



# Centring Blackness in European History: A European History Quarterly Forum

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Black History is European History. By placing Blackness at the centre of the historical narrative, historians are transforming the way in which we think of the history of Europe and successfully overcoming intellectual frameworks which have consistently failed to produce accurate, diverse and compelling analyses of European societies. This collection of essays engages with the methodological and intellectual challenges that we, as historians, face when doing so. We conclude that no matter the difficulties, these new approaches have proven genuinely liberating, and it has allowed historians to escape traditional narratives that consistently ignore the intellectual, political, social and cultural contribution of Black people to European History.

In their contribution, ‘Centring Blackness as Methodology and as Citational Practice’, Nicholas Jones and Alani Hicks-Bartlett emphasize the importance of citation and the recognition of this practice as a political choice. In the first part, ‘Centring Blackness as Methodology’, Jones stresses the importance of taking seriously the work of Black women along with other scholars of colour to create a radically new, anti-racist, historiography, as part of a transformative methodological approach. In ‘Centring Blackness as Citational Practice’, Hicks-Bartlett opens her discussion of race, recognition, and acknowledgment with a brief analysis of spectacle, corporeal spectacularity, and the regime of the gaze in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. Then, turning to methodological pathways and the issue of citational practice itself, Hicks-Bartlett considers key issues informing accepted citational ethea along with problematic lacunae and omissions by addressing citationality and critical silencing through an intentional citational exercise.

Chloe Ireton, in her essay ‘Black Thought in European History’, argues that while the call to centre Blackness in European history is an admirable one, historians must go beyond tracing the presence of Black Africans and their descendants in European history and think more carefully about the methodological implications for accounting for the diverse intellectual legacies of the African Diaspora in Europe and its empires.

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In particular, Ireton argues that historians have a responsibility to explore how enslaved and free Black Africans in the early European empires reckoned with the brutality and violence of the Atlantic world that they were forced to inhabit, and the different ways that they engaged with and shaped the intellectual life of diverse European and colonial societies. This involves, in the first instance, engaging in important methodological discussions about how we practise history and accounting for the theoretical implications of generations (and centuries) of epistemic erasures of diverse intellectual histories of Black thought in colonial societies. In other words, Ireton argues that our work in centring Blackness in European history must go beyond tracing the presence of Black Africans and their descendants and instead move towards investigating their intellectual, political, social, and cultural histories and legacies.

In Montaz Marché's contribution, 'Centring Blackness: A Focus on Gender and Critical Approaches through Black Women's Lives', the author demands from historians a more personal, individual and intimate engagement with the histories of Black people to fully grasp their experiences and identities. Contextualizing and encompassing economic, social and personal identities will allow us to build better narratives of Black people, and Black women in particular. Focusing on her research into black women in early-modern London, the author demonstrates the capacity to excavate Black women's lives through brief, third-person sources. Moreover, she emphasizes the value of questions of experience and humanity, when analyzing Black women's lives in terms of their being sentient beings rather than abstract concepts, utilizing black feminist and intersectional frameworks to stimulate research avenues.

Onyeka Nubia, in his essay 'Decoding Early-Modern European Ethnography in the "Masque of Blackness"', analyzes Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blacknesse* and decodes the 'blacknesse' in the *Masque* to reveal how it is not definitive, but emblematic and symbolic of early-modern European ethnography. However, some scholars critiquing the *Masque* through the lens of European court-spectacles have defined the 'blacknesse' in it as purely idiomatic. Other historians have claimed that the *Masque* provides evidence of systemic racism in early-modern societies. The author of this article uses inter-textual, contextual and extra-textual methodologies, to examine these conflicting concepts. But this article concentrates on a less-frequently analyzed section of the *Masque*. This is a section in which the virtue of blackness is extolled. The author reflects on why this important part of the *Masque* is rarely examined by modern historians. The author concludes by distinguishing the dramatic othering of Africans in the *Masque* with the actual presence of Africans in early-modern England.

In my own essay, 'Centring Blackness: Towards a New Public History of the Spanish Empire', I discuss the role of public historians in the construction of new historical narratives that include, reflect and acknowledge Black people in Spanish history. By referring to two of my most recent research projects, I call for a renewed historiography to insert the social, intellectual, political and cultural contribution of Black people into our analysis of the past, going beyond merely acknowledging their presence and engaging with their individual and collective stories – ultimately creating a history that is more inclusive, complex, exciting and engaging.

We believe this *forum* will make a positive contribution to the ongoing debates on the methodological challenges that centring Blackness in European history demands and

requires. As research appears every year, the need for sharing good practices among historians has never been more apparent. The essays included here provide examples of nuanced and innovative approaches to the study of Black communities and individuals in Europe, the Atlantic World and beyond.

### **Author Biography**

**Jesús Sanjurjo** is a Fellow of the Leverhulme and Isaac Newton Trusts in the Faculty of History and Corpus Christi College of the University of Cambridge. He has published various articles, in English and Spanish, on the history of the slave trade, slavery and radical politics in the Atlantic World. He is the author of *In the Blood of Our Brothers: Abolitionism and the End of the Slave Trade in Spain's Atlantic Empire, 1800–1870* (2021).