



## Chapter 5

# Race, Antiracism, and the Place of Blackness in the Making and Remaking of the English Working Class

Caroline Bressey

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Many talks and papers commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* reflect on the influence of the book—how historians read it as undergraduate or graduate scholars and found an inspirational narrative and methodological process that opened new directions of interpretation and research. The absences—particularly around the histories of women—have been well documented. For many it was Thompson's lack of focus on gender, empire, and laborers such as factory workers that stimulated their own research to recover “new worlds of political activity in the streets and taverns of towns and cities across America, France, Italy, India”;<sup>1</sup> it is the absence of “black history” in *The Making* that is the focus of my reflections here. The black presence in Britain was and remains marginalized in the retelling of the Isles' history in both scholarly and popular form. Its persistent absence illustrates the

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complex politics of belonging in historical narratives and the reluctance of many to examine the intersections of class and race and gender in political activism, particularly antiracist activism in Britain.

In this article I revisit some of the sources used by Thompson in *The Making* to draw attention to histories of the black presence within them. These, I argue, suggest a greater overlapping of race and class in the actions and ideals of some of the activists present in *The Making*, and as such there is still much work to be done in order to unpack the many layers of political work undertaken by characters in and beyond the pages of *The Making*. Thompson's narrative is undoubtedly an immense achievement and it can seem churlish to list the material that is clearly missing—how many more pages would one really wish it to be? But it is undoubtedly true that a re-writing of the history of the English working class that gave equal weight to the experiences and roles of women and “race” in the making of the English working class would result in a different narrative.

## Historical Geographies of the Black Presence in Britain

To be fair to Thompson, a historian approaching this material when he was writing would have not been well supported by their peers. There was very little on the history of black people in Britain available. Kathleen Chater's research indicates that M. Dorothy George was the first modern historian to mention the historical presence of black people in her research of London in the eighteenth century published in 1925.<sup>2</sup> In a chapter on immigrants and emigrants, George looks at Jewish and Irish communities alongside lascars who came to London through the networks of the East India Company and “negroes in London.”<sup>3</sup> In the same chapter George reflects that few up to that date had commented on the “great number” of black people in the city. George found black residents in the archives of the courts of the Old Bailey, in newspapers and runaway notices, and in legal cases, among them that of Katherine Aucker, a black woman who, in 1690, petitioned to be discharged from her absentee master.<sup>4</sup> George saw London's eighteenth-century black presence as made up of a people who were “immigrants a class apart,” but who also led complex working lives.<sup>5</sup> They did not live in ethnically segregated ghettos and, while many experienced enslavement, there were reports of black apprentices who were “apparently as free as other apprentices,” though, as George acknowledged, this was “perhaps not saying much.”<sup>6</sup> George's *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* is referenced in *The Making*, while Kenneth Little's *Negroes in Britain* is not.<sup>7</sup> Published in 1948, Little's work is largely a survey of the black community in Cardiff, but it does contain a brief history of the presence of black people in Britain from 1600 to 1948.<sup>8</sup> Peter Fryer's *Staying Power*, a seminal text on the history of “Black People” (meaning, in the context of the political language of Britain at the time, people of both African and Asian descent) would not be published until 1984.<sup>9</sup>

