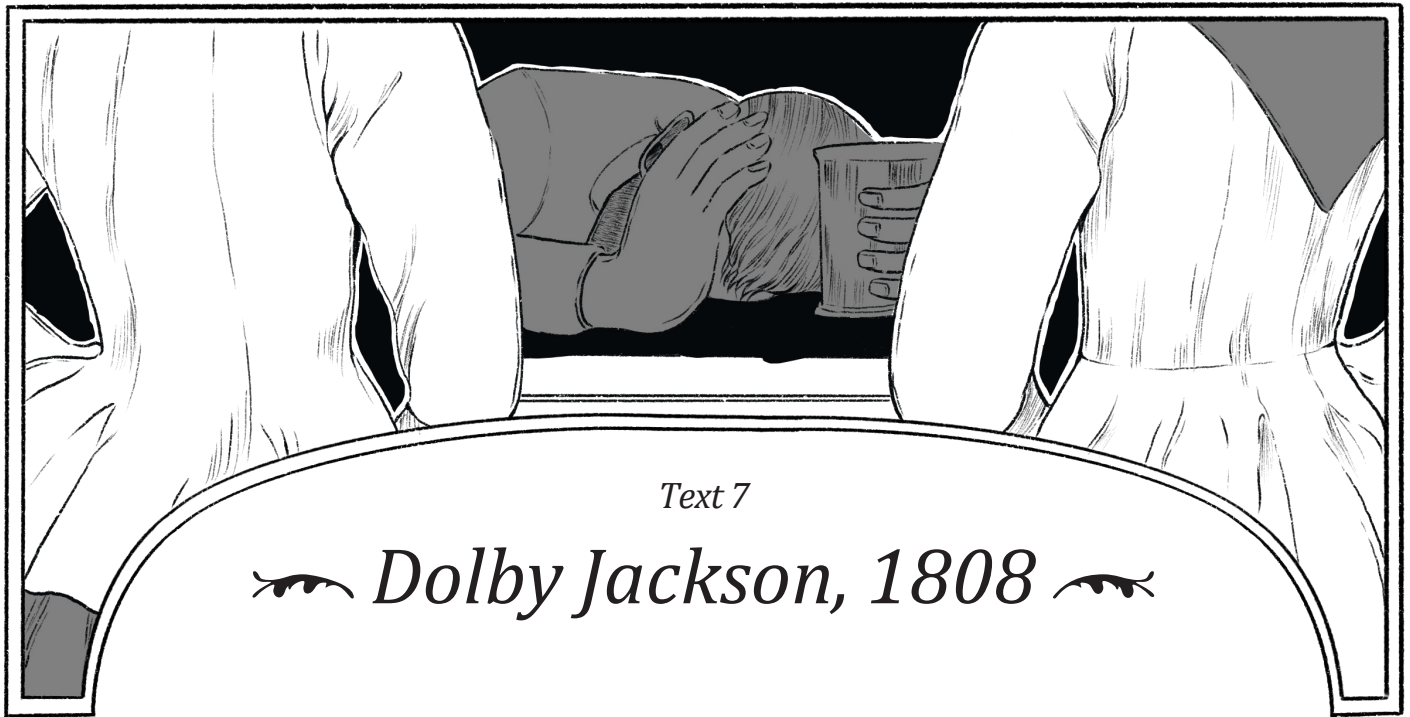
**Why all the Fuss?:** According to his own testimony, Joseph Lifford waited two to three hours outside in the middle of a rainy February night on the off chance that a slumbering James Wallis would steal a piece of old rope in the morning. His patience paid off and Wallis was arrested. But why not just wake him and ask him to leave? Why go to all the trouble just to get Wallis punished? Was this evidence of racist motives?

**Sleeping Rough:** Wallis describes himself as a newcomer to town – an American born sailor who was caught up in the French wars. He spent some time as a prisoner of war before making his way to London. He's had a tough first few weeks by the sound of things. Britain is in the midst of an economic downturn in 1801, meaning many people are already competing for scarce resource. A Black stranger may find the situation doubly hard.

With the ships at anchor awaiting more inviting weather in the spring, he's also struggled to find work as a sailor. As a result, he's resorted to sleeping wherever he could and scraping together a living. In this case, he lays his head down at a rope making facility where he'd worked a couple of days earlier in the season.

**Sent to Sea:** Wallis is found guilty, but his punishment is 'respited' – postponed. Instead, he's sent 'to sea'. This was a rare punishment for defendants at the Old Bailey. It meant Wallis was conscripted into the Royal Navy, where he would fight against the French in the Revolutionary War (1792-1802). This may not have been the worst outcome, but we'd be unwise to assume Wallis welcomed it. His future had danger on the horizon.





Text 7

## ~ ~ *Dolby Jackson, 1808* ~ ~

**A** white man falls asleep at a pub after getting locked out of his accommodation. He is approached by two young women looking to relieve him of his possessions. A Black man notices that the exhausted chap is about to become a victim. Will he intervene, or will he do as the landlord suggests and mind his own business?

### **Key Players**

- Charlotte Brown, *a young accused thief (19 years)*
- Elizabeth Hincks, *a young accused thief (21 years)*
- Thomas Barry, *the sleeping victim, a shoemaker*

### **Minor Players**

- Dolby Jackson, *a Black man, a shoe-black, and key witness*
- James Charol, *the publican*

### **Court Personalities**

- John Silvester, Esq., *the judge*
- Job Silby, *the courtroom reporter*
- R. Butters, *the publisher*
- Felton Matthews, William Wybert, Timothy Fletcher, William Depsey, John Parker, Thomas Hughes, William Holmes, John Sewell, George Silk, Thomas Bray, George Miller, John George Olney, *the jury*

### **People Mentioned**

- *Thomas Barry's shop mates, who joined him at the pub*
- *A woman in the pub*

## *The Black Londoner*

### **The Scene**

13 January 1808. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.

Concerning an event on 13 December 1807.

