Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677
Imprints of the Invisible

IMTIAZ HABIB
Introduction

The Missing (Black) Subject

I

Studies of racial formations in early modern England have always had to deal with an uncertain knowledge of the actual numbers of black people. The stumbling block in the resurgent “moment” of race in Renaissance studies has been, in the absence of information to the contrary, the reluctant acknowledgment that “actual” black people were probably a “tiny” population.\(^1\) Scholars have been unable to regard historical blacks in the reigns of Elizabeth and her immediate successors as anything more than stray figures in an “anecdotal” landscape, too accidental and solitary to be even a historical statistic.\(^2\) Such current assumptions are merely reinforcements of the pronouncements of earlier scholars, who insisted that the Elizabethans did not know black people.\(^3\) Yet, obscure, truncated and largely inaccessible documentary records, which are only now becoming fully available, paint a very different picture about the size, continuity and historical seriousness of the black presence in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, well before English black populations become known through the transatlantic slave trade.

---

\(^1\) Peter Erickson, “The Moment of Race in Renaissance Studies,” p. 35. Even in the odd instance when scholars are impelled to assert that there were “fair numbers of black West Africans in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” they do so by blind faith rather than on the strength of documented evidence, as for instance Eldred Jones did a long time ago in his *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (p. 17). By “black people” here and throughout this book, I mean people particularly from the African continent, including Egypt, but expediently from the Americas and India as well, in conformity with the endemically loose way an early modern English cultural consciousness sees them, as for instance Samuel Purchas does in his *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, p. 559. The only precision of the term “black” as a typological identifier of people—for the early modern English, and consequently for this study—is as a loose category of the non-white, non-English (as distinct from white but non-English people). “Black” in this study is thus “Negro,” “Ethiopian,” “Egyptian,” “moor”/“blackamoor,” “barbaree”/“barbaryen,” and “Indian” (including orthographic variations thereof for all of them). The study’s use of the word also includes geographic names by themselves, such as Guyana or Guinea, where for the early modern English they function openly or implicitly as regional identifiers of people of color. Anthony Gerard Barthelemy in *Black Face, Maligned Race* (pp. 1–17), Michael Neill in “‘Mulattoes,’ ‘Blacks,’ and ‘Indian Moors’” (pp. 273–77), and Margo Hendricks in “Surveying Race” (pp. 15–20) all offer useful demonstrations of the propriety of adhering to a taxonomic looseness in tracing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English constructions of colored people.


\(^3\) G. K. Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Traditions*, p. 32.
For instance, buried in the documentary minutiae of Elizabeth I’s household records for the years 1574 and 1577 are several items of expenditure for two black individuals in her domestic staff, the one described as “a littel blak a More,” and the other simply as both, “Thomasen, a woman dwarf,” and as “Tomasen, the woman dwarf,” respectively, the former apparently a page and the latter a female member of her personal entertainment staff. Earlier in the century, obscured in the myriad desiderata of the ritual royal disbursements of Elizabeth’s father and grandfather, are regular compensations to a black trumpeter named “John Blanke.” Throughout the sixteenth century and the next, in the private household inventories of Tudor aristocrats, as well as in the casual entries of the parochial churches with which their estates or residences are associated, are notations about “Negroes” and “blackamoors” or “blackamoors.” For example, included in the elaborate instructions of Edward Stanley, the third Earl of Derby, to his domestic staff in 1568 is the incidental prohibition of his “slaves” from sitting at tables. Mentioned without explanation in the lavish household accounts of Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, are his orders of payment to his “blackamore” in 1584, and to “Mr. Rawles” in 1585. Noted briefly in the baptism records of St. Luke’s church in Kensington for 1597 is the baptism of Walter Raleigh’s 11-year-old Guyanian boy “Charles,” while tersely listed in St. Clements Danes’ burial lists for 1601/02 is Robert Cecil’s “blackamoor servant Fortunatus.” Located unobtrusively in the extensive rolls of the Earl of Dorset’s servants at Knole, his estate in Kent, for the period 1613–1624 is a “John Morrocco, a Blackamoo,” and a “Grace Robinon, a Blackamoo,” the latter also inexplicably remembered by Lady Anne Clifford in her Diary.

At the same time, hidden in the vast archives of parish churches within London and without, all through the Tudor and Stuart reigns, are voluminous cryptic citations of “nigro,” “neger,” “neygar,” “blackamore,” “blackamoor,” “moor,” “barbaree,” “barbaryen,” “Ethiopian,” and “Indian.” In London’s northeast, in St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury, a “Jhon the Blackamore” is said to have been baptized in 1565 and buried in 1566, and in St. Martin in the Fields “Margareta a Moor” is reported buried in 1571, in Christchurch Newgate Street on the city’s west side the burial of Mr. Jucent’s servant “Thomas Blackmore” is attested in 1579. Towards the

---

4 Thomasen has been identified by some scholars as being black. See Item 139 in the Index. Henceforth, all records mentioned in this document will be cited in parenthesis in the document itself by the item number with which it occurs in the Index. The records cited below in this Introduction are only a sample of the total body of records presented in this book and listed and fully described in the Chronological Records Index at the end of the book. The full text and details of all records, including the ones referred to here, can be found in the Chronological Record Index, and in the discussions of each of them in the book’s particular chapters in which they occur, in each of which they are identified parenthetically by the Item number that they have in the Chronological Records Index itself. Such Item number identification for each record mentioned here is for that reason not included in this Introduction.

5 All approximate parish locations and neighborhoods of early modern London and its environs provided in this book are derived from a combined consultation of the Agas and the Braun and Hogenberg maps of London in the 1570s reproduced in Prokter and Taylor, eds., A to Z of Elizabethan London, on pp. 2–29 and 32, respectively. In referring to London locations, I am assuming more or less the greater London area of today rather than the London
Introduction

city’s southwest, on the river, “Domynge a Blackmore[‘s]” death is recorded in St. Ann’s, Blackfriars in 1587/88. On the east side, transcribed in St. Botolph’s church in Aldgate are the deaths of “Suzanna Pearis a blackamoore,” “Symon Valencia a blackamoore,” and “Robarte a negar servant,” all in 1593, while in nearby St. Olave’s Church in Hart Street are described the demises of “Isabell a blackamoore,” “Francisco a negro,” and “Peter Marley, a blacamore” in 1588, 1590, and 1594, respectively. Across the river, south of the city, in the diocese of Southwark, a black family by the name of “Reasonable” is documented as living in St. Olave Tooley Street, where “Jane, d[augther] of Reasonable, blackmor” and “Edmond, s[on] of Reasonable, blackmor” are listed as dying in 1591 and 1592.

