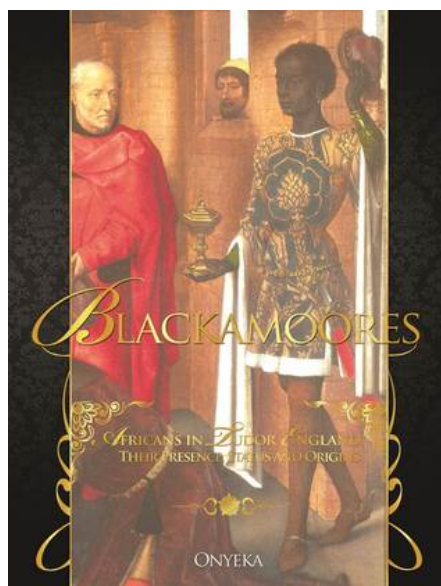




Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins

Onyeka

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Do we imagine English history as a book with white pages and no black letters in?

We sometimes think of Tudor England in terms of gaudy costumes, the court of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I and perhaps Shakespearian romance.

Onyeka's book acknowledges this predilection but challenges our perceptions.

Onyeka's book is about the presence, status and origins of Africans in Tudor England. In it Onyeka argues that these people were present in cities and towns throughout England, but that they did not automatically occupy the lowest positions in Tudor society. This is important because the few modern historians who have written about Africans in Tudor England suggest that they were all slaves, or transient immigrants who were considered as dangerous strangers and the epitome of otherness. However, this book will show that some Africans in England had important occupations in Tudor society, and were employed by powerful people because of the skills they possessed. These people seem to have inherited some of their skills from the multicultural societies that they came from, but that does not mean all of those present in England were born in other countries: some were born in England.

The arguments in this book are supported by evidence from a variety of sources both manuscript and printed, most of which has not been widely discussed - whilst some of it Onyeka has discovered, and this may be the first time that it has been revealed. Other evidence is taken from texts that are the subject of popular discussion by historians, linguists and so on, but Onyeka encourages the reader to re-examine these works in a different way because they reveal information about the presence, status and origins of Africans in Tudor England.

Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins Details

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Laisha says

This book provides a valuable insight into a period of history that I have seen only in a distorted perspective from my early education, through to modern representations of the Tudor period. It sheds light on the origins of terms, ideals and prejudices that have become entrenched in our everyday speech, customs and lives and in some cases forgotten completely.

There are a considerable amount of images included in the book that help to illustrate the points being raised and support the primary evidence that is discussed. Within these images, there are a number of images of Africans from European countries other than England, despite the focus being Tudor England. Although this initially caused some confusion, on further exploration of the book, I was able to understand that there are fewer images of Africans in England readily available, compared to European images of Africans. The inclusion of Africans in Europe in this book, helps to further highlight the position of Africans at this time and provides a deeper analysis of the contribution that Africans made to European/World history. I hope that the author plans to investigate these topics further in later books.

I found it to be an extremely accessible book with evidence, theories and conclusions laid out clearly and logically, so that a novice to the subjects raised is able to understand and feel confident to explore the topics further.

I thoroughly recommend this book to EVERYONE. I was especially glad to hear that the publishers of this book, Narrative Eye, have started a petition for the African Tudors to be included into the National Curriculum. When successful, I hope that this book is made a core text book.

Rowena says

Review originally posted at <http://mediadiversified.org/> (February 2014)

A criminally neglected part of British history is the true scope of the African diaspora in Britain that reaches as far back as Renaissance Europe. A new book by Onyeka Nubia seeks to rectify the problem, examining the lives of the thousands of blacks that lived in the UK in Tudor times. In *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England*, Onyeka Nubia shares research conducted in uncovering early evidence of Black existence in the United Kingdom, and proves that black presence was evident a lot earlier than is usually assumed. Nubia's research focuses on the Tudor era (1485- 1603), specifically looking at the four English cities of London, Plymouth, Bristol and Barnstable.

