Whiteness, Polite Masculinity, and West-Indian Self-fashioning: The Case of William Beckford

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ABSTRACT
Using alderman William Beckford (1709–1770) as a microhistorical case study, this essay analyses the interconnectedness of polite masculinity, Englishness, and whiteness in mid-eighteenth-century Britain. It argues that Beckford’s failure to perform gentlemanliness made him vulnerable to politically motivated racialised attacks. Analysing a variety of polemical texts by Beckford’s political opponents, the essay suggests that gendered performances of politeness played a crucial and thus far underresearched role in the racialisation of white West Indians. Beckford’s case shows that as an identity yet untethered to biology, white Englishness could be both compensated and endangered by performative displays of polite cultural capital.

KEYWORDS
Polite masculinity; whiteness; Creole self-fashioning; identity performance; eighteenth-century Britain; British West Indies

Introduction

When William Beckford (bap. 1709), slaveowner, MP, and London alderman of Jamaican origin, died on 21 June 1770, his fellow whig Horace Walpole privately eulogised him in his Memoirs in these somewhat unflattering terms:

[Beckford] had boldness, promptness, spirit, a heap of confused knowledge, displayed with the usual ostentation of his temper, and so uncorrected by judgment, that his absurdities were made but more conspicuous by his vanity. Under a jovial style of good humour, he was tyrannic in Jamaica his native country, and under an appearance of prodigality, interested. On the other side, the excesses of his factious behaviour were founded neither on principle, nor on rancour. Vainglory seemed to be the real motive of all his actions... the turbulence of Beckford, his imposing noise, and his great wealth, concur [red] to his authority. 1

Walpole’s critical view of Beckford features a cluster of epithets that can be read as not only his personal dislike of the man he considered to be a vulgar and ridiculous buffoon, but a critique of Beckford’s masculine and national character alike. Ostentatiousness, vanity, factionality, lack of rational judgment, and incapability to exercise self-control were considered to be failings in both polite manliness and white Englishness; Beckford’s ‘tyrannic’ ownership of some 1,300 enslaved people further complicated his self-fashioning as a ‘Free Englishman’ and custodian to English liberty. 2

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Challenging Beckford’s Englishness also implied questioning his whiteness, since Englishness was not only a national but an ethnic identity. Englishness and whiteness also revolved around questions of class, as civility had a long history as a racial marker in British thought. Accordingly, the question of whether lower classes were thought to partake in white English identities to the same extent as their social superiors was a fraught one, as there was a conceptual entanglement between uncivilised plebeians and non-European ‘savages’. Indeed, in Georgian Britain, gentlemanliness was more or less equated with white Englishness, and for example Simon Gikandi has demonstrated that polite taste was a central tool for racialising black people and marking them as an inferior breed. This essay uses William Beckford [Image 1] as a microhistorical case study to argue that these racialising practices were not limited to non-white people of visible physical racialised difference, but that white West Indians were similarly subjected to racialised othering. While Creoles might have been considered effectively white in the Caribbean colonies (where the need to distinguish between races was much more adamant than in the metropole due to the gross imbalance between a small white powerful minority and large black enslaved majority), their whiteness rapidly faded the closer they moved to the metropole, where not quite/not polite was quickly equated with not quite/not white.

Examining the interconnectedness of gender, national identity, and race in Georgian Britain, this essay brings to focus specifically the intimate links between polite masculinity and whiteness which have heretofore received relatively little scholarly attention; thereby, it makes a contribution to the rich scholarship investigating colonial and intersectional aspects of eighteenth-century identity construction. Recent scholars have argued that refined, polite manhood as the ‘product and expression of elite urban culture and Britishness’ was the most dominant expression of Englishness in eighteenth-century Britain. Taking many forms and outward expressions and emphasising varying such epithets as courtesy, sentimentality, martiality, or gallantry at different moments and spaces, polite masculinity was closely intertwined with national character and English virtue. This polished, enlightened masculinity rested, roughly speaking, on physical and mental poise, self-regulation, and independence. These qualities were supposed to be demonstrated through thoughtful conversation, tasteful moderation in living, confinement of pride and passions, and easy affability towards others. The discourses of polite masculinity drew on Scottish Enlightenment notions of civic virtue, which deemed male refinement and polite sociability essential in discouraging self-interested behaviour and encouraging men to act in the public interest. These were the virtues that made not only the gentleman, but – most crucially – the English gentleman.