Scattered across the four compass quadrants of London and its liberties, symptomatic documentations of black people continue in the seventeenth century. As a “Christian Ethiopia” was baptized in St. Dunstan and All Saints in Stepney in 1602, so was a “Richard a Blakmore” in St. George the Martyr, Southwark in 1609. In 1616, “Peter a blackamore … from Mrs Locksmiths” was buried in St. Dunstan in the West, while “An East Indian was Christened by the name of Peter” and publicly baptized in St Dionis Backchurch in central London. “Nicholas a Negro of unknown parents … at the age of 3 yeares or thereabouts” was baptized in St. Margaret’s Westminster in 1619/20, while “Barbaree, servant to Mr. Smith” was buried in St. Peter, Paul’s Wharf in 1623. The death of “Anthony, a poore ould Negro aged 105 yeares,” occurred in Hackney in 1630, and “Sara Reide … a blackamore[‘s]” baptism took place in St. Dunstan, Stepney in 1659.

In the same period, inscribed fragmentarily in legal, taxation, medical and civic archives is the varied impress of black working lives. Immured within the ponderous substance and verbiage of sixteenth- and seventeenth-court documents are instances of black people answering to the laws of the land. A black Guinean diver’s testimony on his employer’s behalf in an Admiralty case in 1547/48 was protested by the prosecution because he was a slave. In a Court of Requests hearing in 1587 the newly purchased Ethiopian servant of a Portuguese merchant was the object of his master’s desperate complaint because he refused to obey him. Sometime between 1588 and 1599, in a lawsuit filed in the Court of the Queen’s Bench and heard in the Court of Chancery, the blackamoor servants of a prominent London Marrano Jewish physician’s kinsmen were made to offer by proxy incriminating evidence against the physician after his death. Noted dryly in laconic tax returns are identifications such as “Lambert Waterson, denizen, barbaryen, teneunte … [who] goeth to his parish church” in St. Giles in the Fields north of London in 1568, “Ferdinando a Blackamore” in All Saints, Staynings in 1582, and “Clar a Negra at Widdow Stokes, Maria a negra at Olyver Skynners, Lawse a negra at Mr. Mittons, Marea a Negra at Mr. Woodes,” in Tower Ward in 1598. On occasion, written into stray medical records in London and in the country, are accounts such as Simon Forman’s diagnosis in 1597 of “Polonia the blackmor maid at Mr Peirs” as suffering from “a fever …

defined by early modern English city limits. In the subsequent chapters of this book all London locations cited will be referenced parenthetically in my text itself by the map coordinate and page number of the location in the Agas map in Prokter and Taylor.
[and] faint heart full of melancholy,” and a Court of Wards’ postmortem in Chester, Cheshire of “George Blackmore” in 1617.

Even with their enigmatic brevity, such references register black lives in many visible professions. In addition to the vocational activities evident above, namely trumpeter, diver, royal page, entertainer, laundress, servant, and maid, black professional service caught in these documents includes that of a professional soldier of the kind that the decorated Peter Negro is in 1548, needlemaker of the type William Harrison remembers working in Cheapside in the early 1550s during Mary Tudor’s reign, and metal worker of the sort that Symon Valencia is in St. Botolph, Aldgate in 1593. Also noticeable are goldsmiths, such as Andrew and Henry Blackmore in St. Mary Woolnoth in 1626. Indeed, in one instance an entire group of black people in a neighborhood setting is caught in a casual London newspaper comment in 1645.

Yet, despite the plentifulness of black people in early modern England that such documentary materials reflect, they do not, for the most part, appear in contemporary accounts of the land and its peoples as a distinct, considerable population. In his influential encyclopedic Description of England in 1577 William Harrison remembers only the black needlemaker in Cheapside in the reign of Mary Tudor cited above but declares emphatically “As for slaves and bondmen, we have none.”

Following him, Thomas Smith and William Camden, in their magisterial accounts of the country in 1583 and 1586, are oblivious of any English black populations. Foreign accounts of England in the later decades of Elizabeth’s reign are not any different. The Duke of Wirtemburg describes violent, dangerous street scenes in London in 1592 but no black people anywhere.

Paul Hentzner, the German traveler, sees Negro figures in a tapestry in Whitehall in 1597, but no living black people.

Thomas Platter, a Swiss visitor to England, recounts crowded London playhouse scenes in 1599 but mentions no blacks. The English reports of Juan Fernández de Velasco in 1604, Otto Prince of Hesse in 1611, Peter Eisenberg in 1614, and Valentin Arithmœs in 1617 fare no better either, notwithstanding their detailed and often critical recollections of English social practices.

Meticulous English urban and national chronicles at the end of the century and in the next are equally devoid of any citations of black inhabitants of the land. John Stow, while providing the most minutely informed and historically authoritative tabulation of Elizabethan London’s neighborhoods and residents in 1598, has only a casual, ambiguous comment about black monks in Blackfriars but no other references to black people. Between 1631 and 1684 John Evelyn, while faithfully chronicling numerous social and public events in London, has no memory of any black persons in England, even though he remembers seeing one in Milan.  

---

6 The Description of England, ed. George Edelen, p. 118. Although it is clear from the context that Harrison’s phrase “bondmen and slaves” does not refer to blacks, they do not figure as a class of people at all in his taxonomy of English social structure.

7 In William Brenchley Rye, ed., England as Seen by Foreigners: In the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I, pp. 1–52; see esp. p. 7.