This is not the first book published about African presence in England. *Black Lives in the English Archives* by Imtiaz Habib (2008) and Gustav Ungerer's *The Mediterranean Apprenticeship of British Slavery* (2010) are two other books that look at similar subject matter and help substantiate the information uncovered in this research project. Additionally, just this year, academic Miranda Kaufman has published essays on the same research.

Using extensive data from letters and parish records, Nubia pieces together some of the unknowns, and

paints a bigger picture of Black presence in Tudor England. These historical documents, one even signed by Queen Elizabeth I in 1596, clearly confirm the black presence in the country. Emma McFarnon in *The Missing Tudors: black people in 16th-century England* questions why history doesn't acknowledge black Africans being part of that society. As she says, the numbers were quite large too, at least large enough for Queen Elizabeth I to have taken note in two letters signed by the monarch in 1596.

Who were the Africans? McFarnon says that from as early as 1558, parish records mentioned Africans using a diversity of terms such as "Blackamoors," "blacks," "moors," "negroes," "negars" and "Ethiopians" to describe people of African heritage. Africans were buried in England in the 16th Century, Africans such as Anthony John who died on March 18, 1587. Africans were also found in the royal court, men such as John Blanke, the black trumpeter who attended court from 1506-1512. Evidently, Africans were an important part of the social fabric.

Nubia courageously confronts the assumptions made by a few of the prominent authors of Black history in England that Africans were brought to England as slaves. Indeed, the author found firstly that the term slave when used was a "temporary or transitory" term; additionally, there is evidence of Africans marrying English people and having children.

'A report in 1578 declared 'I myself have seene an Ethiopian as black as cole...taking a faire English woman as wife [they] begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father.' James Albert Gronniosaw (an African prince, enslaved at 15, who served in the British army and later wrote his memoirs) married an English weaver and settled in Colchester.

One of the examples of Africans found in important jobs at the time is a man named Fortunatus, who was in the employ of Robert Cecil, a member of Queen Elizabeth I's Privy Council, proving that blacks in Tudor times were not always confined to the lower classes. Black representation in 16th and 17th Century art and literature was not unusual. Juriaen Van Streeck (1632-1687)'s painting "A Still Life with a Moorish Servant" depicts a Black man. Jan Brueghel, a prominent Flemish artist also has paintings of Black subjects.

With well-cited facts, records and other documents, credibility is lent to an under-researched and generally unpopular area. Onyeka Nubia acknowledges the challenges of working on such a neglected topic and stresses the history of the African diaspora be "taken more seriously." Nubia carefully details the problems faced when researching the historical data of blacks — it begs the question, why are modern historians so uncomfortable with discussing the historical Black presence in Renaissance Europe? This is an area of history that hegemonic historians ignore.

It is timely that I read Nubia's book during Black History Month here in North America. In television shows, films and books by popular historians, the presence of black Tudors is not acknowledged. As McFarnon says, the problem with not acknowledging them is

"it influences how we develop public policies on a range of important matters and it affects how we educate children in schools." Historian Marika Sherwood goes further and states that black people often say **"in this curriculum I don't exist."**

Blackamoors shows us parish records, letters and artwork as primary sources, detailing how Black people have been a part of European society since at least the fifteenth century. It is obviously important for the African diaspora to know their roots and see evidence of themselves in history, a history that has often been whitewashed in popular culture and history books until recently. As Onyeka Nubia writes,

"this tension exists and to some extent is inevitable until Black history and in particular the study of Africans in the Diaspora is taken more seriously."

It's time for academia to take the African diaspora seriously.

Raine Fleary says

How refreshing to finally have a book that confronts the common misconception of any existence 'other than the Europeans' in English History. The world is your oyster with this book. It opens the mind to unlimited possibilities pertaining to the African existence beyond that of even the 15CE.

Africans in Tudor England were present and were regarded differently to what we learn about them from say the 18th CE and beyond.

The font size of this books make easy. My children have picked it up and continue to open it every day

I for sure will be recommending this book not only to family and friends, but also professionals and scholars alike.

Msselena says

I am in the process of reading Blackamoors for the second time.

The first time I read this book it had such an empowering affect on me.