### **Place of Event**

The Spotted Dog public house, St. Giles Broad Street in northwest London. An area known for poverty and crime, as well as a large Irish population, and London's most notorious slum.

### **Source**

Trial of Charlotte Brown and Elizabeth Hincks, January 1808, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18080113-58](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18080113-58)

## **The Trial of Charlotte Brown & Elizabeth Hincks, 1808**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Charlotte Brown and Elizabeth Hincks were indicted for feloniously stealing on the 13th of December, a silver watch value 50 shillings, the property of Thomas Barry, in the dwelling house of James Charol.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

When did you lose this watch?

### **Thomas Barry**

On the 13th of December, about six o'clock. We were at the Spotted Dog, Broad St. Giles's. I went in to have a pint of beer with my shop mates, and I went to sleep.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

I suppose you had been up all night

### **Thomas Barry**

Yes. I am a shoemaker. I was locked out of my lodgings. I had been walking about the streets all night. I went in and went to sleep.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Did you pick up these women in the street?

### **Thomas Barry**

No, I never saw them before. They were never in my company. They came into the house. One laid hold of me, and the other took the watch out of my fob.

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

How could you tell, when you were asleep?

### **Thomas Barry**

This man saw them - Dolby Jackson, a black man.

### **Thomas Barry**

No. When I awoke, I found my watch was gone. There was a woman standing by the side of me, but she was neither of the prisoners. The prisoners went out of the house as soon as they took the watch away. I laid hold of the woman. The black man said if she had not got the watch, he would shew me who had.

I went and found the prisoners in the street, drinking saloop.<sup>38</sup> They were taken to the watchhouse, and nothing found upon them. The watchhouse keeper told me to go back for the saloop woman. I did. She was gone away. She has not been out for weeks afterwards.

---

<sup>38</sup> A hot drink of brewed roots or leaves. An alternative to coffee or tea.



## *The Black Londoner*

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

Were you sober?<sup>39</sup>

### **Thomas Barry**

No, I was drunk.

### **Dolby Jackson**

I am a shoeblack. I was sitting in the Black Dog. These two men came in and called for a pint of beer. They both drank once. He fell asleep. These two women came in and finished the pint of beer the men called for. One of them sat down and the other leaned over him. Charlotte Brown put his head in her lap, and the other unbuttoned his flap and took out his watch.

I called out they were going to rob the man. The landlord said, what is that to you. Then I said no more. I waked him soon after and he went and took them in the street. Hincks searched him first. She says I can perceive nothing.

Brown said, you come and set over him, I will search him. The biggest prisoner drew the watch out. I halloaed out. The landlord said I had nothing to do with it. As they said so, I said no more.

As soon as I came to town I gave twelve shillings for a hat. Some of them in that public house stole my hat.<sup>40</sup>

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

You are sure it is the same persons?

### **Dolby Jackson**

Yes, there were other girls in the house. They were not nigh this man. None but the prisoners. When they took the watch out, I saw them. I spoke. They told me to hush. I told them they were robbing the man. They told me to go away. I would not.

### **Note of the Courtroom Reporter**

The prisoners said nothing in their defence or called any witnesses to character.

---

<sup>39</sup> This was a typical question that people faced in court. It seeks to determine to what degree their testimony about the episode might be considered reliable.

<sup>40</sup> Dolby Jackson's hat is not actually relevant to the trial, but given the fact that Jackson finds himself in front of a respected judge, he's throwing that out there, perhaps in the mistaken belief that he'll get justice for his stolen hat. Given how heavily edited Old Bailey trial accounts are, it's unusual to find an irrelevant detail like this kept in the published version. One might suggest the printer was having a bit of fun at Jackson's expense, showing the readers that this Black man didn't understand his role in the court.

*The Black Londoner*

**Verdict**

Brown, Guilty, aged 19.

Hincks, Guilty, aged 21.

Of stealing to the value of thirty-nine shillings.

Transported for Seven Years.

