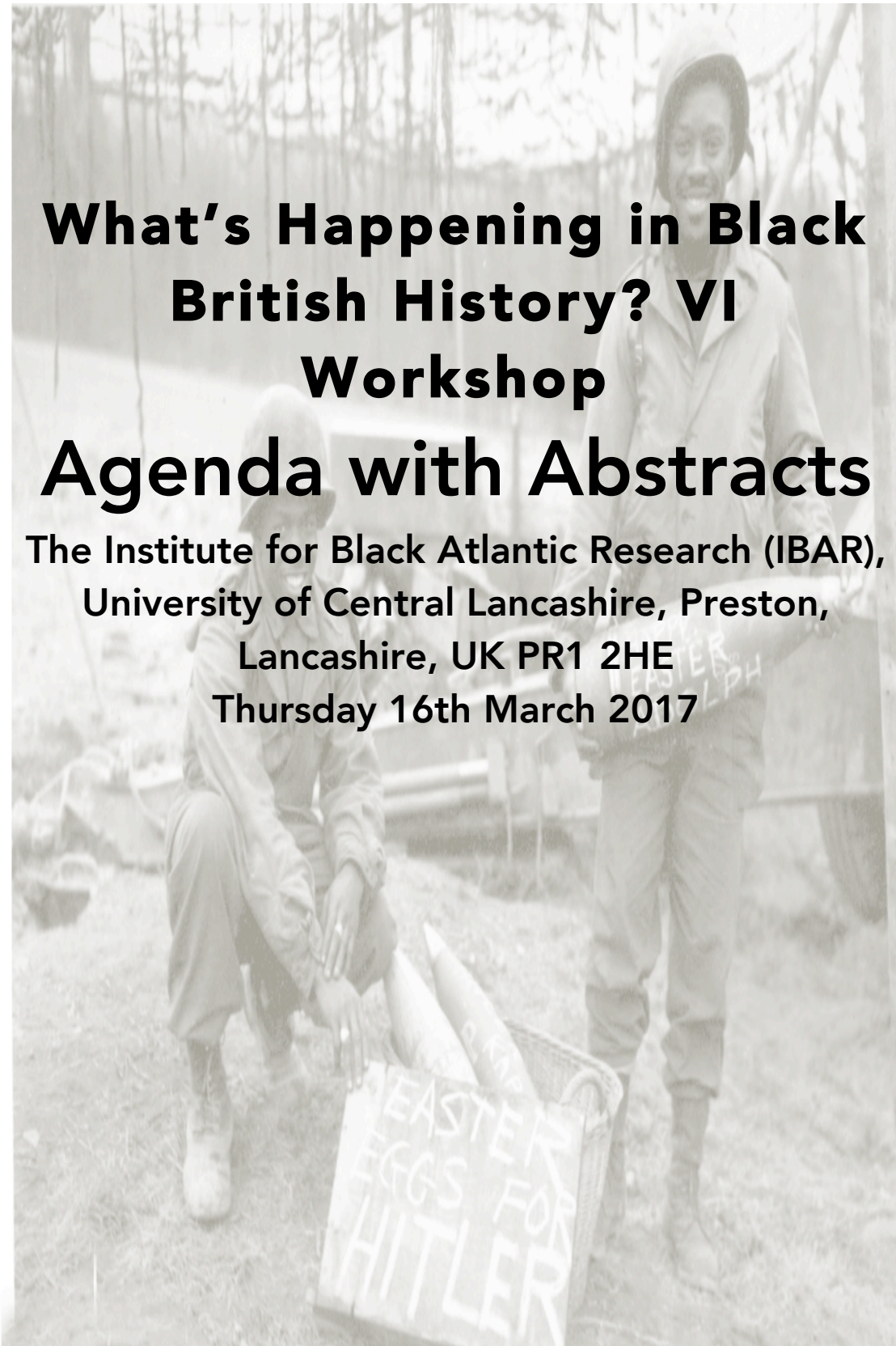




What's Happening in Black British History? VI Workshop

Agenda with Abstracts

The Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR),
University of Central Lancashire, Preston,
Lancashire, UK PR1 2HE
Thursday 16th March 2017



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10.30- 11:00 **Registration:** tea & coffee

11.00-12.30 **Session One: Beyond the Margins: Diverse Black Histories in Britain**

Chair: Alan Rice (IBAR)

Alan Rice (IBAR), *Vagrant Presences and Reparative Histories: Lost Children, The Black Atlantic and Northern Britain*