For the first time I have been filled with a sense of being. All the history that I had previously been exposed to has never invoked such a positive understanding of my peoples history right here in the land I call home and was born.

The contributions made have and still have effects today, which are not recognised. A bit like the majority of history I have been exposed to.

I am grateful for the hard work that Onyeka has gone through and the difficulties he has faced for many many years.

His journey has also given me hope with the understanding that there is so much more to be discovered on Africans in Tudor England and within other periods.

Anthony Lee says

This is an excellent piece of writing that depicts the plight of Africans during Tudor periods. The surprise in this piece is that Africans in England at this time where not slaves but lived and worked in England and made their own choices. Historians generally omit what the true plight of Africans where during this period. There is much more to the book and I recommend this book as an inspiring piece and a must read.

D Hunt says

This is a fascinating addition to the history of Tudor England and indeed World history. This book is a real eye opener containing omissions I certainly did not know about, from such a celebrated period of history.

Onyeka discusses with a very engaging style the positions of Africans in Tudor England, from servant to

royalty! why they were there and what they were called. He gives the reasons why this was so and makes reference to numerous parish records and letters (as well as other evidence) to illustrate his point.

The most fascinating part of this book is when he discusses the origins of the Africans. He talks about powerful empires such as Songhai and how such places link in with England long before it became wealthy and built the biggest Empire in the world off the back of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Onyeka has gone the extra mile with his research. The bibliography and reference listing is the largest I have ever come across in any book and this allows you to go and look for yourself.

I wish you all the best in getting the recognition you deserve for such an important publication.

BM Productions says

A book that the eyes of African (black)in Britain needs to feast their eyes and mind on, truly Blacktastic.. The evidence is undeniable and irrefutable fact truth of Our-story! - That surely needs to be implemented into the school curriculum.

Having said that I do have a personal issue with 'so called 'black his-story' but if we are going to learn our-story of our presence on this island known as Britain, Africarribeans (black) should know it from this book. Outstanding!

Brethan Bray says

A captivating book for every household. I have taught history with a focus on Tudor England for over 20 years and this is the first comprehensive work of this period to focus on Black Tudors.

I have heard and read other authors make reference to the blacks in Tudor England however mainly as slaves and hardly no evidence about the multiple other positions they held.

I will certainly use this book as a source to create my lesson plans and highly recommend it to other teachers in my field.

Remal Morris says

Refreshing and much anticipated! Africans in Tudor England is a book that was waiting to be written! The inclusion of visual proof of the African's status in Europe, solidifies the fact that Africans weren't confined to slave status in any country during the Tudor period. While we waffle on about immigration, it's clear that England has long been a diverse cultural melting pot. What England is now would have been undoubtedly shaped by ALL of the inhabitants of our land, back then. The book carries some physical and historical weight! I'm impressed by the fact that parish records of this amount still exist, yet we don't publicly hear about the many 'Moors' and 'Blackamoors' that were probably born and evidently buried in English soil. No doubt many of us will have this paperback on the shelf and the kindle edition on our e-readers! A definite must-buy for anyone who wants to whip-up a debate on what it means to be "English"!

Remal.

Michael1952 says

This is a ground breaking book, some idea of just how ground breaking this book is can be found in the fifty-two rejections Onyeka received when proposing it as subject of a doctorate. Most of the rebuffs were on the grounds that there was no one in the university's department with the knowledge to supervise his subject. Onyeka is to be praised for overcoming his feelings of 'failure and resignation' to produce the work.

He argues that not only was there a black presence in the period but black Africans and their descendants brought new skills to Tudor society and crucially - they were not slaves. He continually rails against those historians who denied these facts, as he has evidenced, in fact he goes further speaking of an 'academic culture' that was against accepting any black presence that contributed in any way to Tudor society.