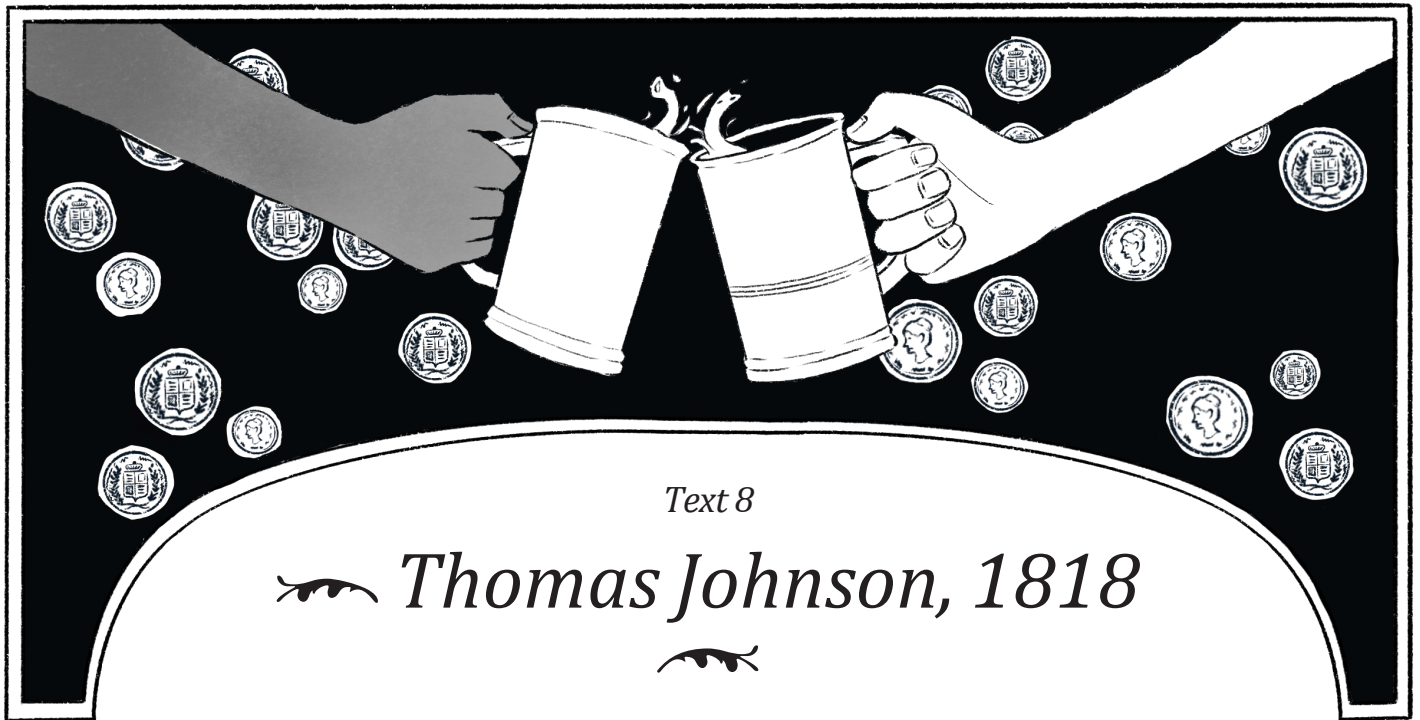
## **Key Evidence of Jackson's Life**

**Employment:** Jackson describes himself as a shoeblick – sometimes now called a shoeshine. This was not stable employment that came with a regular wage. Instead, he may well have worked on the side of the road, trying to entice passers-by to use his services as they went about their day. He was likely living somewhere between begging and honest work – possibly both at different stages. It certainly would not have been easy for Dolby Jackson to make ends meet, and his choice of neighbourhood reinforces that.

**Locations:** This crime takes place just down the road from London's most deprived slum, known as the 'Rookery'. It has come to be remembered as an Irish slum, but it was also home to a much wider range of people. Most of the Rookery's inhabitants were very poor and paid for their lodging on a nightly basis, sleeping in cramped and unsanitary conditions. Heavy drinking was common in the area as a way of emptying one's pockets before entering the unsecure lodging houses. Empty pockets meant no risk of robbery.

**Race and Morality:** Jackson speaks up when he sees the sleeping man falling victim of a crime, despite there being no clear benefit to himself for doing so. The fact that others in the pub tell him to mind his business is a testament to Jackson's strong moral character. It also dashes any possible argument that one's race was a measure of one's morality in nineteenth century London. Instead, Jackson shows us that people of all races could be counted upon to seek to uphold justice. This should not be a surprise to any of us, but it certainly would have countered the beliefs of many white people at the time.

**Testimony Believed:** Despite the fact that this case relied almost entirely upon the testimony of a Black man, we see no evidence that his race made his story less believable to contemporaries. This is despite the fact that the missing watch is never found, meaning that these two women are found guilty on the strength of Jackson's word alone. There is power in the spoken word. As it happens, that includes the words of a Black man in nineteenth century London.



Text 8

## *Thomas Johnson, 1818*

**A** Black sailor arrives in London flush with cash. The hackney coachman who helps him get his bags off of his carriage invites him out for a drink, and then another. By the end of the evening, the sailor has been robbed by his new friend but a good Samaritan steps in to set things right.

### **Key Players**

- Joseph Avery, *one of the alleged thieves*
- Sarah Scocart, *the other alleged thief*
- Thomas Johnson, *a Black sailor and the victim*

### **Minor Players**

- Maria Freeman, *a patron of the pub and witness*
- Mary Ann Nugent, *a witness*
- James Bartlett, *a constable*

### **Court Personalities**

- Sir John Silvester, *the judge*
- H. Buckler, *the courtroom reporter and publisher*
- George Radburn, George Kemp, Thomas Marsh, William Green, Samuel Betteley, Henry Hales, John Moore, James Turner, James Maiden, Thomas Harrison, Thomas Stunt, James Mason, *the jury*

### **People Mentioned**

- Two women, *patrons of the pub - possibly acquaintances of the accused.*
- Mellon, *one of the people at the pub.*

## *The Black Londoner*

### **The Scene**

2 December 1818. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.

Concerning an event on 30 November 1818.

### **Place of Event**

At various drinking establishments in the vicinity of Charing Cross in West London over the course of an evening. The newfound friends travel about a third of a mile on their pub-crawl, ending near Covent Garden Market.

### **Source**

Trial of James Avery and Sarah Scocart, December 1818, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0.  
[oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18181202-154](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18181202-154)

## **The Trial of James Avery and Sarah Scocart, 1818**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Joseph Avery and Sarah Scocart were indicted for stealing on the 30th of November from the person of Thomas Johnson the sum of £3, 10 shillings in monies numbered, two £5 and seven £1 bank notes, his property.