This paper will discuss a range of African Atlantic figures whose vagrant and vagabond lifestyles help to broaden Paul Gilroy's conception of the Black Atlantic and remould traditional historiography about Black presence creating new and dynamic narratives that construct alternate historical realities. Geographically, Rice moves away from metropolitan concerns to discuss the rural and the provincial as key areas to discover hidden truths about African Atlantic peoples. The paper investigates North British historical concerns from slavery and its aftermath in the North of England and Scotland to the Cotton Famine in Lancashire. He uses a range of case studies to investigate the way traditional black historiography with its echoing of majoritarian and metropolitan histories elide radical black pasts. He discusses the radical Scots-descended Robert Wedderburn, the North of England based, circus performer Pablo Fanque and the fugitive slave and wanderer James Johnson whose biographies promote a wider and less unidimensional Black history nationally and whose presence allows for performative reparative history for activists in the present. Rice uses his theory of guerrilla memorialisation to discuss this needful activism. He also discusses contemporary literary and artistic responses to black presence in North Britain by Caryl Phillips, Ingrid Pollard and Jade Montserrat to show how these historical presences are being remembered and reimagined. He uses the theoretical model developed by Michael Rothberg of "multi-dimensional memory" to investigate the way these historical characters and events are key to the fullest understanding of the Black Atlantic in Britain and beyond and how contemporary artists and writers by creating reparative historical models reinsert the presence of a full range of black humanity beyond the usual suspects and including themselves.

Corrine Fowler (University of Leicester), *How Writers Can Public Raise Awareness of the Black Histories of Britain's Countryside and Why It Matters*

This paper - which will end with a call for collaborators - arises from research for my forthcoming critical-creative book, 'Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Britain's Historical Black Presence' (Peepal Tree Press). The book examines writers' responses to recent historical work on iconic sites of British rurality: coastlines, country houses, lakes, moorlands, woodland and villages. It also contains creative responses to new historical research. My talk will provide a rationale for presenting a devolved, rural vision of black British history. Criminological work by Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland shows the extent to which Britain's countryside is a virulent site of racism, perceived as a white preserve and repository of the national past.

My paper provides a succinct overview of contemporary writers' responses to recent historical research into the countryside's black histories. It asks why this creative response matters and asks what we can learn from the - sometimes disparaging or uninformed - critical reception to such work. I will end by proposing a range of possible models for collaboration between writers and researchers by drawing on

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previous projects led by the Centre for New Writing, which I direct. I will also call for collaborators on a new large grant application which will emphasise devolved black rural histories and involve schoolchildren as well as writers.

Dr. Theresa Saxon (IBAR), *Ira Aldridge in Britain*

2017 marks one hundred and fifty years since the death and two hundred and ten years since the birth of African American actor, Ira Aldridge. From 1825 to his death, Ira Aldridge performed throughout England, Scotland and Ireland and travelled across Europe, touring, also, in Russia and Poland. Ira Aldridge's theatrical legacy makes him a pivotal figure for discussions of attitudes globally that continue to inform contemporary critical approaches to race and representation.

Aldridge is an important figure – he was the first black actor we know to play Othello on English stages. In 1833, he famously performed Shakespeare's tragedy at one of the patent theatre houses in London, the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden.

That Aldridge remains an important figure has been demonstrated by the success of Lolita Chakrabarti's 2012 play, *Red Velvet*, set in 1867, as Aldridge is failing in health, then takes the audience back to the fateful night 10th April, 1833, when he performed as Othello at London's Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

Much has been in criticism about Aldridge's treatment at the hands of audiences and press as a result of his appearances at the Theatre Royal in London, but little work has been carried out to assess regional responses to his performances and this paper sets out to redress that gap. For example, Aldridge played as Othello in Manchester in 1827, and in Lancaster around the same time, in patent theatre houses, and inspired very different critical reaction. The diversity of response, in the context to attitudes towards race expressed in regional press, therefore forms the basis for this assessment of Aldridge

Dr Raphael Hoermann (IBAR), *"The fate of St. Domingo awaits you": The Haitian Revolution and the Haitian Gothic with White and Black British Radicals, 1804-1819*

This twenty-minute paper wants to investigate the use of the Haitian Revolution in the discourse of two white radicals, Samuel Whitchurch and Edward Rushton, and one Black Atlantic radical, Robert Wedderburn. I will also focus on their engagement with – what I have called – the Haitian Gothic: the excessive use of tropes of horror and terror in the discourse on the Haitian Revolution.