8 Paul Hentzner and Sir Robert Naunton, Travels in England and Fragmenta Regalia; see p. 37.


which is all the more surprising since his close friend, Samuel Pepys, has several intimate accounts of black individuals in his *Diary*. Thomas Fuller in 1662 faithfully lists detailed histories of notable English personalities, regions, commodities, and resources, but cannot recall any blacks anywhere in such histories.\(^\text{12}\)

So, are black people in early modern England an invisible, secret population? Not slaves officially since a reformist English Protestantism disavows slavery publicly even as it advocates its expedient usage,\(^\text{13}\) nor properly a part of the medieval serfdom of *villeinage*, since that is a practice badly decayed by the sixteenth century,\(^\text{14}\) and not quite belonging to the new practice of indentured servantship either because its precise articles of contract are for a color-coded English cultural practice almost certainly not usable for illicitly acquired blacks, early modern English black people miss the minimum humanizing visibility of legal definition. Tudor and Stuart poor laws—such as those of 1531, 1536, 1547, 1550, 1555, 1563, 1572, 1576, 1598 (2), 1601, 1610, 1647, 1649, and 1662 (which gives parishes the right to remove any newcomer deemed to be a burden)—do not see black people even when they see

\(^{12}\) Thomas Fuller, *The Worthies of England.*

\(^{13}\) *Occasional papal edicts against slaving practices*, such as the *Sicut Dudum* of Pope Eugene IV in 1435 condemning the enslavement of peoples in the newly colonized Canary Islands; Pope Pius II’s letter in 1462 gravely warning against the enslaving of baptized Africans; and the *Sublimis Deus* of Pope Paul III in 1537 describing the enslavers of the West and South Indies as allies of the devil and declaring attempts to justify such slavery “null and void” (Parker Pillsbury, *Acts of the Anti-Slavery Apostles*, pp. 830–31), corroborated in English common law deriving from the Magna Carta (William Quigley, “Five Hundred Years of English Poor Laws, 1349–1834,” p. 76), are reflected in conventional English disavowals of slavery such as the court rulings of 1569 (“Matter of Cartwright,” 11 Elizabeth 1, in John Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, p. 468) and 1587 (Court of Requests 2/164/117; Index Item 163); in the denials of Sir Thomas Roe abroad in India in 1616, when he declines the Mughal emperor’s offer of an Asian slave because “in England we had no slaues, neyther was it lawfull to make the Image of God fellow to a Beast …,” and in 1617, when he turns down the Mughal emperor’s offer to sell him three “Abassines” (Abyssinian, i.e. Ethiopian slaves) because “I could not buy men as Slaues, as others did, and so had profit for their money …” (*The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Moghul*, journal entries of March 23, 1616 and November 6, 1617 respectively, pp. 150 and 445–46), and of Richard Jobson in West Africa in 1620, who when offered slaves by a local chief said “Wee are a people that do not deal in such commodities, neither did we buy nor sell one another” (cited by Robin Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” p. 96). At the same time, an expedient slavery is defended by the foremost Elizabethan jurist Sir Edward Coke in Calvin’s Case in 1608, in which he rules that “all infidels are in law perpetual enemies” (Thomas Bayley Howell, ed., *Complete Collection of State Trials* 2:559), and complicatedly defined by the political philosopher John Locke in 1679 when as the justifiable product of a just war: “a state of war continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive” (*Second Treatise of Civil Government* 2:4, 24), both deriving from Pope Nicholas V’s *Romanus Pontifex* Bull of 1455 sanctioning the war against and enslavement of non-Christian people whose primitive living practices are in violation of natural law (extracted in Frances Gardiner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties*, p. 23).

the poorest in English society. At the same time, throughout the fluctuating history of Tudor and Stuart legal definitions of aliens, including the repeated Elizabethan censuses of aliens in London and elsewhere, the focus is on European religious

15 The orders are, respectively, “Concerning Punishment of Rogues and Vagabonds” (22 Henry VIII c. 12); “For the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars” (27 Henry VIII c. 25); “For the Punishment of Vagabonds and Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons” (I Edw. VI c. 3); “Touching the Punishment of Vagabonds and other Idle Persons” (3 & 4 Edw. VI. c. 16); “For the Provision and Relief of the Poor” (5 & 6 Edw. VI c. 2); “For the Relief of the Poor” (2 & 3 Philip & Mary c. 5); “For the Relief of the Poor” (5 Eliz. I c. 3); “For the Punishment of Vagabonds and for Relief of the Poor and the Impotent” (14 Eliz. I c. 5); “For the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoiding of Idleness” (18 Eliz. I c. 3); “For the Relief of the Poor (39 Eliz. I c. 30); “For the Punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars” (39 Eliz. I c. 40); “For the Relief of the Poor” (43 Eliz. I c. 2); “For the Charitable Relief and Ordering of Persons infected with the Plague” (1 James I c. 31); “For the Due Execution of ... Laws ... Against Rogues ... and Other Lewd and Idle Persons” (7 James I c. 4); (1647 & 1649) “Ordinances of Parliament for the Relief and Employment of the Poor and Punishment of Vagrants and other disorderly Persons in the City of London”; “For the better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom [Act of Settlement]” (13 & 14 Car. II c. 12); for a description of these laws, see Paul Slack, The English Poor Law, pp. 59–62.