It is not that race is entirely absent from *The Making*. There is a reference, for example, to the Jamaican born William Davidson, who was one of five men executed for their role in the Cato Street Conspiracy, on 1 May 1820, in the last public decapitation in England. Born in Jamaica in 1786, Davidson was sent across the Atlantic to be educated in Edinburgh. After some time press-ganged into the Navy, studying in Aberdeen and the failure of his business in Birmingham, Davidson settled in London working again as a cabinet maker in south London, living with his wife and four stepsons near the old Lord's Cricket Ground. Together he and his wife Sarah had two more sons. Peter Fryer describes Davidson's local popularity and that, following his membership of the Marylebone Union Reading Society—where members met regularly to read radical newspapers—he began holding meetings of up to eighteen people at his home. His work would earn him a place on a list of thirty-three leading reformers compiled from reports for the home secretary in October 1819.<sup>10</sup> Through a police spy and provocateur George Edwards, Davidson was introduced to Arthur Thistlewood's radical group; Davidson became secretary of the shoemakers' trade union and chaired some of the group's meetings. Here, the police provocateur suggested they carry out violent attacks against the government, encouraging their outrage against the Peterloo massacre. Richard Carlile, who appears throughout *The Making*, wrote to Sarah following Davidson's execution, apologizing for his mistaken belief that Davidson, not Edwards, had been the government informant. In his public letter of apology he wrote, "Be assured that the heroic manner in which your husband and his companions met their fate, will in a few years, perhaps in a few months, stamp their names as patriots, and men who had nothing but their country's weal at heart. I flatter myself as your children grow up, they will find that the fate of their father will rather procure them respect and admiration than its reverse."<sup>11</sup>

References to race in a broad sense do occur earlier in Thompson's narrative than the Cato Street Conspiracy. In the preface Thompson acknowledges that he is focusing on the English to the exclusion of the Scottish and Welsh. He argues that he does this not out of chauvinism but out of respect, what we could now perhaps read as a sensitive acknowledgement of the geopolitics of whiteness. Thompson also reflects briefly on "The white slaves [who] left our shores for the American plantations and later for Van Diemen's Land, while Bristol and Liverpool were enriched with the profits of black slavery."<sup>12</sup> But while this reference to white slaves leaving and profits arriving has a persuasive literary flow, its conflation of white indentured labor and prison transportation with chattel slavery is problematic. It also reveals Thompson's inaccurate assumption of the whiteness of those pioneer prisoners sent to Australia, which has been made increasingly visible by historians such as Ian Duffield and Cassandra Pybus. Their research can now be used by scholars who have access to a wealth of digital archive resources, such as the Old Bailey online.<sup>13</sup> In a 1987 paper exploring "aspects of the Black convict contribution to resistance patterns during the

transportation era in Eastern Australia," Ian Duffield traced the experiences of John Goff, a seaman born on the Isle of Wight in about 1792.<sup>14</sup> Sentenced to transportation for fourteen years in 1814 in the Devon Assizes, Duffield argues that Goff's "subversive attachment to liberty in Australia, and his refusal to be submissive as a convict" are important and suggestive of Goff's agency in the context of a coming together of working-class rights and the emancipation struggle of black people in an age of slavery.<sup>15</sup> In September 1826 Goff led an uprising on Norfolk Island that was followed by a mass escape of one-third of the convicts; for his role in the death of Corporal Robert Wilson during the violence Goff was sentenced to hang and he was executed in Sydney on 24 September 1827.

The first mention of a black man does not occur until page 769 (in my edition of *The Making*), and there are no black women at all, though there was an opportunity in the context of Colonel Edward Despard.<sup>16</sup> Having served his country for thirty years Despard was found guilty of a conspiracy against the state and was hanged in February 1803. Increasingly interested in radical politics and the cause of Irish independence, in the 1790s the Irish born Despard joined the London Corresponding Society (LCS)—a group of shopkeepers, mechanics, and tradesmen focused on political reform who came together in 1792—and the United Irishmen and United Englishmen in London. Thompson explains that Despard was arrested during the suspension of habeas corpus between 1798 and 1800; following his release in 1800 he was again arrested in November 1802, at the Oakley Arms in Lambeth, south London, in the company of men deemed to be part of his revolutionary conspiracy. Given his link to the LCS and revolutionary politics it is not surprising that Despard is mentioned several times in *The Making*. Thompson argues that "the Despard affair must be seen as an incident of real significance in British political history," but Despard's black wife, Catherine Despard is not considered as a part of that political moment.<sup>17</sup> It is Linebaugh and Reddiker's account of the revolutionary Atlantic, which emphasizes its multiethnic history, that draws attention to Catherine's political contribution to the making of English working class politics.<sup>18</sup> Catherine accompanied her husband from central America to England in 1790, and Linebaugh and Reddiker illustrate the important lobbying role she played not only in defense of her husband, but for prisoners' rights more broadly. They reconfigure the "Despard affair" as a partnership between Catherine and Edward, a union that "may stand for a new cycle of rebellion that began in the 1790s, from which emerged not only the race and class themes in the age of revolution but also a new definition of the human race."<sup>19</sup>