Both white radicals, Whitchurch in his epic poem *Hispaniola* (1804) and Rushton in his poem "Toussaint to His Troops" (1806), go surprisingly far in the endorsement of this slave and anti-colonial revolution. Whitchurch conjures up several revolutionary shades who wreak vengeance on slaveholders and colonialists. Borrowing the voice of the Haitian General Toussaint Louverture, Rushton even indicts British colonialism and cast the Haitian Revolutionaries as Black Jacobins. They have inherited the radicalism of the French Revolutionary Jacobins who fallen prey to Napoleon's counterrevolution.

However, the ultra-radical agitator Robert Wedderburn, in his appropriation of the Haitian Revolution, goes beyond such ultimately white radical visions of black revolutionary agency. Sidelining the French Revolution altogether, Wedderburn

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instead places slave resistance and the Haitian Revolution at the root of a revolutionary Black Atlantic. Unlike the French Revolution, his 'West Indian' concept of liberty seeks emancipation from any class and race oppression. In a Black Atlantic dialogic discourse that constantly slips between England and the Caribbean, he envisages a transatlantic revolutionary scenario where "fermentation will be universal: "the Caribbean slaves and the British proletarians will fight interlinked systems of oppression and exploitation, "slaying all before them.

12.30-1.30 **Session Two: Fathers' Migration Stories**

Chair: Miranda Kaufmann

Hannah Lowe (Kingston University) *Ormonde: Post-War Caribbean Migration through Poetry*

During my presentation I will read from, discuss and project images from my poetry chapbook *Ormonde* (Hercules Editions, 2014).

The chapbook combines a cycle of poems and unique archive material to chart the journey of SS *Ormonde*, one of the first post-World War II ships (followed within a year by the *Almanzora* and the more famous *Empire Windrush*) to carry significant numbers of migrants from the Caribbean to England. The boat docked in Liverpool in March 1947.

My father was a passenger on this boat, and the poems assume his voice and the voices of other passengers - "Dressmaker", "Schoolboy" "Boxer" "Stowaway" and the six "Distressed British Seamen" who were on board. The poems are accompanied by public historical and personal archive material such as the 1947 passenger list, newspaper clippings, photographs, and extracts from my father's notebook about his early life in Jamaica.

In between reading the poems, I will consider the ways the book seeks to complicate and disrupt the narratives that exist around the *Windrush* and post-war Caribbean migration to Britain. I'll also discuss archival research as the genesis for creative work and contextualise the poems by discussing my position as a diaspora descendent, seeking to articulate a narrative of arrival and origin related to my own identity.

SuAndi and Jackie Ould (AfroSolo UK) *My Father Always Wore A Dunhill Hat*

Early December 2016 I complimented a young woman on her coat. She was known to my friend and as they chatted I couldn't but help admire the herringbone single breasted design. "It was my mum's," she told me. I turned to my friend and said how it was so much a Black man's coat. To which she replied 'Yes, Pimp by design I feel, so ghetto.'

To avoid upsetting myself further I walked away, my stomach full of the bile of disgust.

For those of us growing up first generation children of African fathers we rarely saw our fathers casually dressed. Their uniforms of life meant they always wore a white shirt most often with a tie if not a suit then a jacket and trousers. They rarely went bare-headed and in my father's case his hats were made to order by Dunhill London. I was always excited when a new hat arrived in the grandeur of a velvet lined hat box.

The point of this story lies in the lack of historical knowledge of Africans in the UK. Many historians, social scientists and commentators on 'race' have over-invested in

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the Windrush timeline. In doing so they have served to minimize and obscure the impact of African immigration on society as they created new families with their English wives and partners. What few social science studies there are seem to focus on the 'problem' of the mixed race generation these men created.....

Drawing on my own research titled Afro Solo UK funded by HLF I will present the experiences of the men given to me first hand or via their children.

These life stories contradict the image of Black men as work shy and having criminal intent. The suited African dressed away from his manual labour to show his dignity and worth for his family, neighbours and those who judged him as a lesser human being

My presentation will include a sample of personal photographs of ASUK the families. www.afrosolouk.com

1.30- 2.30 **Lunch**

2.30- 4.00 **Session Three: Black British Experiences of War**

Chair: Sean Creighton

John Siblon (Birkbeck College), *First World War Memorials of African, Asian and Caribbean Colonial servicemen in Britain*

In this paper I will use a cultural history approach to examine how the First World War service of Africans, Asians and Caribbeans from British colonies was commemorated in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.