16 Irrespective of whether alien status is not an issue in post-conquest England because the government of William the Conqueror itself is foreign, as F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland held (The History of English Law 1:458–62), or whether it is legally constructed from Anglo-Saxon times to the fifteenth century exclusively in terms of a person’s place of birth or origin in a location other than that of the time of such construction, or whether such constructions are also based on the person’s status as “free” or “unfree,” as in the writings of Glanville and Bracton, as Keechang Kim has recently argued (Aliens in Medieval Law, p. 9), and irrespective of how any or all of these ideas are replaced by or combined with allegiance to the monarch (i.e. state) as a criterion for the consideration of English subjecthood or citizenship from the fifteenth century onwards in the expositions of John Fortescue (De Laudibus Legum Angliae, p. 30) and Thomas Littleton (Tenures, fol. xiv r), and irrespective of how both traditions collide contradictorily in the early modern period in the pronouncements of Edward Coke in “Calvin’s Case” in 1608 (Howell, State Trials, 2:638–96), such constructions do not extend to black people in Tudor and Stuart England, who remain, like animals, an un-legalized entity. This is true even if they fit the convenient summary of legal restrictions on aliens in England that Daniel Statt offers in his study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English alien legislation based on his culling of the standard legal historians of England such as W. Holdsworth, W. Blackstone, and A. K. Cockburn, that includes stipulations such as that the alien “could own no real property, he could have no legal heir, ... he could bring no legal action that related to property, ... he had no political rights, could not vote or hold political office,” and could not employ “fellow aliens” (“The City of London and the Controversy over Immigration,” p. 46). These stipulations, which permanently include the government’s de facto right to search and seizure, are the overall product of both a variable Tudor monarchical fear of French and Spanish Catholic penetration of the security of the state, and of a selective monarchic pandering for popular support in times of crises to perennial English mercantile instincts of opportunistico protectionism against Italian, French, Dutch, and Spanish trade and craft activities within the country. Beginning with Edward I’s Ordinances of London in 1285, Richard II’s 6 Richard II c. 10 in 1382, Henry IV’s 5 Henry c. 9 in 1399 and his 18 Henry IV c. 4 in 1439, Edward IV’s 3 Edward IV c. 3 and c. 4 in 1464, and Richard III’s 1 Richard III c. 9 and c. 12 in 1483, some of the more signal instances of this legislative history include the
refugees. The fact that (a) most blacks may technically have been foreigners or aliens in terms of the histories of their arrivals and (b) English poor laws and local government were not set up to cater to outsiders, does not mitigate the fact of their exclusion from civic sight, particularly since they became a settled population in England. More than being even foreign or poor, black people are unnamable entities. The one time the law does openly identify them, it does so in a gesture of exclusion, as in Elizabeth’s unsuccessful orders of 1596 and 1601 deporting “negars and blackamoors” from the realm, and which in their abruptness and singularity are acts that merely reinforce their effacement rather than the palpability of their English existence. Unseen in civic record, and hidden as references to them most frequently are in secretive parish archives,¹⁷ where they are further obfuscated by (a) the eccentricities of improvisatory parish documentation that is incomplete, inconsistent, and discontinuous, (b) non-standard orthography, and the opacity of early modern English cultural naming practices, and (c) the pressures of the conversion process, whereby ethnic identities disappear under Christian names, Tudor–Stuart black lives are imperceptible in the cultural acknowledgments of the age. Even when they are visible, as in the popular representations of the English public theaters—such as in the plays of Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare—their historical reality fades under the deformative force of cultural metaphor and becomes exotic fiction.

Unsurprisingly, in seeming consequence of all of the above, early modern English black people are untraceable in the work of both social historians of the age such as Lawrence Stone, Peter Laslett, Steven Rappaport, A. L. Beier, Ann Kussmul, Ian Archer, F. F. Foster, Joan Thirsk, Paul Slack, Jeremy Boulton, Paul Griffiths, and Lena Orlin, and traditional literary scholars of the period such as Louis Wright, Samuel Schoenbaum, and G. K. Hunter, despite the fact that all of them use sophisticated cross-disciplinary methodologies and deal extensively with primary documents of the time. Even for traditional and post-structuralist scholars alike who have focused on historically ignored population groups in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, such as Linda Yungblut in her study of the xenophobia about strangers, aliens, and foreigners, and Patricia Fumerton in her tracking of the cultural life of vagrants respectively, black communities have not comprised an analytical category.¹⁸

¹⁷ See the essay by Paul Griffiths, “Secrecy and Authority in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century London”, and Ian Archer, who observes, “Parish clerks were careful to conceal the existence of controversies” (The Pursuit of Stability, p. 84).

¹⁸ It is appropriate to point out—in a footnote—that when Linda Yungblut does see black people—“two ‘blackmores’ were reported living in London at the time of this survey”—she
Emerging scholarly attention to this problem over the last four decades, while useful in tabling the issue, has been spotty, diffuse, and generally ineffective in its findings. W. E. Miller’s solitary enumeration in 1961 of four Elizabethan London tax assessments identifying four black people in All Hallows parish was followed by Eldred Jones’s two publications in 1965 and 1971 that broadly and tentatively searched for an empirical Elizabethan knowledge of black people. In between Jones’s two works, Thomas Forbes, in his study in 1969 of the parish registers of St. Botolph, Aldgate, cited in the preface of his book, without any further attention, a list of entries of black people that he had found. Two similarly brief but helpful works were Robert Fleissner’s pieces in 1976 and 1978 on the mannerist parallels between George Herbert’s poem “Aethiopissia” and the “Dark Lady” of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, and on the “Moor’s Nomenclature,” respectively. The trend toward documentary evidence in Miller and Jones, and the encouraging cue in Forbes’s prefatory list, grew over the next two decades into the work of the black social historians Follarin Shyllon, Paul Edwards, James Walvin, Peter Fryer, and St. Clair Drake. But they focused more on the more relatively visible periods after the emergence of the slave trade in the latter half of the seventeenth century; historical blacks in the England of Elizabeth and her immediate successors were a minor and occasional presence in their data. That is even truer for the most recent example of this kind of study, Gretchen Gerzina’s Black London.

On the other hand, the instinct for analyses of modes of representation in Fleissner, in gravitating in the same period as the work of Shyllon and the others into the full blown critical excursus of literary scholars such as David Dabydeen, Ruth Cowhig, Eliott Tokson, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, and Jack D’Amico, while importantly foregrounding race and blackness as neglected topoi in Elizabethan and Jacobean literary studies, further occluded the materiality and consequent historical import of the black presence in the earlier centuries of the English early modern age. With the advent in the late 1980s of post-structuralist exegesis of early modern English race formations, the proliferation of such modes-of-representation studies in a constellation of analytical axes—cultural materialist, black studies, feminist, postcolonial—has eclipsed the subject of the historical presence of black people in Tudor and Stuart regimes even further and relegated it to the status of an unfashionable scholarly hobby-horse and naïve intellectual interest. The only exceptions have been Roslyn Knutson’s brief but important study in 1991 of notations of black people in several London parishes, Duncan Salkeld’s committed electronic essay in 2000 about black prostitutes in late Elizabethan London court records (“Black Lucy”), Virginia Mason Vaughan’s electronic notice in 2001 of blacks in the Harleian Society’s published relegates them to a footnote: p. 21, n. 39. See Margo Hendricks’s comment on this scholarly sleight of hand in her essay, “Feminist Historiography,” p. 371.