Thompson's assumptions about the whiteness of fleets of transportees sent to Australia are closely connected to the presumed whiteness of the English working class at home. Though an acknowledgement of the profits of black labor coming to British shores is clearly made in *The Making*, enslaved black men and women workers themselves remain off shore, and there is no consideration given to how a man such as William Davidson—the son

of a black woman and Jamaica's attorney general—who studied in Scotland and bought a house in Birmingham where he set up trade as a cabinet maker, arrived at the gallows with his fellow Cato Street conspirators. The conflation of chattel slavery to that of indentured laborers and prisoners is uncomfortable, but the reference in this context to North America, the West Indies, and Australia gives no thought to the communities who lived on those lands before the arrival of the English and their capitalist adventurers, and so another strand of empire, the oppression of indigenous people and their complex relationship to the formation of the English working class, is also avoided.

The reluctance of the British Left to consider the presence of black workers or include the contribution of black activists to formations of radical politics in Britain has been highlighted most recently by David Featherstone through his work on *Solidarity*.<sup>20</sup> Featherstone has previously researched the hidden histories and geographies of political solidarity through the London Corresponding Society, an organization that appears on the first page of *The Making*.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of the LCS at the front of Thompson's narrative could have been a tool to underscore the multiplicity of concerns that at least some working people had in the 1790s. When including the links of the LCS to black radicals it can be more clearly seen that, as Fryer argued, for some working class radicals "black and white freedom were two sides of one coin."<sup>22</sup> The link between the LCS and the former slave Olaudah Equiano are key to an understanding of their position.

Olaudah Equiano was a friend of Thomas Hardy, the first secretary of the LCS.<sup>23</sup> Equiano stayed with Hardy and his wife Lydia at their home in London while he was working on the manuscript for a new edition of his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, first published in 1789.<sup>24</sup> Between 1789 and 1794 Equiano toured England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to promote his *Interesting Narrative* in what John Bugg calls "the first modern-style author tour in British history."<sup>25</sup> Equiano spent most of 1791 and 1792 visiting towns and cities such as Derby, Nottingham, Halifax, and Sheffield—all of them points on *The Making's* geopolitical map—selling his book and drumming up support for the abolition movement. Bugg reflects that the cultural significance of Equiano's tour has been largely ignored probably because it ended in the summer 1794, when Equiano found himself caught up in the arrests of members of the LCS in May. Bugg's suggestion builds upon Vincent Carretta's observation that, among the list of subscribers for the fifth and later editions of Equiano's *Narrative*, the names of Thomas Hardy and George Walne, Hardy's brother-in-law and organizer of the LCS, as well as the formerly enslaved radical Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, disappeared.<sup>26</sup> During his book tours Equiano acted like an agent for the LCS, passing on to Hardy the names and addresses of abolitionists whom he met that thought would be sympathetic to the cause of the LCS.<sup>27</sup> Among the evidence gathered by the state during the repression of the movement in 1794 was a letter

from Equiano to Hardy.<sup>28</sup> The ninth and final edition of Equiano's *Narrative* was published in 1794. Though Hardy was acquitted in November following his arrest in May of that year, both Bugg and Carretta speculate that the clampdown on the activism of the LCS may explain Equiano's apparent public silence after 1794.