His dedicated scholarship in refuting that 'academic culture' is without question. His masterful thirty page analysis and deconstruction of Elizabeth I's Privy Council's letters of 1596-1601 which said that 'the said kind of people' should be discharged with all speed from her realm, is just one of several examples of his analytic prowess. Onyeka's thorough analysis reminded me of the late Prof Marwick from my OU studies and his demand for the 'unwitting testimony' to be teased from a primary text - those things which were omitted, not stated, assumed or implied in and from any text. 'Unwitting testimony' can only be revealed by a thorough knowledge of the circumstance, and, critically, the period of the text: Onyeka seems to have that knowledge.

He reveals a significant black presence through the study of many thousands of parish record entries of the period to reveal the hidden black presence. For example, he suggests that one in fifteen or 6% of the entries in St Botolph with Aldgate's parish register were African.

For the status of Black Africans he examines not just the well known John Blanke, but many others such as Diego who assisted Sir Francis Drake in his circumnavigation of the globe or Symon Valencia, a servant to a needle maker. He also discusses the roles played by women of African descent.

The scholarship of the writing is manifest by the huge number of primary sources referenced along with the prodigious bibliography however regrettably the same cannot be said of the book's use of imagery.

I was very surprised to see that the front cover had no direct connection to Tudor England, The image was in fact painted in 15th Century Germany. I know well this foppish black Magus. He appears in an Adoration scene by the Flemish artist Hans Memling, who had copied the work of another Flemish artist Rogier van den Weyden. Van den Weyden was sponsored by the Holy Roman Emperor. The rear cover is Los tres mulatos de Esmeraldas (Portrait of Don Francisco de Arabe and Sons Pedro and Domingo) by Andrés Sánchez Galque. This extraordinary image of Ecuadorians was painted in 1599 for the King of Spain. Again, it bears no direct relation to the history of Africans in Tudor England.

I found no reference to either work in the text, (the absence of a detailed index was a great frustration, hopefully this can be remedied in a future edition) which led me to question the book's selection and interpretation of images.

The text for the Bosch Adoration (Fig. 24) says the attendant of the black Magus 'may be his daughter' (p.218) I would contest this inference, as there is no evidence that a female was an attendant of any Adoration magus black or white, in any of the writings on or depictions of the Adoration, in fact the only female ever present in the Adoration is the Virgin Mother Mary. Further the text claims the black in

Domesday Abbrevatio (Fig. 9) is 'useful' (p.136) to society. His attire indicates exactly the opposite that he is a reprobate, an outsider, a threat to society.

The explanation and description of the Queen of Sheba's two depictions (Fig.. 10 and Fig. 11) are in the briefest of footnotes with no account as to why both images have her shown with a black face and blond hair – surely that requires clarification in a text on black Africans. Both these images and others (Fig. 16 et al, Fig. 22) I believe have been taken from the seminal work on black images in Art – *The Image of the Black in Western Art* which I have written about elsewhere in this blog. But oddly the book's lengthy and authoritative looking primary sources and bibliography make no mention of this work. This is very disappointing omission.

The images of blacks seem to have been selected for aesthetic rather than historic reasons as they are mostly from continental Europe where black people were treated very differently from those in England. I know from personal experience the paucity of English images of blacks from the period. Nevertheless the images do exist, the book in fact has two good examples - John Blanke (Figs. 2 and 20) and *The Adoration of the Magi* (Figs. 12 and 13) which is a work well known to the author of this blog. The fact that both are used twice within the text seems to indicate their importance and rarity so, why did not either or both make it on to the front or back covers?. The actual images chosen are indeed glamorous, some might say sensational, but I would argue they in no way support the scholarship found between the book's covers whereas as John Blanke and the black Magus are both worthy candidates.

In breaking that new ground in writing about a black presence in Tudor times, Onyeka moves on from Prof Kate Lowe's important and influential researches on black Africans in Renaissance, Europe. And in doing so he moves away from the slavery and colonialism studies, which conventionally have formed the backbone of black British History, greatly expanding its possibilities. While many of his generation's historians continue to rake over conventional black histories as new sources come to light or old are reexamined, he has found a new and important area of black British history. I am aware of only one other British academic in this area working with equal rigour in the archives to reveal that black presence and that is Dr Miranda Kaufmann whose unpublished doctoral work I have had the pleasure of reading. She seems to have accessed an even wider number of primary texts than Onyeka, as her work has the possibility of a searchable database detailing what tantalizingly little that the records she studied – Baptism Records, Burial Records, Marriages, Tax Returns, Household Accounts, Church and Municipal Account, Court Records, Wills and Inventories, Diaries and Letters – revealed about the lives and times of over 350 black Africans. I look forward to its publication so the two works can be fully compared. I am encouraged by all this activity around black Tudor History as it further underlines the need and the possibility for a British history taught in schools which is a rigorous academic subject from A and GCSE levels onto degrees, masters and doctorates all possible in black British History