19 I am referring to the work of Michael Neill, Peter Erickson, Martin Orkin, Emily Bartels, Joyce Green MacDonald, Margo Hendricks, Kim Hall, Ania Loomba, Jyotsna Singh, Dympna Callaghan, Arthur Little, St. Clair Drake, and Catherine Alexander and Stanley Wells, and my own work.
transcriptions of Tudor and Stuart London parish registers in the Folger Shakespeare library’s holdings, and Margo Hendricks’s essay in an anthology on early modern women’s writing, insisting on the need for scholars to now turn to archival work on a historical black presence in early modern England. Also exceptional has been Marika Sherwood’s dogged if informal pursuit of black records in the Tudor and Stuart years. Equally notable is the work Susan Amussen has started recently on historical black people in England in the later seventeenth century. But these exploratory excursus have been little noticed and remain together with the works of Miller and Jones and the citations of Forbes, as well as peripherally that of Shyllon, Walvin, Fryer, and Drake, part of a minority trend in current scholarship. As the editors of the first recent scholarly attempts to explore the history of black people in Europe announce at the very beginning of their volume, this is a “neglected” subject, and as another contemporary scholar has put it, one that is still in its “infancy.”

Indeed, the triumph of theory in a poststructuralist age might seem to be the prohibition of the real. The threatening specter of essentialism translates factuality into the unknowable, renders ambivalent if not disallows the value of the archive. Yet, theory needs “a local habitation and a name” on which to mark itself, an ontology for the semiology of its performative life, without which its epistemological dividend misses its material effect. This lacuna develops into a compound loss in the otherwise rich aggressiveness of current deconstructions of racial formations in the early modern age in England cited earlier, in which the topoi of the racial other cannot transcend its constructionist abstraction and remains an ideology only, rather than an ideology that includes also, and is mandated by, the impress of the literal. The resultant scenario can be described thus: what is little looked for, and what is therefore non-existent, is also what is/should be unknown because it cannot be known. This in turn reinforces the conventional contemporary mistruth: there were no actual people of color in early modern England; references to them in popular media of the time are metaphoric; and the period is race-innocent. Thus, theory might seem to conspire with the natural fragmentariness and obscurity of the documentary life of the early modern English episteme to block the real of the racial in the corrective reconstructions of the age.

III

It is the contention of this book that the substantial archival evidence of black people in England between 1501 and 1676 exemplified above contributes significant,

20 “Feminist Historiography,” pp. 374–75. Hendricks’s call is paralleled by Kim Hall, both together representing a response to Ania Loomba’s suggestion that scholarship should now move away from historical “black presence studies”; see Loomba’s “The Color of Patriarchy,” p. 26, and Kim Hall’s measured rejoinder in her essay “Object into Object: Some Thoughts on the Presence of Black Women in Early Modern Culture,” p. 349.

irreversible, and hitherto unavailable materialities to current understanding of racial discourse in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. These records mark the empirical intimacy of the English construction of the racial other, and of the national-imperial drive that is its most immediate occasion, both parallel to and independent of such formations in the travel literature of the period.\textsuperscript{22} If, as Jacques Derrida has said, “what is no longer archived the same way is no longer lived the same way,”\textsuperscript{23} it follows that archives write lived lives. As in the “repressed archive [lies] the power of the state over the historian,” so “there is no political power without access to the archives.”\textsuperscript{24} If “[t]he “archive always works, and \textit{a priori}, against itself,” and if it reveals as much as it suppresses,\textsuperscript{25} it is these archives that will publish the very secrets that they were meant to guard. As such, in documenting the presence of black people in Shakespeare’s England, these datasets will de-mystify decisively the subject of the black presence in early modern English cultural history. If, in Michel Foucault’s terms, the archive is “the system of discursivity” that establishes the possibility of what can be said,\textsuperscript{26} these archives register the imprints of the invisible black within the most visible cultural episteme of the West.

In presenting these archives this book will, thus, marry productively, in the manner called for by Duncan Salkeld,\textsuperscript{27} the hard pragmatism of traditional history with the constructionist convictions of poststructuralist theory in general, and postcolonial

\textsuperscript{22} I mean here typically the well-known writings of John Mandeville, Leo Africanus, William Towerson, Richard Eden, Richard Hakluyt, and Samuel Purchas, among others, which have been traditionally regarded as the obvious sites of early modern English racial construction; see, for instance, Emily Bartel’s essay “Imperialist Beginnings: Richard Hakluyt and the Construction of Africa.”

\textsuperscript{23} “Archive Fever,” p. 18.

\textsuperscript{24} Sonia Combe, \textit{Forbidden Archives}, p. 321, cited by Derrida in “Archive Fever,” p. 10 n. 1 and p. 10, respectively.


\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Archaeology of Knowledge} p. 129.

\textsuperscript{27} “Those who see a neutral history as the only one worth striving for (and if it can’t be had, the very possibility of history is denied), throw the whole thing in because they demand the impossible. Theirs is a kind of all-or-nothing position which asserts that since genuine difficulties attach to historical/textual interpretation, it must follow that \textit{all} interpretation is in the end ‘fatally flawed’ or futile. But only a hopelessly naive belief in the absolute conceptual purity of an intellectual discipline could be so flawed. Any view of historical interpretation which disavowed total conceptual purity would have not a single glove laid on it by this form of critique. Most people can accept that all sorts of difficulties and unknowns intervene with primary source material, empirical evidence, contextual bias and establishing agreement, since these are precisely what makes the study of history interesting and worthwhile. But no one needs to assume, as some postmodernists do, that since the history writer cannot step outside her language, community and time, her narrative of the past is ‘fatally’ disabled. There is, of course, no stepping ‘outside’ the language of our communities and so too, of course, there is no pure vocabulary of ‘fact’ that an imagined ‘neutral’ history could articulate. Once that illusion is dispensed with, and it is allowed that there simply are no non-evaluative discourses, the need to generalize about the fallibility of interpretation drops away, and more complex considerations of what makes an interpretation more or less persuasive come into view.” Salkeld, “Making Sense of Difference,” p. 5.
theory in particular, in which the strengths of the one are appropriated by the other, so that the facticity of the archives becomes the mandate of theory and the construction of theory writes the reconstructed facts of the English early modern age. Enabling the visibility and historical impress of black people in Tudor and Stuart England necessitates several heuristic transactions. Generally, since “archivization produces as much as it records the event,” to navigate the archives is also to construct them. To secure access to the historical subjects of such records from the casual crypticity of parish record, arcane legal testimony, and casual household inventory listing, will involve doing what Paul Voss and Marta Werner have described as “read[ing]” their “minimum signs with maximum energy.” To extract a sense of a living community from such records despite the refraction inevitably imposed on them by the mediation of their recorders, such a community will have to be conceived, in the sense of what Patricia Fumerton has called the “virtual subject” of “nowhere people,” as archival subjects that occupy a virtual space in the map of visible history. The same virtuality of black archival content reckons with the inevitable transience of the abodes of disadvantaged early modern groups, particularly in London, and translates the scattered incidence of black people in the archives into the signs of a community that is identifiably cogent in its epistemic context and broad regional location. In the quantification of virtual black subjecthoods, the inscrutability of numbers cannot make what figures of black people the recovered records yield seem to be absolute, symptomatically indicative as they instead are of a larger unquantifiable population, and the semiotic quotient not of a demographic curiosity but of a historically significant reality.