Fryer illustrates that combining demands for black and white freedom were not only to be found among members of the LCS. He reports that at Sheffield's largest demonstration of workers in April 1794—a city Equiano had visited in 1790 and perhaps also in 1792—a thousand artisan cutlers supported a unanimous resolution for the emancipation of enslaved Africans as well as an end to the slave trade.<sup>29</sup> For Hardy and his wife, Lydia, who was involved in the domestic sugar boycott, the link between black and white workers' rights was clear.<sup>30</sup> In the inaugural letter of the LCS addressed to the Rev. Mr. Henry Bryant of Sheffield in March 1792 to introduce him to the work and aims of the LCS, Hardy wrote,

I hope you will pardon that freedom which I take in troubling you with the following sentiments; nothing but the importance of the business could have induced me to address one who is an entire stranger to me, except only by *report*. Hearing from my friend, Gustavus Vassa, the African, who is now writing memoirs of his life in my house, that you are a zealous friend to the abolition of that cursed traffic, the Slave Trade, I infer, from that circumstance, *that you are a zealous friend to freedom on the broad basis of the RIGHTS OF MAN*. I am fully persuaded that there is no man, who is, from principle, an advocate for the liberty of the black man, but will zealously support the rights of the white man, and vice versa.<sup>31</sup>

Thompson surely read Thomas Hardy's memoir closely, but mention of "Gustavus Vassa, the African" in a key document of the LCS did not seem to pique his curiosity. Featherstone argues that, on greater reflection, the LCS can be seen to have been "shaped by practices where it makes little sense to make such a rigid distinction between the 'local' and the 'universal'."<sup>32</sup> William Davidson and Equiano embodied these geographies and evoked them in their political campaigns; in his campaign to galvanize an international campaign against slavery, Equiano described himself as a "citizen of the world."<sup>33</sup> Equiano, Davidson, and the Hardys understood only too well the inherent geographies of inequality that produced the sugar that flowed "through English blood and rotted English teeth."<sup>34</sup>

For researchers particularly interested in why race became such a key stratification of working class politics, organizations such as the LCS provide an opportunity to attempt to unpack why some protests within working class organizations sought to embrace a diverse and international foundation for working class solidarity, and why others did not. An unpacking of their networks of solidarity may also reveal more about the ability of some working class organizations to establish themselves and why others came under particular scrutiny at particular times. One hypothesis is that Equiano could

travel more freely than members of the LCS because of his antislavery work, a cause sympathetically viewed by many at the time. Following from this, it is also possible that the LCS could not be tolerated by the State because it advocated freedoms not only for an English working class, but a working people that included the enslaved on the plantations of Britain's empire. There may also be more to uncover around the intersections of class solidarity and ideals of racial equality during the period. Josiah Wedgwood would become famous for the "Am I not a Man and a Brother" antislavery motif designed and produced by his pottery company, but as Thompson notes, Wedgwood and other industrialists linked with the abolition campaign did not actively link with Hardy and the LCS, while Equiano and perhaps other leading black activists did. How race was understood in activist imaginations is surely a key to understanding these different pathways to solidarity.

Attempting to unpack these aspects of labor politics should not be marginal to a rethinking of a Thompsonian formulation of the making of the English working class. Certainly such ideas were not marginal to the concerns of Equiano or the Sons of Africa, the London based collective of which he was a part, or for white activists such as the Hardys, the LCS, or later antiracist activists like the Quaker Catherine Impey and her colleague Celestine Edwards. Entangled in these narratives of labor politics are the complexities around the growth of class consciousness that Thompson identifies as an identity of interests between diverse groups of working people and against the interest of other classes. There are also the complexities of whiteness, an identity that for some would override class interests. For others whose skin marked them as black, racism made it exceedingly difficult for them to maintain class based solidarities. To ignore these interclass conflicts belies the complexities of solidarity and does not help us understand as well as we might why antiracism failed to become a core part of the working class intellectual tradition in England, or why the working class movement split between those who held on to a universal notion of equality and those who, in the nineteenth century and following World War I, asserted and reasserted nationalistically and ethnically bounded ideas of equality. Nor does it help us capture how the "optimistic imaginaries" of activists, such as those working with Catherine Impey's anticaste movement, sought to understand and overcome class competition in the context of the deeply radicalized and racist world of the late nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