To conclude, Onyeka certainly makes his case that Africans in Tudor England were not slaves, and did in fact bring skills to Tudor society. His book contains many carefully detailed and argued references, supported by copious footnotes and a prodigious number of primary sources, reinforced by a large, authoritative bibliography. The book is however to my mind let down through the way in which it handles images, specifically the few genuine black African Tudor images available and the omission of reference to *The Image of Black in Western Art* needs to be addressed in future editions. His numerous setbacks while trying to write this work confirm that serious academic study of the subject still has some way to go. Nevertheless in his text he has made an outstanding contribution to the scholarship of black Africans in Tudor Times. With the reservation on how the book manages images, I fully recommend this work as an account of blacks in the period - #GoBuyThe Book.

Claire Braithwaite says

Such a detailed book. Only half way through and I'm blown away by all the facts that are presented. Very well written and thoroughly explained.

Finally a history book that places Africans in Britain long before what school history classes have taught us, long before what most people know of 1947.

Onyeka, through research and facts, talks of the Africans that lived amongst and socialised with the people of Britain including royalty, showing that not all Africans that were here were here as slaves. For me this was an eye opener as everything I had been previously taught and grew to understand and take as the truth was in fact flawed... very flawed!

A wonderful book and a must read for all.

P.H.G. Haslam says

I was a little afraid that this book would be more polemic than history, but it's actually hugely well researched and revealing. Onyeka's knowledge of West African history in the 16th and 17th centuries really gives one the sense of a multi-dimensional world. Not just people coming from somewhere vaguely determined... but a world of dynamic relationships. This really puts a very different spin on the Tudor period in Britain. Much recommended.

G. Lawrence says

What a fascinating find this book was ! A fresh look at the presence and status of black people in Tudor England, and a challenge to all pre-conceived ideas on the subject.

Even though I've spent most of my life reading about the Tudors I hardly knew any of the interesting facts and cases this book brought up. Riveting and well written. I'd give it 10 stars if I could!

Mohamed says

Onyeka was able to navigate through uncharted waters and literal minefield not just on our shores but continental wide to bring us such magnificent, detailed scholarly work.

With such tantalizing evidence we must truly be mad not to restructure our teaching of African history in our schools. In Tudor period as Onyeka states England/Britain was a third rated European whereby Spain and Portugal were the Major players, we know these societies were dominated by African/Moors the light bringers to Europe after the Dark ages.

A must read for all who seek to genuinely seek to understand the hereditary make up of the modern Brits. Thank you Onyeka.

Lemisha says

Think about going through life without belonging. Well that is the case for most Black people in England but

reading this book has given me a new sense of belonging.

I do not know why it takes a book to make you realise that it is okay for you to be classed as English or even to allow you to form ties to this land but I am glad it has.

The book gives an introduction to what Origins, Status and perceptions Africans/Blackamoors/Black people had in the Tudor period.

The book informs you about the Moors and how worldly they were. What status they had being in Europe and England. What happened to them in Spain. The types of skill sets they brought to England. The value they had for themselves and what they could do and become within this land.

It also touches on religion and why Africans were very quick to take on board Christianity.

The book goes into real depths to prove why those letters and draft proclamation were falsely linked to Queen Elisabeth and they could not be implemented. The population was not expelled out of England. Where the population ended up, through the various generations they can be traced but the Africans no longer look African they integrated so much that all their ancestry is now caucasian/white.

I look forward to the next installment from the author because from reading this book I am sure he found a lot more than what was left for us in the book.