The term “community” applied to early modern English black people here, and elsewhere in this study, is used in neither of the two senses in which Ian Archer has said the term is used in modern sociological scholarship, namely “locality” and “social organization.” Rather, cued by James Walvin’s construction of the idea of such a black community as comprising “individuals distinguished from white society by their blackness, no matter how widely separated they might be,” it is meant to denote a group of people bound by a common history of direct or indirect English enslavement, benign or brutal, and having common ethnic or cultural characteristics, not as a group of people who necessarily share a common interest and communicate with each other or who even know each other but as a term that is a starting point for identifying a set of people in the historical significance of their plurality. What Archer says about the “marginalized groups” of “subsistence migrants” in early modern London applies in a much starker sense to the early modern English black community as a whole that is this study’s subject: “access to a key instrument of socialization was denied them. Rather they found themselves eking out an existence on the margins of economic life …” According to Archer what precludes such subsistence migrants from “a key instrument of socialization” is their exclusion from “the membership of the household of established citizens that apprenticeship

---

28 “Archive Fever,” 17.
29 “Towards a Poetics of the Archive,” p. ii.
31 Pursuit of Stability, p. 58.
32 Black and White, p. xiii.
entailed.”

For many early modern English black people, however, their location even in aristocratic households did not provide such socializing identifications, since they existed there as nameless chattels. Their commonly dispersed, unnamed existence is what makes them, in this study’s purview, a historical community. But that early modern English black people can constitute a community even in the traditional sense of the term cited above (a group of people who share a common interest and communicate with each other or who even know each other) is evident in the one rare reference cited earlier, about their neighborhood activities near the Portuguese ambassador’s house in London in 1645.

If the un-seeability of early modern English black people is also due to the sedimented racial etymology of their naming, the re-seeing of this population has to bypass traditional onomastics. As Ann Stoler has argued, racial thinking is not subsequent to social order but constitutive of it. Racism is not only a colonial reflex fashioned to deal with the distant other but a part of the very making of Europeans themselves, a setting up of the privileged hierarchies through which the European order itself will function. Racial naming proceeds not from the fixity of essence but from its very ambiguity, which is to say that it fixes difference on that which resists difference, on that which is human/white but not quite. Thus, racial naming may appear to be a neutral descriptor of difference, unless it is realized that racial taxonomies produce difference in the very act of cataloging it. In this sense, the English adoption of the Spanish-Portuguese word “negar/neger” for black, and “mourao” for Moor, may seem neutral, but the descriptive act in this derivative naming is a distancing separative gesture that only sometimes strains toward explicitness through other supplementary descriptors such as the prefixed variant “blackamoor” or the geographic locator positioned as surname, “guinea,” “ethiope,” “barbary.” At other times, the racialism of the naming of the black is buried within the opacity of the chosen nominal term standing by itself. Thus, if “niger,” meaning black in Latin, becomes “negro” meaning a black person in Spanish-Portuguese, and “negre” in middle French and “neger” in early modern English evolve with the same meaning—that is a racialization process because it essentializes a physical attribute; a color becomes an essential determinant of a person which then is made to signify the entirety of the individual (without the same happening to white people in that moment). The word cannot be neutral, irrespective of whether the negative, racializing connotations show up obviously in it. As Alden T. Vaughan put it,

in each language the word for “black” carried a host of disparaging connotations. In Spanish, for example, “negro” also meant gloomy, dismal, unfit, and wretched; in French, “noir” also connoted foul, dirty, base, and wicked; in Dutch, certain compounds of “zwart”

33 Pursuit of Stability, pp. 61–62.
34 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power, p. 144.
35 Ibid., p. 207.
36 For discussions of the etymology of moor meaning a black person, see J. A. Rogers, Nature Knows No Color Line, pp. 72–74.
37 Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, p. 1203; The Oxford English Dictionary, 1:79; in that same main entry, however, the OED also cites “ negerous” as “barbarous.”
conveyed notions of anger, irascibility, and necromancy; and ‘black’ had comparable pejorative implications in Elizabethan and Stuart England.\(^{38}\)

To this can be added J. G. Jackson’s comment that “no African was ever called ‘negro’ before or without enslavement, present or past.”\(^{39}\)

Two examples of visibly negative uses of descriptions of black people include the description of a “morisco,” i.e. a Moor, as a worthless slave in the 1547/8 Admiralty case cited earlier (which is also the year that the word “blak e more” is first used in Andrew Boorde’s *Introduction to the Book of Knowledge*), and John Minsheu’s definition of “negro” as “a great lipp’d fellow” in his dictionary of 1599.\(^{40}\) In the semantic mutation of “niger” to “negar,” and of “morisco” to “moor” to “blak e more” and “blak a more,” the racial etymology is additionally obfuscated by, and hidden under, other traditional associations of those words with which that etymology uncertainly coexists, such as field for “moor,” and “blackmore” as a customary English surname.\(^{41}\) The hidden negativity of the early modern English naming of black people applies to the variable Tudor and Stuart semantics of “black” as well, which indistinguishably includes both a black-haired, black-eyed, or tawny Caucasian, as well as an African (as in the instance of “reasonable, Blackman” cited above, whose racialization is visible only in the additional descriptor “blackamore” attached to his children).\(^{42}\) The finding of early modern English black people will therefore have to proceed with a certain amount of reasoned intuition, in which the identification of individuals will have inevitably an approximate rather than an absolute accuracy.