During the war, Indian troops were allowed a combat role in Europe due to a change of policy and also served in Mesopotamia. Military and colonial officials had initially connived to exclude African and Caribbean military formations from participating in the European theatre of war but later relented and allowed Africans and Caribbeans to serve in non-combatant roles on the Western Front. Asian, Caribbean, and African troops, carriers and porters died in large numbers on the African continent.

Meanwhile, African, Asian and Caribbean sailors and seamen served in the trans-oceanic theatres of war. Many of these servicemen were from Britain or had passed through Britain in the war years.

What then would be the forms of cultural commemoration of African, Asian and Caribbean colonial troops, labourers and carriers after the war? Were all commemorated equally and was there specific African, Asian and Caribbean 'sites of memory' constructed in the British landscape to commemorate their war service?

Using a study of permanent, official memorials to the colonial dead and missing throughout Britain I will argue that official memorialisation practice does as much to obscure our perception of colonial military service as to present a full understanding of its extent.

I am currently a PhD candidate at Birkbeck College, London. The working title of my thesis is 'War memory and the construction of hierarchy: representations of black colonial servicemen in the aftermath of the First World War'. During the day, I teach History at City and Islington Sixth Form College in Islington, London. I am born of immigrant parents from Guyana and I take a keen interest in remembrance and commemoration practice regarding Africans, Asians and Caribbeans in British history. My grandfather was a soldier in the British West Indies Regiment in the First World War. I have published articles including: 'A Mistaken Case of Identity', *History Workshop Journal* 52, Autumn 2001, pp. 253-260; "' Monument Mania'"? Public

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Space and the Black and Asian Presence in the London Landscape' in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (eds.), *People and their Pasts: Public History Today* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 146-162; 'Negotiating Hierarchy and Memory: African and Caribbean Troops from Former British Colonies in London's Imperial Spaces', *The London Journal*, Vol. 41, Number 3, (November 2016); *Caribbean Soldiers on the Western Front* (African Heritage Forum, 2016).

Melissa Bennett (University of Warwick), *Deciphering photographs of black military bodies prior to World War One*

Finding photographs of black military bodies prior to world war one can be difficult, but deciphering these photographs can be even harder. Photographs in archive collections be poorly (or even incorrectly) labelled, the original context of the images can be lost, and it is hard to connect them to their purpose. For this reason, a lot of photographs are often included in historical research as illustrations rather than as true primary sources that are contextualised and analysed. My work on photographs of the West India Regiment between 1865 and 1914 uses photographs as its main body of primary sources and, a result, I have developed a method of analysis that treats photographs firstly as visual images analysed for their content, secondly as objects focusing more on their form, history and presentation, and thirdly (where appropriate) as commodities that circulated and were exchanged. By looking at photographs in this way it is possible to use them not only to learn about who the soldiers of the West India Regiment were and where they served, but the way that these soldiers were perceived in the racialised societies and increasingly tourism driven economies that they operated in. In this paper I will share some examples of how the meaning of photographs of black soldiers can be expanded upon if we look at who captured them, how they are organised on the pages of albums, and how they were advertised to prospective buyers.

I am a PhD student working on the AHRC funded Africa's Sons Under Arms Project. The project is a collaboration between the University of Warwick and the British Library and uses the British West India Regiments to explore the relationships between the arming of people of African descent and the changing nature of racial thought from the late 18th to early 20th centuries. My particular project focuses on images captured by and of the soldiers of the West India Regiments. As part of my research I have travelled across the Caribbean and worked closely with local historians and professionals in the heritage sector to unearth photographs and stories about the West India Regiments. I was awarded a research fellowship at Yale in the spring of 2016 and spent three months carrying out research there and at other US institutions into the Regiment and soldiers of African descent more generally. Before embarking on this project I completed my Masters at Kings College London with a dissertation that focused on the colonial police force in Trinidad in the interwar period.

Lauren Darwin (African Stories in Hull and East Yorkshire), *"You black men are not wanted in this country": Exploring the dichotomy between the experience of Black sailors before, during and after World War One in Hull.*

"You black men are not wanted in this country": Exploring the dichotomy between the experience of Black sailors before, during and after World War One in Hull.