### **Thomas Johnson**

I am a seaman. On the 9th of November I came to town from Chatham.<sup>41</sup> The coach stopped at Charing-Cross<sup>42</sup> between nine and ten o'clock at night. I met Avery at the coach. He assisted in getting the baggage off the coach. He said that he was a hackney coachman and it was a common rule to pay him for getting the things off the coach.<sup>43</sup> The coach was full of my shipmates. There were nine of us. I gave him 8 shillings for us all.<sup>44</sup>

I said I was thirsty and wished I had some beer. He showed me where I could get some. I parted with my shipmates. I do not know where he took me. I am a stranger in town. He said he wanted a supper. I treated him and gave him more beer and a glass of gin. I took a bag of silver out of my pocket to pay for the gin. There was about £4 in it. The reckoning came to 18 pence.<sup>45</sup>

He then took me to another place. We sat very close together. I put my hand to my pocket and pulled out my notes and counted them. There were two £5 and seven £1 bank notes.<sup>46</sup> I rolled them up in a piece of canvas and put them into my left-hand waistcoat pocket. I asked him for some tobacco. He said he had none. I bought 6 pence worth and put it in my pocket on the top of my money.

A woman who sat on the opposite side told me to look in my pocket and see if I had lost anything. I then missed my money and said I was ruined. I looked round and missed him and the women who were there. I went out with the woman to look for him and found him at a house and asked how he could leave me in a strange place?

---

<sup>41</sup> A town in Kent, east of London, near the mouth of the Thames and on the ocean.

<sup>42</sup> In the pre-railway era, Charing Cross was one of several key nodes in the London stagecoach transportation network. A number of coaches traveling to a range of destinations would have stopped at Charing Cross.

<sup>43</sup> The fact that Avery is telling Johnson it is custom to tip him, suggests that Johnson is not accustomed to London etiquette.

<sup>44</sup> A fairly handsome tip for a porter. Johnson is flashing his money, perhaps unwisely, by tipping so lavishly.

<sup>45</sup> Given those prices, the tip he gave the porter was enough to buy five double-rounds at the bar.

<sup>46</sup> Further evidence that Johnson has unwisely been advertising his wealth, by pulling it out in public and counting it. As a newcomer to town, he may be unaware of the danger of his actions.

## *The Black Londoner*

I sent for a watchman.<sup>47</sup> Two women were with him when he was with me. They were stooping down. I asked Avery for a glass of gin. He immediately ran into the street. I followed, calling out ‘Stop thief!’<sup>48</sup> and came up to him. He was stopped by the watchman. I gave him in charge. The money was not found. I was neither drunk nor sober.<sup>49</sup>

### **Unknown Questioner of the Court**

How long had you been with him?

### **Thomas Johnson**

I met him at ten o’clock. He left me at twelve. I am sure he is the man. He sat on my left side. The two women sat close to him. 23 shillings was found on him. I do not know where we met the women. The prisoner Scocart was one of them and sat next to him.

### **Sarah Scocart**

Were any women with him when you met him?

### **Thomas Johnson**

At the second public-house. And I found the same women with him when we took him. My tobacco was found on him.

### **Maria Freeman**

I saw the prosecutor and Avery come into the Black Dog and call for a pint of beer. I sat opposite to them. They called for another pint. Avery told me that the black man had plenty of money. The prosecutor then took his notes out, counted them, wrapped them in canvas, and put them in his inside jacket-pocket.

Avery said if I would get them from the man I should share them with him. I said I did not understand him. He then crossed from the side where I was and sat by the prosecutor and appeared whispering to him. He put his hand into his pocket, took the notes out, and put them into his own great-coat pocket.

I told the prosecutor he was robbed and he fell into a passion with me for saying so, and would not look into his pockets.<sup>50</sup> He went out with Avery, the two women, and me to a cook-shop.<sup>51</sup> We then went to Long-acre and had something to drink. The prosecutor had his silver then. I told him he was robbed and if he did not take care the man would be gone. Avery immediately called him down Hanway-street and spoke to him. Walked on. Avery and the two women left.

---

<sup>47</sup> Despite being a stranger to town, Johnson shows he knows what to do when robbed, calling for the watchman.

<sup>48</sup> This is known as ‘raising the hue and cry’. Anyone who heard Johnson shouting would be legally and morally obliged to try to help.

<sup>49</sup> The prosecutor is trying to assure the jury that he was not so drunk that he did not know what was happening. In other words, his testimony can be believed.

<sup>50</sup> This testimony undermines Johnson’s claim that he wasn’t drunk.

<sup>51</sup> A place where one could order hot food.

## *The Black Londoner*

I said to the prosecutor, "If you feel in your pockets, you may depend upon it, you have no money." He put his hand into his pocket and missed his notes and silver and said he was ruined. I said I would assist him.

The watchman hearing him say he was robbed took me into custody to the Coal-yard watch-house, as being concerned with them. I am sure I saw Avery put his hand into his pocket. Scocart was in his company. I did not see her do anything.

### **Mary Ann Nugent**

The prisoners, I, and Mellon, went in with the prosecutor and Freeman to get something to drink. We could find no public-house open till we came to the Ship in Covent-Garden. We had a glass of gin. The prosecutor asked Freeman to look for a watchman. While she was gone, he ran away and the two girls ran another way. I saw them dividing the money at the Ship. It appeared to be notes and silver. The watchman took Avery to the watch-house.

### **James Bartlett**

I am a constable. Avery was brought to me on the 30th of November. I found 23 shillings on him. It was about one o'clock in the morning. He denied the robbery. I found some tobacco in his pocket, which the prosecutor claimed.

### **Joseph Avery**

I took them to the Ship.