### IV

Given the virtual materiality of black people in the archives that is this study’s project to render, the 448 records that will be presented comprise a catalogue that is neither definitive in ambition nor documentarily puristic in substance. To aspire to definitiveness in the detritus of personal, mercantile, legal, and governmental minutiae cannot be a feasible prospect because the accidental, discontinuous, and impossibly dispersed nature of the survival of such details ensure for them a state

---


\(^{40}\) The first use of “blak e more” by Boorde is cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1:223, which also cites in the same headnote William Thomas’s definition of the word in his *Italian Gram* the following year as “a man of Ethiopo.” For Minsheu’s definition of “negro” see Ian Lancashire’s *Early Modern English Dictionaries Database* (EMEDD).

\(^{41}\) For “moor” as field see Patricia Hank and Flavia Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames*, p. 54; and for “moor” as both field and dark, see Reaney and Wilson, *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, p. 243.

of perpetually incomplete recovery.\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, as one early modern European demographic historian has put it, “detailed compilations [of demographic data] run the risk of rapid obsolescence.”\textsuperscript{44} The book’s aim is not to recover a black population of any particular size, but to establish its very presence in early modern England, in considerable plurality, range of locations, and periodic continuity, that together demonstrate black people to be a known even if denied ethnic group rather than stray individuals encountered by few or none. Likewise, the collection of black records presented here is framed by dates that are not incontestably perspicuous but reasonably cogent. The general expository logic of the opening date of 1500 is that it marks the beginning of British and European cross-oceanic explorations and hence of contact with non-Europe, and that of the closing date of 1677 is that it highlights the first year in which British slavery is, albeit briefly, made official.\textsuperscript{45}

The second limitation is mandated by the fact that against the inherent heterogeneity of these materials what creates them as an archive is simply the commonalty of their references to black people. They cannot be subjected to the kind of deep-structure unpacking used in traditional historical analyses, namely their examination in “the full field of language in history,” prescribed by Carolyn Porter and demonstrated by Cynthia Susan Clegg, who cites her,\textsuperscript{46} not only because “the archive is always only partially decodable,”\textsuperscript{47} but also because materials such as these do not exist within

\textsuperscript{43} The comments of Paul Voss and Marta Warner about the fundamental fragmentariness of all archives are worth noting: “The history of the archive, on the one hand, a history of conservation, is, on the other hand, a history of loss. The archives of antiquity have long since vanished; we receive their contents as fragments or only as citations in later works. The contents of the English monastic libraries, scattered at the time of the Dissolution … have been only haphazardly and incompletely recollected … Moreover, the complex relationship between the archive and memory is not confined to the forces/agents of the outside but inheres in the interior dynamics of the archive. Even if the historical winds never destabilized the archives, their ultimate stability would not be guaranteed; the archive’s dream of perfect order is disturbed by the nightmare of its random, heterogeneous, and often unruly contents. The dream of those secret or disconcerting elements (‘errors,’ ‘garbage’) located at its outermost edges or in its deepest recesses, defile codification and unsettle memory and context …” (pp. i–ii). “Founded in order to preserve the official records of successive cultures but comprised of material ‘citations’ often wrenched out of context, the archive is necessarily established in proximity to a loss—of other citations, citations of otherness” (p. ii).

\textsuperscript{44} L. R. Poos, “Historical Demography of Renaissance Europe,” p. 796.

\textsuperscript{45} In 1663 England chartered the Company of Royal Adventurers—renamed the Royal African Company in 1672—which officially designated blacks commodities, or chattel, to be exchanged across the Middle Passage in the slave trade. This company held a monopoly on slaving, transporting nearly 90,000 slaves from 1673 to 1689, when all Englishmen were granted the right to trade in slaves (James Rawley, The Transatlantic Slave Trade, pp. 151–77). In 1677, in the court case Butts v Penny, involving a suit to recover possession of 100 slaves, it was held for the first time that slavery was legal in England because black people were infidels and the subjects of an infidel prince, and therefore without the rights enjoyed by Christians (A. Lester and G. Bindman, Law and Race, p. 28).


\textsuperscript{47} Voss and Werner, “Towards a Poetics of the Archive,” p. ii.
the plane of visibility that source documents of traditional historical scholarship have. Such records as this study deals with do not have for their recorders the already-established contextual value that the supplementary connected illumination of a cultural habit of documenting such subjects can provide and that is recognizable as such by the requisites of modern historical research. As a stand-alone instinct of preservation that is for the most part neither exclusively public nor private in what it preserves—the compost of human miscellany, the marginalia of mundane litigation, and the gloss of incidental private observation—these black records represent an unprecedented subject of early modern English memory that lacks the pre-established form that can historically identify it. Even if the black contents of the parochial church registers are part of data produced by Tudor monarchic promulgations ordering minute civil surveillance from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, such dictates specified only purpose, not format: recording black people per se was not the charge given to the Church Wardens and parish clerks. Thus, as the black records exceed the inter-documentary connectivities that one might bring to bear on them, so they resist the notions of documentary formalism that conservative scholarly expectations might demand of their assemblage as archives.

As the energy of this compilation is directed primarily to establishing a hitherto unavailable critical mass of information about the historical existence of black people in Tudor and Stuart England irrespective of any methodological self-consciousness that might accrue therefrom, its source attestation will variably include unpublished manuscript, transcribed print material, and even electronic media. Use of the last-named source is in acknowledgment of both, the impracticable time- and cost-intensive difficulty of direct examination of all early modern English manuscript records of the sort discussed above, and of the recent initiative of British national document repositories to release on the world wide web in the form of individual articles as well as online searchable catalogs partly scanned and transcribed sample manuscript contents of materials in their possession, including advertisements of those pertaining to black people. As public announcements, such releases provide

---

48 The exact phrasing of the order, which was issued on September 5, 1538 to every parish in England and Wales, was as follows: “By the authoritie and commission of the most excellent Prince Henry by the Grace of God Kynge of Englande and France … I Thomas Cromwell, lorde privie seal … do … give and exhibite unto you theise injunctions following, to be kept observed and fulfilled upon the paynes hereafter declared … That you and every parson, vicare and curate within this diocese shall for every churche kepe one boke or registere wherein ye shall write the day and yere of every wedding christening and burying made within yor parishe for your tyme and so every man succeeding you likewise. And you shall insert every persons that shall be so wedded christened or buried.” Except for one change—in the amount of the penalty for failure to keep this injunction—the order was reissued in toto in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth. See J. Charles Cox, The Parish Registers of England, pp. 2–5; W. E. Tate, The Parish Chest, pp. 43–44.