As several scholars have noted, the growing British empire played a crucial role in the construction of English masculinity by creating anxiety over the corrupting influence of colonial luxury and the increasing ethnic and religious diversity of the empire. The trope of the debauched West Indian – indolent, licentious, passionate, and greedy – was, in many ways, a manifestation of these fears. Indeed, the cultural and moral dissimilarities between the West Indian slaveholder-planter and the British country gentleman were increasingly emphasised in political prints, satires, and fictive works as the number, influence, and domestic visibility of absentee planters grew during the second half of the eighteenth century. Importantly, the cultural degeneration of the West Indian,
distinguished by un-gentility and lack of polite decorum, merged ambivalently with physical otherness and suspicions of mixed race in eighteenth-century popular print, where white Creoles were represented as ‘negroefied’ ‘Calibans’ and ‘savages’ of ‘swarthy hue’. This racialising rhetoric was also prominently featured in the public criticism
targeted against William Beckford, which did not limit itself only on his temperament, manners, spending, and morals, but extended to his physical appearance as well. In 1761, for example, one of Beckford’s most vociferous critics, Philip Francis, denounced Beckford’s race as as profoundly mixed as his moral character in a scathing pamphlet seeking to discredit his allegedly self-serving dedication to the West India interest:

Then should creolian B[ekfor]d, like himself,
Start from the Canvas in his native Hues,
The bronze tartarean, and Jamaica tint,
Sun-burnt and deep enamell’d.¹³

Indeed, especially at the height of his political fame, Beckford was the target of a vehement slander campaign that aimed to shake his political authority by focusing on representing him as a racialised other to refined white Englishness.

This essay starts from the premise that the racialising rhetoric used by Beckford’s critics provides us with an exceptional window into the ways in which Englishness, whiteness, and Creoleness were understood in mid-eighteenth-century Britain. To attract slander was by no means uncommon for a politician during this period; however, the vocabulary and content of that slander speaks volumes of the cultural and social meanings given to different characteristics and identities. Accordingly, Beckford’s case can be used as a magnifying glass that makes British anxieties about the fragility of their whiteness visible. Drawing from a variety of polemical texts written by Beckford’s political adversaries – mostly whigs of opposing factions like Philip Francis or Tobias Smollett – the essay analyses the rhetoric of these political attacks aimed against Beckford to examine whiteness as an intersectional identity where polite masculinity played a central role. As Alex Shepard has noted, policing masculinities was a key tool in creating national character and belonging, and the vocabulary of manhood was used to exclude individuals from social, political, national, or ethnic group identities.¹⁴ Building on this, the essay argues that Beckford was a conspicuous target for racialised slander because he failed to compensate for his West Indian background with passable performances of polite masculinity. His Creole heritage alone would not necessarily have been a cause for his inability to gain full social acceptance – after all, some West Indians, including Beckford’s own sister, managed to lead more or less successful social lives as members of the British elite. Beckford’s ultimate failing proved to be the combination of his failed gentlemanliness and his colonial heritage – which his critics were quick to use for their opportunistic gain.

The first section of the essay discusses Beckford’s racialisation in mid-century pamphlets and other texts, examining the rhetoric and vocabulary of physical otherness used to question Beckford’s white Englishness. The second section analyses Beckford’s behaviour through the discourses of polite masculinity, showing that eighteenth-century gendered politeness, Englishness, and whiteness were mutually entangled and, to some extent, negotiable identities. As a slaveholder and a Caribbean outsider, Beckford should have mastered the codes of polite gentlemanliness to compensate for his questionable background; as he did not, he was ridiculed, ostracised, and othered. Based on this, the essay seeks to make a broader claim on eighteenth-century racialising practices and the fragile
and easily corruptible nature of whiteness, thus contributing to the growing body of critical race studies. It argues that the exclusion of a racialised other from white Englishness was not limited to blacks or other people manifesting clearly visible physical difference to white Europeans, but foreign cultural traits could lead to racialised othering by creating an imagined physical difference. While race was not tethered to skin colour alone in a modern biological sense, eighteenth-century notions of Englishness as an ethnicity were racialist in the sense that they were Eurocentric and privileging metropolitan heritage, culture, religion, knowledge, and moral and physical characteristics, including white skin colour. The un-British West Indians were thus not only culturally suspicious but physically othered. In fact, the racialisation of white Creoles bears many similarities not only to the othering of black people but also to the racialisation of Highland Scots and the Irish, who were similarly branded as ‘members of a different and inferior race’ because of their deficient masculinity, displayed by their ‘barbarous’ manners. In this way, the othering of Creoles and other ‘white savages’ of the civilised world played a central role in the forging of race in eighteenth-century Europe.