## Race, Class, and Caste

In 1885 Catherine Impey wrote an essay on "Some Diverse Views on Social Equality" for the *Village Album* in which she examined what she called the "right relations" between "rich and poor, or the cultured and the uncultured" in America, England, and around the world.<sup>36</sup> Impey presented her audience with an exploratory discussion of "social rights" and "civil

rights" within a conception of "human rights." These ideas of rights in the context of political reform informed her writing and the editorial voice of her monthly periodical *Anti-Caste*. From this small town in rural Somerset Impey challenged racial prejudice in the British Empire and the United States and, beginning in March 1888, edited and distributed copies of *Anti-Caste*, possibly Britain's first antiracist periodical. She hoped *Anti-Caste's* community of readers would become the foundation for an international antiracist movement that would unite "blacks and whites and Indians, Africans, Americans and Europeans" to work "for the emancipation of all men everywhere from disabilities imposed on the ground of colour or race."<sup>37</sup> In what can now be read as an early contribution to ideas of intersectionality, Impey identified issues of racial prejudice to be more difficult to overcome than those of class alone, arguing that in the United States questions of rights and equality were complicated by issues "about differences of race."<sup>38</sup> She similarly observed that in South Africa, processes of inequality and oppression were dominated by "class feeling emphasised by differences of colour."<sup>39</sup> For Impey racial prejudice was produced and maintained by white people through social and economic systems of oppression. Over the six years of its publication, *Anti-Caste* sought to provide a space in which these systems of oppression could be exposed, and those oppressed by the inequalities of racial prejudice could speak to an audience at the heart of empire and to each other.<sup>40</sup>

To create the content for *Anti-Caste* Impey relied on local news written and edited by African, African American, and Indian journalists and *Anti-Caste* readers whom she described as her "co-workers."<sup>41</sup> Though she attempted to draw together an internationalized content for *Anti-Caste*, it was the divisive and at times extremely violent racism operating in the United States that was most often reported. This reflected Impey's personal connections to American civil rights workers, including Frederick Douglass, T. Thomas Fortune, and Albion Tourg e. *Anti-Caste's* most high profile work came with the collaboration of Catherine Impey and the African American feminist and activist Ida B. Wells during their anti-lynching campaigns in 1893 and 1894. But although the "American Question" dominated the first issue of *Anti-Caste*, within six months examples of discrimination and injustices in Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, and colonies in the Caribbean and Africa had also been reported. The number of regular readers *Anti-Caste* attracted did not amount to a large group. The subscriber list for *Anti-Caste* probably never reached more than 350 households at its peak, though the distribution of free copies boosted circulation towards, and sometimes beyond, 3,500 each month. Free copies particularly targeted spaces accessible to working class readers such as YMCA reading rooms in America and free public libraries in Britain. Over its lifetime the periodical produced a reading community of progressive radicals: vegetarians, early feminists, early socialists, pacifists, and international students based in Britain, as well as antislavery campaigners. International readers were present from the



outset either as subscribers or, like the radical African American journalist T. Thomas Fortune, they were part of the editorial exchange network that provided *Anti-Caste* with its often challenging content. International subscribers were usually located in the United States, but the periodical also had readers in Africa and the Caribbean.