49 One description of such an initiative is the following: “Since 2001, ‘Black and Asian Londoners: Presence and Background 1536–1840’ (BAL) a major research project at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), funded by the British Library and Re:Source – The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, has been uncovering fascinating evidence of the Black and Asian presence in London, stretching back over four centuries. Over 1,000 Anglican Parish
usable replicas of documentary substance and legal verifications of their locations. Whereas these releases by individual institutions can provide only a piecemeal database, this work collects and consolidates them into one body of information. Within this aggressive inclusiveness, all the records presented here are identified by print or current institutional location, frequently both in conjunction with each other, as for instance citations from the published volumes of transcriptions of London parish registers that are checked and cross-sourced with the manuscript originals, which helps to minimize the errors often contained in the former. The records themselves, of which the book will be a discussion, make up the entries of the Chronological Index of Records, each of which is numbered and appears with date, geographic location, transcribed content, and source, with additional explanatory notes for some. The numbered format facilitates quick reference to a record for discussion, while the running chronology helps to make visible patterns in the flow of this data across the two centuries of its range.

There are three basic types of evidence of black people that this compilation will present. These are (a) government records, (b) personal references, and (c) parochial church notations. The first type includes monarchic promulgations, government accounts, law cases, and national chronicles mentioning black people. The second comprises descriptions of, and allusions to, black people in letters, household accounts, and diaries and personal papers. The third constitutes entries in local parochial church registers and ecclesiastical courts, documenting the christening, marriage, and deaths of black people in that neighborhood, including wills made by them or mentioning them. Whereas all three categories share a variable opacity of ethnic identification in their contents, the data of the first category is the most indisputable but the least numerous, and the second relatively more revealing of black personal history but distant and disconnected from, and uncorroborated by, the data of the other two categories. This is the type of black record that Kim Hall

Baptismal Registers have been searched for entries of Black and Asian people and the results have thrown up interesting insights into Black and Asian history in the capital … Over 2,000 references to Black and Asian Londoners were found in registers from all over London. Tower Hamlets, Westminster, Southwark, Camden and Greenwich each had more than 100 Black and Asian people.” <http://www.bl.uk/collections/britasian/britasialondon.html> date seen 9.29.04.

The total number of references mentioned here covers a range extending into the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas the present study is concerned only with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the present study was begun before projects such as the above were started, and without awareness of them, the statement quoted provides a nice confirmation of the validity of the research agenda of this book, literally as in the following statement: “BAL has clearly demonstrated the amazing research potential in archives not only for academics but for those interested in their own rich local, personal and community histories.”

For a discussion of the frequent inaccuracies of early modern English parochial church records, see Eamon Duffy’s The Voices of Morebath, pp. 17–24, and E. A. Wrigley’s more historically wide-ranging but analytically detailed essay, “How Reliable is our Knowledge of Demographic Characteristics of the English Population in the Early Modern Period?,” pp. 274–75; both contain sizable bibliographies of literature on this topic. These inaccuracies, however, concern dates and financial notations more than they concern the individuals mentioned. Needless to say, neither work is concerned with references to black people.
Introduction

has described as anecdotal. The last category’s distinction is not only that it is the predominant source for records examined in this book but also the most inclusive. The data extracted from parish registers and ecclesiastical courts is based on conservative and permissive criteria of selection, containing entries that cite black people not only in the rhetorically underlined forms recognized and accepted by traditional history such as “a/the blackamore/blackamoore” or “a/the moor” or “a/the negro,” but also those that use other forms of black names and without any emphases, such as “Rose Blackmoore,” or “Henry Blackemer,” or “negus” or “morian,” or even “blackman.” Representing what in this book’s view are the extinct variations of the more recognizable morphologies of black names, and the non-standard orthography and improvisational documentary habits of the local clerical record keeper, these kinds of entries, while being the most uncertain in the authenticity of their black content, are nevertheless included here in order to compensate for the over-conservative, mutually reinforcing, multilayered assumptions of traditional early modern history that have made black people in Tudor and Stuart England absent by default.

Such data as is presented in this work is inherently correctible, as all such data must be, but such corrections can occur only after the fact, that is after the project of making visible what has been rendered invisible has seriously occurred. It must also be clearly understood that this project is not interested in early modern English social history per se as it is traditionally constructed, except in those points and aspects where that history includes or connects to, or should include or connect to, black people. The book’s discussions of the records of black people may often appear to be of speculative and symbolic value. But in the project of reconstructing the irrecoverable history of early modern English black people speaking from silence is not a willful disregard of an axiom of scholarly wisdom. It is a sober assertion of the obligation of a necessary risk and one that redeems a difficult task from being one that is not attempted at all.

V

This presentation is cued principally by the empiricism of the works of Miller, Jones, Forbes, Edwards, and Knutson, and peripherally of those of Shyllon, Fryer, Walvin, and Drake, and less centrally and eclectically by the theoretical conversations of Neill, Orkin, Hall, Little, MacDonald, Loomba, Singh, Hendricks, and my own earlier work, as well as the larger race, postcolonial, and theoretical excursus from which those conversations derive. This syncretic critical ideology informs the discussions of the records and fuels their argument, even as the fundamental purpose of the discussions remains to provide a coherent way to read the records themselves. The discussions of the records are organized in five chapters dealing with records of black people in early sixteenth-century Britain, in Elizabethan London, in seventeenth-century London, and elsewhere in England, with the last two chapters examining records of black people in the English provinces, and East Indians and other people of color in London and in the countryside. The book’s “Afterword” analyzes the frequency ratios, demographic patterns, and locational impact of the records as a whole.
The particular argument that this study exemplifies is that the black archives demonstrate the vanishing circle of the bare life of the black between the beginning and end points of its early modern English narrative across both sides of the visibility sight line, from the bare life of the black encountered as unprocessed/never-seen phenomena by an insular English consciousness to the bare life of the black as the politicized racial subject processed and seen by a burgeoning English colonialism as the exception of a primitivism meant for reprogramming in its own image in menial usage. The excluded inclusion of the former and the included exclusion of the latter completes the arc of invisibility of the black subject from unrecognized life to undeveloped life, the present-absentness of both ends of this transformation describing the self-disappearance of black life in early modern Europe’s cultural optics, its virtual subjecthood. This argument, while implied in the discussions of the records, is formally articulated in the “Afterword,” providing a perspective on the records’ significance after the records themselves have been experienced by the reader.