### **Sarah Scocart**

Nugent cannot say what money we were dividing.<sup>52</sup>

### **VERDICT**

Avery – Guilty. Aged 28.

Scocart - Guilty. Aged 20.

Transported for Seven Years.

---

<sup>52</sup> Scocart is suggesting that the money was nothing to do with a robbery, and that dividing money between friends is not a crime.



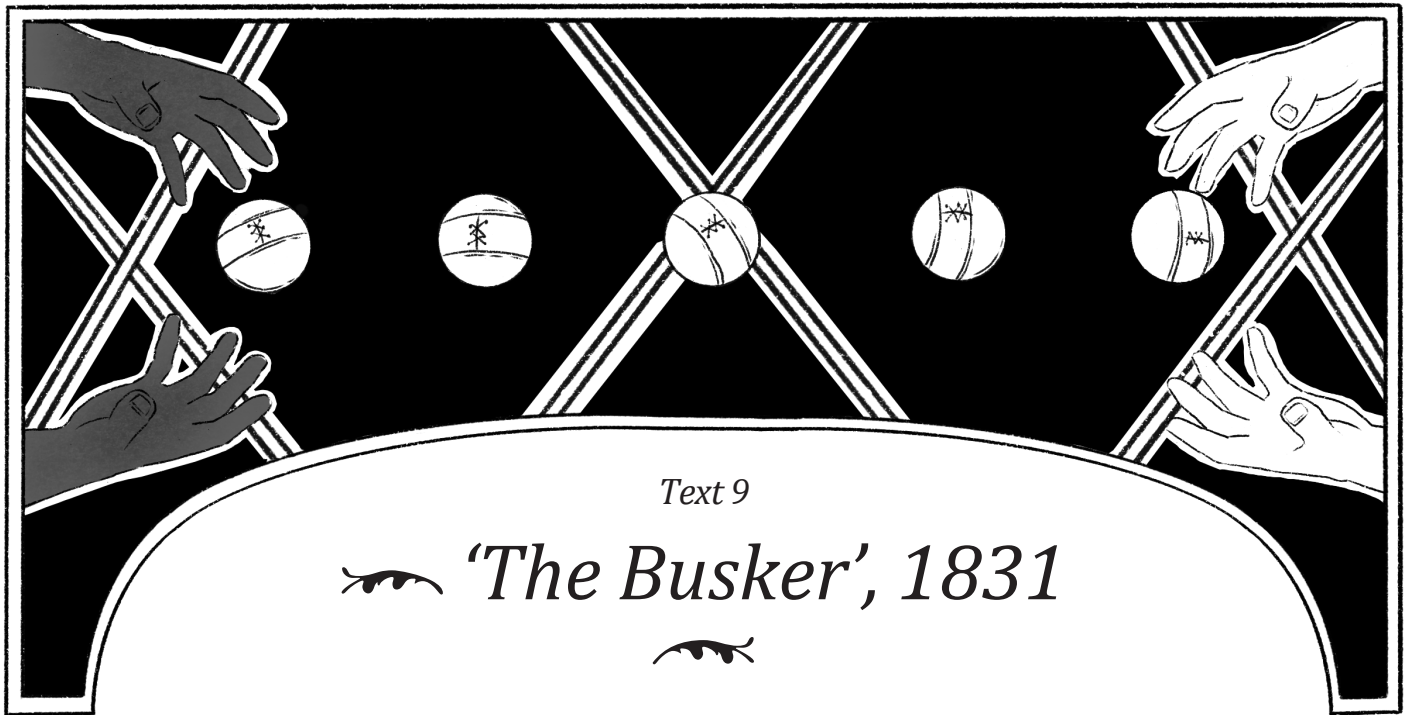
## **Key Evidence of Johnson's Life**

**Fast Friends:** Johnson arrives in London with a carriage full of shipmates, but opts instead to make fast friends with the local man who helped unload their bags. We later learn that man has his eyes on Johnson's money, but the interactions early in the evening show that it was not unusual to find some drinking buddies on short notice for a stranger willing to pay for a round.

**A Friendly White Face:** It isn't clear that Johnson was targeted because he was Black. But it is clear that his race did not prevent Maria Freeman from coming forward when she realised he had been robbed. Assuming Freeman was white, this is evidence that race was not necessarily a barrier to kindness in nineteenth century London. The jury finding in Johnson's favour further supports that claim.

**Shore Leave:** Johnson describes himself as a sailor newly arrived in London, and a stranger to the city. Having possibly spent months at sea, the evening he recounts provides a glimpse into the mindset of a sailor let loose upon the city. He has money in his pocket, a new friend to spend time with, and no end of establishments to visit or indulgences (tobacco and alcohol) to partake in. Sailors like Johnson were an important part of the London evening economy, with many small businesses catering to their needs – and unfortunately, many thieves too seeing them as potential sources of income.

**A Pub Crawl:** The two gentlemen at the centre of this story have quite a mobile night. Not only has Johnson just arrived overland from Chatham at the mouth of the Thames, many miles east of London, but the pair visit a number of different London venues where they drink, eat, and meet new people. A night out in the capital was not necessarily a stationary event in the early nineteenth century, as this episode makes clear.



Text 9

## 👁️ 'The Busker', 1831



An unnamed Black busker is entertaining the crowds near the Houses of Parliament. Two women stop to take in the show when one of them notices a hand in her pocket.