Segregation, lynching, legal injustice, and colonial expansion were all themes covered in *Anti-Caste*. Reporting on the racialized exploitation of workers in the Empire and the United States proved an effective way for *Anti-Caste* to demonstrate the everyday forms of racism experienced by ordinary people. The exploitation of "native" workers in southern Africa, the abuse of Chinese workers in the United States and Australia, as well as the deplorable conditions of the Kanaka (Pacific Island workers) on the sugar plantations of Queensland all featured in issues of *Anti-Caste*.<sup>42</sup> The harsh realities of working life on tea plantations were an aspect underpinning consumer culture in England that *Anti-Caste* sought to expose through the republication of details from a report on the imprisonment of an assistant manager of an Assam tea plantation for his "assault on coolies" and other injustices faced by the plantation workers. To bring the unjust treatment of the tea plantation workers home to her readers, Impey compared their troubles to those of factory workers in Britain. What would readers say, she asked, if there were a factory in England where half, or even a quarter of the workers died every year; what would they say to a government that forced employees to fulfill the full term of a contract which they had entered into while they were ignorant of the nature of the work they were to undertake?<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 1893, after six years as editor and proprietor, Impey transferred the editorship of the periodical to Celestine Edwards, probably Britain's first black editor. Under his tenure the paper expanded and was renamed *Fraternity*, and he maintained a relentless criticism of racial prejudice and the exploitation of the people of color throughout the world. Unlike many of his African American peers, Edwards was not a trained journalist. As a boy he had left the Caribbean as a stowaway on a French ship and began his life as a seaman. In 1873 he had found himself in New York, though by 1875 he had moved on to San Francisco where he decided to try and make a life on land. Narrowly missing being shot during a fight caused Edwards to reflect on his life in America and he went back to sea. Around 1878 Edwards found himself at Hull, and from there he moved on to Edinburgh where he lived for about two years.<sup>44</sup> By the time of England's 1891 census he was living in East London and was a popular and active speaker on aspects of Christianity and temperance.<sup>45</sup> In 1893 Edwards was among the speakers addressing a Trade Union march in Portsmouth. The three thousand demonstrators included members of the Boilermakers' Society, the General Labourers' Amalgamated Union, coppersmiths, bricklayers, joiners, plasters, dockers, railway workers, stone masons, iron founders, and insurance agents. Speaking to the crowd, Edwards proposed a motion for the

meeting to push for the improved conditions of workers and the placement of labor representatives on all local governing bodies. He encouraged the unionists to better educate themselves by meeting together in clubrooms so they could discuss "the vital questions which lay at the very root of happiness and peace."<sup>46</sup> He also argued that only once workers had settled their petty differences could they conduct a peaceful war against the capitalists.

Edwards undertook his speaking tours alongside the editorship of *Fraternity*. Like *Anti-Caste*, the paper strived to provide its readers with international reports, but it also maintained a high profile on lynchings in the United States. They illustrated only too well the regular column of "Things as they are and should not be." The column covered the social and economic disadvantages placed on black people, especially Americans, from the proposed racial segregation of tax allocations in Alabama to the pervasive attempts to keep black Americans from the ballot box.<sup>47</sup> Edwards juxtaposed these reports of inequality, oppression, and murder with columns in which more heartening stories were shared, reporting examples of everyday heroism and conviviality in America and Britain. The columns also celebrated the successes of people of color, primarily heralding stories of "Coloured Inventors," scientists, and "Good Business Men" mainly from North America, where African American newspapers collected and reported on the progress of their communities and where the personal achievements of individuals were closely linked to community politics. Edwards had a similar editorial goal, to argue for the integration of black individuals into all levels of society, but this meant that interconnecting issues of class and race within black communities were not often directly challenged in *Fraternity*. For example, in November 1893 *Fraternity* celebrated the sacking of a group of white waiters at the Avenue Hotel in St Louis following their protest against a black waiter being placed in their charge; all were replaced by black workers.<sup>48</sup> Given the injustices faced by black people in so many realms of employment it is not surprising *Fraternity* celebrated the white workers' failure on this occasion, but it was an indication of how successfully racism played its role in undermining a politics of solidarity between black and white workers against their employers. It also reflected the problematic outcomes of segregation present in Frederick Douglass's warnings in an earlier letter to *Anti-Caste* in which he had argued that black communities who supported segregated education were shortsighted. Like Equiano and the LCS, Douglass argued that true freedom would only be realized with a fundamental remaking of a united and integrated society.<sup>49</sup> Despite the potential for antiracist class politics, by the end of the nineteenth century the interests of white workers in the United States and across the British Empire became solidified within narratives of whiteness.<sup>50</sup> This was, as historians have highlighted, an identity that was not forced on workers but one that many demanded.<sup>51</sup>