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This paper will explore the experiences of Black sailors in the port of Hull between 1900 and 1922. To demonstrate how Black seamen were perceived before 1914 it will draw upon to the racial tensions that plagued Britain's maritime sphere. By analysing the relationship between the increased mobility of Black men in the Atlantic World and the rise of steam powered vessels it will document how Colonial seamen entered the maritime sphere and the resistance they were greeted with in Britain. It will then move on to explore how and why racial tensions abated as war broke out. It will demonstrate that Britain needed colonial seamen to contribute to the Merchant Marine and while the conflict continued Black sailors were accepted and praised for their role towards the war effort. However, it will also explore why negative attitudes towards Black seafarers returned after the conflict was over. This paper presents the argument that while racial tensions were omnipresent during this era, they were stifled during World War One by a collegial spirit that was pervasive during war, once the conflict was over racism and violent riots against Black sailors demonstrated that any perceptions or ideas of equality were short lived. Through the analysis of several case studies this paper will draw attention to the dichotomy between the treatment and praise of colonial seamen for their bravery during the war but their portrayal as 'cowardly foreigners' after the conflict. While this paper aims to demonstrate the appalling treatment of Black seamen in Britain in the years immediately after World War One, it also aims to highlight the ability of colonial seafarers to carve out a life for themselves in Hull despite the hostile atmosphere which permeated the public domain.

4.00-4.30 **Tea/coffee**

4.30- 5.30 **Keynote address:**

Professor Gretchen Gerzina (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

Why Black British History Matters: An American Perspective

Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan to a white mother and African American father, whose marriage was illegal in twenty states when they married. They moved with their two daughters just before Gretchen turned five to Springfield, Massachusetts, where she grew up, always knowing that she wanted to be a writer. She read her way through the Oz, Little Maid, and Book House series in her home, while also tackling the public library which refused to let her have an adult library card until her mother intervened.

Expecting to be a novelist—something to which she still aspires—she began instead to write lives. ("Why invent when there are so many true stories to tell?" she says.) Her first book, *Carrington*, is the only biography of the Bloomsbury Group figure Dora Carrington. Her second book, *Black London* (published in the UK as *Black England*), told the true story of black people in eighteenth-century Britain, and was a *New York Times* "notable book." She followed this with an edited book, *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*. She has published three books on Frances Hodgson Burnett: a biography, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden*, the Norton Critical Edition of *The Secret Garden*, and *The Annotated Secret Garden*, a lushly-illustrated and annotated edition of the perennial favorite. She also publishes numerous academic articles, chapters, and reviews. Her latest book, *Mr. and Mrs. Prince*, was jointly researched with her husband, Anthony Gerzina. Lucy Terry, the first known African American poet, and her

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husband Abijah Prince, were landowners and former slaves who moved two hundred years earlier from Deerfield, Massachusetts, to the same village in Vermont where Anthony and Gretchen were living, and have gone down in legend as remarkable people who fought for their rights in the courts. It completely changes the notions about slavery in the North. Writing and researching this remarkable story was a life-changing event for both Gretchen and Anthony. It was nominated for many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize.

Gerzina has a B.A. from Marlboro College, an M.A. from Simmons College, and a Ph.D. from Stanford University. She has been a tenured professor at Vassar College and at Barnard College, Columbia University. For ten years she was the Kathe Tappe Vernon Professor in Biography and Professor of English at Dartmouth College, where she was the first woman ever to chair the English department, and the first African American woman to chair an Ivy League English department. She was for many years an Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of Exeter in Devon, England, and also a Professor English and American Literature at Brunel University, London. She has taught courses on the novel, Victorian literature, African American literature, Black British literature, and biography. She has held two fellowships from the National Endowment for Humanities, been a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar to Great Britain, and was selected by the Rhodes Trust and Oxford University to be the George Eastman Visiting Professor to Oxford in 2009-10, and a fellow at Balliol College, which awarded her an honorary master's degree. On July 1, 2015 Gerzina began as the Dean of the Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst.

For fifteen years Gretchen Gerzina hosted the nationally-syndicated program "The Book Show," on which she interviewed every week some of the finest writers working today. She has appeared frequently on British television and radio documentaries. Most recently she completed a BBC/Radio 4 series called "Britain's Black Past," which aired over two weeks in January 2016.

5.30- 6.30 **Final Thoughts and Conclusions**

Chair: Michael Ohajuru

Panel: Alan Rice, Elizabeth Burke ,Gretchen Gerzina ,Clinton Smith

6.30 -7.30 **Reception**