### Key Players

- Jane Smith, *the victim*
- George Watson, *a young man accused of pocket picking*

### Minor Players

- The Busker, *a Black man busking at the scene of the crime*
- Jane Harris, *a friend of the victim*
- George Butler, *the constable*

### Court Personalities

- Unknown, *the judge*
- Mr. Heaton, *the defense lawyer*
- H. Buckler, *the courtroom reporter and publisher*
- Unknown, *the jury*

### People Mentioned

- Robert Smith, *the husband of the victim*
- A dark young man, *an accomplice of the accused*

### The Scene

17 February 1831. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.

Concerning an event on 1 February 1831.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

On Richmond Street in Westminster, just north of the Houses of Parliament, where a Black man is busking outdoors for money.

### **Source**

Trial of George Watson, February 1831, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18310217-261](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18310217-261)

## **The Trial of George Watson, 1831**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

George Watson was indicted for stealing on the 1st of February, 1 shilling, 1 sixpence, and 8 halfpence, the monies of Robert Smith, from the person of Jane his wife.

### **Jane Smith**

I am the wife of Robert Smith. On the 21st of February I was with Jane Harris in Richmond-street, Westminster. There were a number of persons collected and a black man was playing some tricks with balls.<sup>53</sup> We stopped to look at him and I saw the prisoner on my right-hand side. I caught his hand in my right pocket. He drew his hand from me. There were two young fellows behind him and they took what he had in his hand. I kept him till an officer took him. I missed a shilling, a sixpence, and eight halfpence, which had been safe the moment before.<sup>54</sup>

### **Mr. Heaton**

Have you always told the same story about this?<sup>55</sup>

### **Jane Smith**

Yes - I never let the prisoner go. I seized his hand. He drew his hand back but I still held his arm. I am quite sure I caught his hand in my pocket. I had taken out a halfpenny for the black man and before I had time to give it the prisoner put his hand into my pocket. I was not at all in liquor. It was not the prisoner who proposed to send for an officer. It was not more than twenty minutes before the officer came.<sup>56</sup> He tried to get away and said if I were not a woman he would strike me. But the mob said, "You shall not strike her."<sup>57</sup>

### **Jane Harris**

I was with Mrs. Smith. I saw her seize the prisoner. I went for the officer.

### **Mr. Heaton**

Had you been with her long?

---

<sup>53</sup> Street entertainment was common in nineteenth century London.

<sup>54</sup> This case shows the importance of knowing exactly what had been in your pocket, in case one was called to testify at a later date.

<sup>55</sup> The lawyer for the defense wants to undermine the jury's confidence in Smith's story by suggesting she has changed her tune.

<sup>56</sup> One can imagine how uncomfortable those twenty minutes were, as the victim and culprit stood waiting for a police officer. Without telephones, an officer had to be sent for by someone on foot.

<sup>57</sup> The mob – or the bystanders – show a willingness to get involved to support the victim. This community sense of justice was a crucial part of London life.

## *The Black Londoner*

### **Jane Harris**

Yes, all the morning. She had nothing to drink in my presence. I had been with her from ten o'clock and this was about ten minutes past one. I saw her take hold of the prisoner's hand and draw it out of her pocket-hole. He put his hand behind him and gave something to a dark young man<sup>58</sup> who made his way through the mob.

### **George Butler**

I am a Police-constable. I received the prisoner in charge.

### **Mr. Heaton**

Was the prosecutrix tipsy?

### **George Butler**

No. I have heard what she has said. I think she told the same story at the Police-office. She said she found his hand in her pocket.

### **George Watson**

Was I not standing with my hands in my pockets when you came up?

### **George Butler**

The prosecutrix had held of your arm.

### **Note from the Courtroom Reporter**

The prisoner received a good character.<sup>59</sup>

### **Verdict**

Guilty. Aged 25. Confined Three Months.

---

<sup>58</sup> Was this 'dark' accomplice also Black?

<sup>59</sup> Someone testified that the defendant was a good person. A 'character' reference was common in eighteenth and nineteenth century trials.

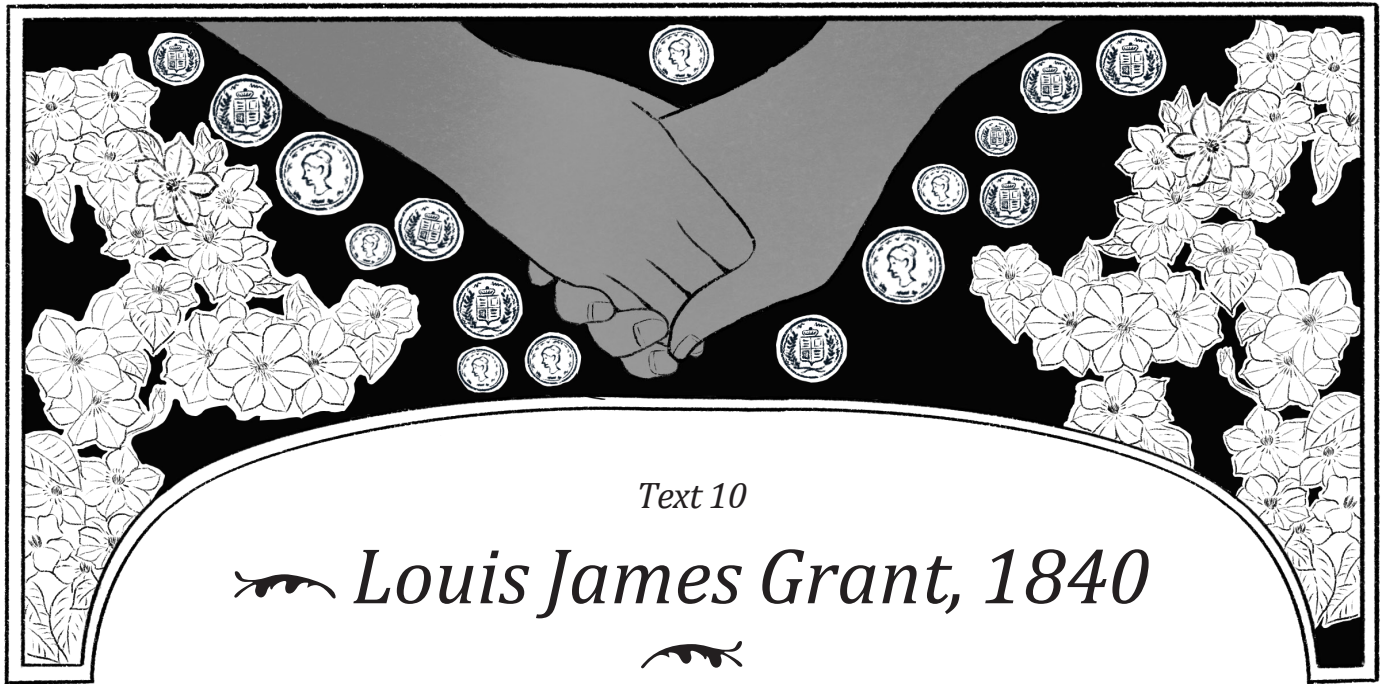
## **Key Evidence of the Busker's Life**