Though neither born before Thompson's empirical cut-off date of the 1830s, nor working class, Catherine Impey's activism reflects the many

complexities inherent in the making of successful solidarities. For both Edwards and Impey, working on antiracist activism meant acknowledging that the politics of labor and work was complexly overlaid with prejudices that operated in materially different ways in different, though connected, places. As an activist and a woman Impey's work is certainly part of a body of historical scholarship that was inspired by Thompson's emphasis on examining "history from below." Her rural base in Street, where she lived for her entire life, places an interesting geographical perspective on the place from which radical movements might emerge—and is a rebuff to those who criticize Thompson's decision to halt his examination before the firm establishment of a factory workforce and his subsequent emphasis on rural radicalism.<sup>52</sup> As an editor and activist Impey was undoubtedly a middle class worker. She was also, through her family's farm, an employer of laborers, and through *Anti-Caste* an employer of artisans (her printers John Whitby and Son in Bridgwater, Somerset). Her father Robert Impey was remembered for his commitment to modernizing agricultural technology that also brought him into conflict with local workers. But though Impey was middle class, *Anti-Caste* was not a wholly middle class enterprise.<sup>53</sup> Celestine Edwards, who originated from the Caribbean and worked as a seaman and laborer before his work as an editor, certainly was not. Although difficult to uncover, evidence of the anticaste movement's working class component is present. One example was made public via a letter to Edwards from Ms J. Simons. She wrote to Edwards on behalf of her band of Christian "workwomen" who discussed the content of *Fraternity* with their Sunday school teacher. The group of women committed to save one penny a week and to send the collected sum to Edwards once a month. They hoped Edwards would accept their contribution and that their actions would inspire others to support the cause.<sup>54</sup>

Thompson could not rescue everyone from the "enormous condescension of posterity," and there is still a large amount of rescue work to be done on the histories of women and the histories of race and antiracist activism in Britain. The dynamic processes of race and formations of racism were place specific, but how people sought to challenge the consequences of racism could and did cut across national boundaries, and class, as in the collaboration between Impey, Edwards, and their anticaste collective. Such cross cutting did not reflect an absence of national or class based concerns, but were part of the complex matrix activists formed, far beyond as well as within the national borders of "the English." Those working for political reform among the eighteenth-century English working class, including Olaudah Equiano and his colleagues who made up the Sons of Africa, Catherine Despard, Thomas and Lydia Hardy, and William Davidson, held ideals with a far greater "optimistic imaginary" than they are given credit for in *The Making*. The extent of their activist networks alongside those of later communities, such as Impey and Edwards' *Anti-Caste* readers, are among many historical narratives still waiting to be given due consideration.

*Caroline Bressey is a Reader in Cultural and Historical Geography in the Department of Geography, University College London. Her research focuses on recovering the social lives and understandings of race and racism experienced by those who were a part of the black presence in Victorian Britain, particularly working-class London. Drawing together geographies of international reading communities, women's activism and radical 'anti-caste' politics in nineteenth century Britain, her book Empire, Race and the politics of Anti-Caste was awarded the Women's History Network Book Prize in 2014 and the Colby Book Prize in 2015.*

