# Black London before Windrush

## The voice and representation of Black Londoners in Georgian and Early Victorian Era 1748-1848

## Resettlement plan to West Africa

Deptford played a major part in the Sierra Leone Resettlement plan. As a solution to the 'problem' of the black poor, the scheme was devised with the help of the Royal Navy to re-settle hundreds of London's black population to Sierra Leone on the west coast of Africa.

In November 1786 Equiano was appointed commissary of provisions and stores for the black poor going to Sierra Leone. Equiano soon found out that a government agent, Joseph Irwin was stealing some of the provision meant for the black poor and reported him. However, Joseph Irwin was white so Equiano was dismissed.

Of the 350 black emigrants who eventually set out from Deptford for Sierra Leone on 23rd February 1787, 35 died during the voyage. The settlement proved to be disastrous. Many died and many other were sold to French traders….After four years only 60 of the original group were left.

In 1791 Granville Sharp and Henry Thornton, the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company, helped 1,100 black loyalists from Nova Scotia to settle in what is now Freetown….This initiative proved more successful and laid the foundation for modern Sierra Leone.

## *Resistance in London*

"I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery" - Sam Sharpe

A great number of black people resisted servitude in the only way open to them: by running way… To be young, black, and on the run meant an existence at the very bottom of the social heap. Especially in London, where black people were not, after 1731 allowed to learn a trade.

The black poor in London were when made up of black woman who were servants, runaways, seaman, those with insecure employment because of 1731 restrictions on apprenticeship for black men, and skilled employed was closed.

During the American war for independence, many black people had to serve and fight for the British for their freedom and in the course of this war, at least 14,000 of them were killed.

The survivors were discharged and arrived in the South-east London. As this happened, the population of the black people increased and the Daily Journal suggested that if the black people are not suppressed from coming in, they will take over the South-east of London.

White working class Londoners…. "had nothing in common with the sentimentality of middle-class abolitionists. They saw black people as fellow-victims of their own enemies, fellow fighters against a system that degraded poor whites and poor blacks alike. With their help, London had by the 1760s become a centre of black resistance."

In 1773, two black men were imprisoned in the Bridewell house for the crime of begging, they were 'visited by upwards of 300 of their countrymen' and the black community 'contributed largely towards their support during their confinement.'

possibility of skilled employment was closed. They lived on the streets or in inadequate accommodation.

## Sir John Hawkins 1532 - 1595

English slave trader, naval commander and administrator, merchant, navigator, shipbuilder and privateer.

The career of the English naval commander Sir John Hawkins (1532-1595) touched all aspects of the Elizabethan maritime world from the illegal and inglorious to the patriotic and profitable. His skills helped to ensure the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

The second son of William Hawkins, a wealthy West Country merchant trader, John Hawkins was born at Plymouth. As a youth, he made a number of voyages to the Spanish-held Canary Islands, where he first learned of the profits to be made from selling African slaves in Spain's American colonies. In 1559 he married Katharine Gonson, the daughter of the treasurer of Queen Elizabeth I's navy. Gonson and his friends helped supply Hawkins with three ships for his first slaving voyage, in 1562.

Ignoring Portugal's nominal control over Africa, Hawkins captured several hundred people into slavery. Sailing to Cuba, he exchanged his live cargo for enough "hides, ginger, sugar, and pearls" to fill his original fleet and two more ships. By September 1563 he and three of his vessels were safely back in England; the others had been sent to Spain.The career of the English naval commander Sir John Hawkins (1532-1595) touched all aspects of the Elizabethan maritime world from the illegal and inglorious to the patriotic and profitable. His skills helped to ensure the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

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