**The Entertainment Industry:** The Busker was one of many in the city who made their living by entertaining others. Not altogether divorced from begging, it was indicative of the creative ways that many people were forced to make their living. In this case, through circus-like tricks to draw a crowd.

**A Tough Business:** Jane Smith testifies that she had tried to take out a halfpenny to give to the busker when she noticed she was being robbed. It is impossible to say how many paying customers a man like the busker would attract over the course of the day, but a halfpenny was one of the smallest denomination coins in circulation, only out-valuing the farthing. In other words, it was the type of tip one might give to a beggar, but not one likely to sustain him for long. If that was typical of the busker's take, he likely worked hard and took little with him at the end of the day.

**At the Seat of Power:** The Busker was performing his show just down the street from the Houses of Parliament, at a spot likely to have large crowds with money they might be persuaded to part with. It shows that Black faces could be found throughout London, from the docklands in the east, to the Palace of Westminster in the west, and everywhere in between.





**A** young Black boy and his father have fallen on hard times in early Victorian London and find themselves in the workhouse. Tempted by some money in the possession of another inmate, the boy steals. But with nowhere to go and no way to hide it, he's caught. Will his youth protect him from the harsh hand of the law?

#### **Key Players**

- Louis James Grant, *a ten-year-old Black boy and inmate of the workhouse*
- William Lake, *a workhouse inmate and the victim*

#### **Minor Players**

- Edward Seagrave, *an eleven-year-old boy and witness*
- John Hugens, *the wardman of the room where the crime took place*
- John Charles Grant, *the father of the accused*

#### **Court Personalities**

- Unknown, *the judge*
- Mr Payne, *the counsel for the defense*
- Henry Buckler, *the courtroom reporter*
- George Herbert, *the publisher*
- Unknown, *the jury*

#### **People Mentioned**

- Seagrave's brother

#### **The Scene**

17 August 1840. Old Bailey Courtroom, London.  
Concerning an event on 6 August 1840.



## *The Black Londoner*

### **Place of Event**

Inside the workhouse of St Martin-in-the-Fields in West London one of the largest in the country. The crime takes place in the middle of the night in one of the wards.

### **Source**

Trial of Louis James Grant, August 1840, Old Bailey Proceedings Online version 8.0. [oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18400817-2035org/browse.jsp?div=t18310217-261](http://oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18400817-2035org/browse.jsp?div=t18310217-261)

## **The Trial of Louis James Grant, 1840**

### **The Charge is Read Out**

Louis James Grant was indicted for stealing on the 6th of August, 2 half-crowns, 5 shillings, 1 sixpence, and 1 penny, the monies of William Lake.

### **William Lake**

I have lately been admitted into the workhouse of St. Martin's-in-the-fields. I lost two half-crowns, five shillings, a sixpence, and a penny. I saw it last the night before when I went to bed. I think it was last Friday week. When I went to bed I put it into my trowsers' pocket in two pieces of paper and hung my trowsers by my bed-side so that the money could not fall out. When I got up in the morning the money was gone. The prisoner slept in the next bed to me.<sup>60</sup>

### **Mr. Payne**

How long afterwards did you go before the Justice?

### **William Lake**

I think it was a week afterwards. The prisoner was locked up in the workhouse that time. His father is a negro<sup>61</sup> and is also in the workhouse.

### **Edward Seagrave**

I am going on for eleven years old. I am in St. Martin's workhouse. I slept in the same room as Lake. Not in the same bed as the prisoner. One night I saw him get out of bed and take two papers with money in them out of Lake's breeches pocket. It was in the night. I did not see what was in the papers. I told him next morning what I had seen and he said he would give me 6 pence to say nothing about it. He offered it, but I refused to take it. I saw him with two half-crowns, five shillings, sixpence, and a penny. He was making a purse to put it into. I directly told my father and Lake.

### **Mr. Payne**

Were you brought up in the workhouse?<sup>62</sup>

### **Edward Seagrave**

No. My brother slept with me. Another boy slept down in the corner in the next bed to the prisoner. The wardsman was sleeping in the room. I laid still when I saw this going on. The boy next to the prisoner was awake. He is not here. I am quite sure it was the prisoner. I told him about half-past nine o'clock the next morning what I had seen. It happened about half-past nine in the night. There was a

---

<sup>60</sup> Privacy was non-existent in the workhouse. Inmates lived, worked, ate, and slept in the company of others.