## Notes

1. Kathleen Wilson, "Class and Condescension," *History Workshop Journal* 76, no. 1 (2013): 251–255, 252.
2. M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925); Kathleen Chater, "Making History: Black British History," accessed 30 September 2014, [www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/black\\_history.html#2](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/black_history.html#2).
3. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, 184.
4. A transcript of the record for Auker's case can be seen online at the UK National Archives website, accessed 30 September 2014, [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/slave\\_free.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/slave_free.htm).
5. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, 134.
6. *Ibid.*, 137.
7. See "Artisans and Others," Thompson, *The Making*.
8. Kenneth Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* (London: Kegan Paul, 1948).
9. Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984). On Fryer, see Terry Brotherstone, "Obituary: Peter Fryer, Communist Journalist Who Told the Truth about Hungary 1956," *Guardian* (3 November 2006).
10. This biographical information on Davidson comes from Fryer, *Staying Power*, 214–220. Fryer notes that the Jamaican born radical Robert Wedderburn was also on this list.
11. Cited in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 220.
12. Thompson, *The Making*, 66.
13. Cassandra Pybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006). The Proceedings of the Old Bailey online database is available at [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org).
14. Ian Duffield, "The Life and Death of 'Black Goff': Aspects of the Black Convict Contribution to Resistance Patterns during the Transportation Era in Eastern Australia," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 33, no. 1 (1987): 30–44.
15. *Ibid.*, 32.
16. Thompson, *The Making*; Despard is named Colonel Edmund Despard in *The Making*.
17. Thompson, *The Making*, 526.
18. Peter Leinbaugh and Marcus Reddiker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000).
19. *Ibid.*, 254.

20. David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
21. David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).
22. Fryer, *Staying Power*, 106.
23. David Featherstone, "Contested Relationalities of Political Activism: The Democratic Spatial Practices of the London Corresponding Society," *Cultural Dynamics* 22 (2010): 87–104.
24. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).
25. John Bugg, "The Other Interesting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano's Public Book Tour," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1424–1442, 1424.
26. Carretta, *Equiano, The African*.
27. Fryer, *Staying Power*.
28. Bugg, "The Other Interesting Narrative."
29. Carretta, *Equiano, The African*; Fryer, *Staying Power*, 211.
30. On Lydia Hardy and women's involvement in the sugar boycott, see Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
31. Thomas Hardy to Rev Mr Bryant of Sheffield 8 March 1792, reprinted in *Memoir of Thomas Hardy* (London: James Ridgway, 1832), 14–15. In his memoir Hardy noted that he republished the letter because during his trial the Attorney General "lamented very much—he is good at lamentations—that he has no possession of it" (14).
32. Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*, 18.
33. See Carretta, *Equiano, The African*.
34. Cited in Tim Adams, "The Interview: Cultural hallmark," *Observer*, 22 September 2007, accessed 4 March 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/sep/23/communities.politicsphilosophyandsociety>.
35. The phrase "optimistic imaginary" is used by Shelia Rowbotham in the introduction to her book, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010).
36. Catherine Impey, "Some Diverse Views of Social Equality," *Village Album* 38, c. 1885. Alfred Gillett Trust, Street, Somerset.
37. Catherine Impey to Albion Tourgée, March 1893, The *Albion W. Tourgée Papers* 6772, Chautauqua County Historical Society, Westfield, New York.
38. Catherine Impey, "Some Diverse Views of Social Equality."
39. *Anti-Caste*, December 1892, 2.
40. I have written more extensively about Catherine Impey's and Celestine Edward's work in Caroline Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Anti-Caste*, December 1889, 2–3.
43. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
44. "Outline Sketch of the Life of S J Celestine Edwards," *Fraternity*, May 1895, 3–4.
45. For examples of the kind of talks Edwards gave see the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 3 September 1887, 2.
46. *Portsmouth Evening News*, 14 August 1893, 2.
47. *Fraternity*, April 1894, 12.
48. *Fraternity*, November 1893, 12.

49. Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste*.
50. See Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
51. Jonathan Hyslop, "The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself 'White': White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa before the First World War," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (1999): 398–421.
52. For a discussion of early critics of *The Making*, see F. K. Donnelly, "Ideology and Early English Working Class History: Edward Thompson and His Critics," *Social History* 1, no. 2 (1976): 219–238.
53. See Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste*.
54. *Ibid.*