If we do not change the way History is taught in schools right now then we will have the next generation feeling the same way we did until they come across this book.

I am so glad to have read this book and I cannot help informing everyone I know about it.

Duara says

What a great read! I found 'The Blackamoors' to be a refreshing change to the image of every African being a slave in English history. Finally, to read something which teaches many (old and young) that actually Africans have contributed to England in ways we never knew.

The book gave facts in an informative way and illustrated how the history of African people in England has to be shown for what it truly is. I think the book would have a great impact if more knew and appreciated what it contained.....Knowledge is power after all!

A definite must have!!!

Martha Gideon says

It is true what they say, that history is written by the victors and it is His-story. For too long the historical experiences and the contributions of Africans in England has gone ignored. There is a veil that has divided us; this division being those who have come since 1948 and those Africans before 1948. This book has pulled down the curtains and exposed a window by which Africans in Britain today can claim an ancestral legacy, and roots so deep in this country, that it has frightened the academic world into rejecting the very idea. As the author puts it he has received over 50 rejections from universities across Britain. The book is a very well written, well researched evidenced based document that exposes line by line the fallacies we have been fed in the media, in the school system about the African presence in this country. The truth of the

matter is that a diverse set of Africans were present in Tudor England, they had many differing status (but were not slaves), and they contributed to this country in many ways. Essentially they are as diverse as the current population of Africans in England today! Which is the very reason that this book is so important, as it draws a clear parallel between those Africans in Britain now and then, and perhaps makes us wonder how we will be represented in the future.

Mary Simmons says

Much has been written about the Tudors; not a week goes by when we don't hear of some programme on TV, a best selling new book or a film about them. However after reading this book by Onyeka, one has to realise the fundamental flaw in the image promoted by the mainstream media about the Tudors. Fundamentally historians, writers, filmmakers have projected a Tudor England that is entrenched in falsehood and jingoism. However the truth of the matter is, England was a multi-cultural society, and Africans were part and parcel of this society.

This may confuse many of us who have grown up with a certain image of Englishness. Our instinctive reaction maybe to quickly ignore Onyeka's new findings and shove them to the back, while we continue our consumption of mainstream junk. But Onyeka's book is like a pin prick in your head, and forces you to re-examine your fundamental believes.

Allme says

Reading this book has done something to my very being and I will forever be indebted to the author for this.

Being an African woman born in this country, I must say I have never felt ties to this land (England) until now. This book made me see through the prejudices I carry about myself that were given to me. During Tudor England times, Africans were not seen as less than human, they had status and upheld jobs of value and worth which have help build England as we know it. This gives me a new found look on myself and my fellow Africans.

The pictures give you all a way of actually seeing some of the types of people that are talked about. I was blown away by the imagery most pictures I had not seen before.

I am telling everyone about this book because it is a must that all little children will need in order to make it through there life without feeling less than worthy about themselves.

The author has done such a fabulous Job and I really applaud and appreciate the work and the passion he has put into the material he researched to ensure the book turned out the way it did. Based on facts.

Pink says

This is not so much a non-fiction book, but more of a thesis, or perhaps a textbook for history students. I

found it incredibly hard to read, almost A4 sized and 450 pages, it's a brick, but the inside was not constructed particularly well either. The whole book is typed in double spacing, with huge chunks of references, which are of course necessary, but don't help with the layout. As for the actual content, I read 100 pages, then began to skip and skim. A large part of the writing is dedicated to disproving other historians, rather than letting the Onyeka's work speak for itself. I kept reading why 'he was wrong, she was wrong, they were wrong' and after so much of this I began to question whether they might have a point. I just wanted to read what Onyeka had to say and make up my own mind. I felt that his constant referral to other historians made his own case sound weaker each time, which I don't think it actually was. On the whole I'd say this is a good book to use as a History student if you're wanting to explore black British history or the Tudor period. Or both as in this case. It's highly referenced, at over 100 pages and there are some fantastic sources. As an enjoyable or insightful read for somebody that wants to learn more about this topic in their spare time, it didn't work for me.