<sup>61</sup> This word, used to describe Black people, was still in use in the 1840s, and had appeared in trial accounts more than a century earlier. The term is dated and derogatory today.

<sup>62</sup> The young Seagrave was being asked if he lived in the workhouse for long.

## *The Black Londoner*

light shining in the room.<sup>63</sup> We go to bed at nine o'clock.<sup>64</sup> The wardsman goes to bed soon after us. I saw the prisoner once in the cell where he was locked up. I did not see a strap on him.<sup>65</sup>

### **John Hugens**

I am in St. Martin's workhouse. I am the wardsman of the room. Six persons slept in the room. On Saturday morning I heard of the loss of the money and asked them all about it – the prisoner among others. He did not produce any money. They said they knew nothing about it. They were all in the room but Seagrave. When he came in I challenged him with it and said, "We shall all be blamed for it". He told his father and me that he saw the black boy get out of bed and take the money out. I said to the prisoner, "You young thief, you have got the man's money". And upon him was found two half-crowns, five shillings, sixpence, and a penny, in this bag. He then said, "I found it. I took him to the master and he told him the same.

### **Mr. Payne**

We understand he was kept in confinement in the workhouse a whole week before he was taken before the Magistrate?<sup>66</sup>

### **John Hugens**

Yes, but he was breaking the place all to pieces and trying to break the windows. He was locked up the day after this took place, about two o'clock. The father did not apply to me to be allowed to go before the Magistrate with him. I did not see him there. I did not see any strap put on the prisoner.

### **John Charles Grant**

I am the prisoner's father and was in the work-house with him. He was confined there a week or eight days before he was taken before a Magistrate. The last day he was taken down into the cell and a strap put on him. I went and saw it pressed so hard on him that I begged the master to release him and it was taken off. He was put in another cell, underground. He was put there for the felony that was alleged. I applied to the master to be allowed to go before the Magistrate. He referred me to the solicitor for the parish, who refused. My son was once sent to the house at Norwood, and escaped from there through ill-usage.

### **Verdict**

Guilty. Aged 10. Recommended to Mercy. Transported for Seven Years—Convict Ship.

---

<sup>63</sup> References to light are important for trials about crimes committed at night. If a person's life or liberty is on the line, the court wanted to make sure they had the right defendant.

<sup>64</sup> Life in a workhouse was very regimented. Discipline was meant to instill the work ethic that would allow an inmate to succeed on the outside.

<sup>65</sup> He means he did not see the prisoner beaten with a leather strap by the workhouse masters.

<sup>66</sup> Part of the discipline of the workhouse involved punishing those who broke the rules. This testimony shows that at St Martin's workhouse, that could include being confined in a cell.

## **Key Evidence of Grant's Life**

**The Mischief of Youth:** Louis is a young boy – only ten years old. Yet the justice system still takes him before the most notorious court in the land where he is given a sentence that takes him away from his father for seven years. This trial evokes images of the cruelties of *Oliver Twist* and a Victorian era that in many respects seemed to be lacking in compassion.

**Life on the Inside:** The account provides fleeting glimpses of life for a young lad in the workhouse. The sleeping quarters are close with several male inmates sharing a single room. It is a life of regimen with set times for getting up, going to bed, eating, and working. Meant to instill a sense of discipline and an attitude of hard work, it was not a pleasant place for a ten year old boy to grow up.

**Corporal Punishments:** Several witnesses mention a “strap” being used to discipline Grant. His father insists his son was beaten, while other witnesses tell a different story. Whether the boy was hit or not, we cannot know. But the discussion shows us insights into the society in which he lived, which saw pain as part of a corrective approach to unwanted behaviour.

**The Limits of these Accounts:** Read aloud the testimony of Edward Seagrave. Asked simply if he was brought up in the workhouse, he responds with a series of statements that seem instead to answer a series of unspoken questions. Nobody at that point in the text mentioned a “strap” being applied to the boy, but Seagrave assures the court that he saw none. The legal team posed many questions and the courtroom reporter – pressed for time and space – opted to record the witnesses answers rather than the questions. This is one of the many ways that we’re reminded that these “accounts” are not transcriptions, leaving many potentially vital details of what took place in the courtroom, to the mysteries of history.



## Credits

*D*r Adam Crymble, editor of this collection, is a lecturer of digital humanities at UCL in London. He is a historian of migration and of urban life. Manon Wright, the designer of this collection, is a MA Publishing alumna who is now working as a London based freelancer in publishing design and illustration.

The primary source records shared within this book are part of the much larger Proceedings of the Old Bailey, which include 197,000 trial accounts that were published between 1674 and 1913. They were microfilmed in the twentieth century, and then digitised and put online in the twenty-first century by a team of scholars led by Professor Tim Hitchcock and Professor Robert Shoemaker, as part of the Old Bailey Online project. The texts presented here are based on those created by that project and are used with their kind permission in this volume.

Dr Adam Crymble annotated and provided the historical context for the texts. Adam would like to thank the many people who advised in the creation of this resource. Most importantly, Emma Azid for her research assistance, as well as Judy St. John, Cage Boons, Sarah Lloyd, Julie Moore, Simon Collier, S.I. Martin, Lorraine Moir, Fred Gibbs, attendees of the workshop at the University of Exeter in 2018, attendees of the ‘Black Lives, British Justice’ events in 2019, and the many students of the ‘Britain and Africa’ module at the University of Hertfordshire (2015-2017).

---

<sup>67</sup> Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913 ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, March 2018).