**Beckford’s dubious whiteness**

A member of one of Jamaica’s wealthiest sugar families, William Beckford in many ways represented the real-life embodiment of the trope of the West Indian absentee planter and slaveholder – a character increasingly familiar to Britons from satirical depictions in print media and epitomised by Samuel Foote’s 1764 fictive characterisation of Sir Peter Pepperpot. Indeed, Beckford’s actions following his final settling in Britain in 1744 are a textbook example of Creole strategies of metropolitan assimilation. As the first crucial step towards building himself a respectable English persona, in 1745 Beckford bought and lavishly renovated an estate in Wiltshire called Fonthill, which not only respectfully ‘domesticated’ his foreign and morally dubious wealth but also procured him a seat at the Parliament. He proceeded to build himself a political career that made him an alderman and lord mayor of London and the right hand of William Pitt at the Parliament. Beckford’s biographer Perry Gauci has taken his rapid political ascent as a testimony of his clever self-adaptation to British political, cultural, and social environment, claiming that Beckford managed his transfer from Jamaica to London sociability and political life deftly. This essay problematises this reading by suggesting that, despite his prestigious political position, Beckford remained culturally, socially, and ethnically something of a West Indian outsider. In this respect, I build on Simon Gikandi’s argument that Beckford was never allowed to be more than ‘a Jamaican Creole with a lot of money and the political clout that came with it’ within the culture of Englishness. Despite his social tribulations, white Beckford was, of course, extremely privileged in many ways at a time when black Britons were struggling to gain social inclusion or political representation; my goal is not to frame him as a victim of racialised exclusion but, rather, to use his rhetorical othering as an example of the interconnectedness of whiteness, masculinity, and Englishness in the eighteenth century.

Beckford became one of the most prolifically ridiculed politicians in 1760s Britain due to a variety of both political and cultural reasons. One was the whig party’s deep factionalism with Beckford prominently in Pitt the Elder’s corner; accordingly, Pitt’s resignation in 1761 left Beckford in a politically precarious situation, as the prime
minister’s protection no longer shielded him against the attacks of Buteite whigs who considered his openly declared West India advocacy unpatriotic and self-interested and his violent enthusiasm for the Seven Years’ War a sign of his imperial greed.25 Indeed, Beckford had become the self-proclaimed spokesman for the West India interest – a status which brought him increasingly on a collision course with the ministry, especially with the passing of the Sugar Act of 1764 and Stamp Act of 1765. In the face of the administration’s colonial reforms which eventually led to the American Revolution, Beckford found it increasingly difficult to successfully balance between colonial and metropolitan interests and to reconcile the discrepancy between liberty and empire. Early abolitionist discourses also found an outlet in rebukes aimed at Beckford’s person, as his ownership of over 1,300 enslaved Africans made him the emblematic tyrannical slaveholder in the eyes of his critics; as Perry Gauci has observed, he was increasingly attacked from the early 1760s onwards for his hypocrisy for standing up for liberty in Britain while enslaving others in the West Indies.26

West Indians, who considered themselves partaking in all the virtues of Englishness, often complained about the biased nature of their portrayal in British publications. While still residing in Jamaica in 1743, William Beckford himself wrote to James Knight to urge Knight, a fellow planter settled in London, to set the record straight by publishing his own ‘True’ account of Jamaica and its inhabitants – for, as Beckford complained, ‘surely we have been Grosly abused and misrepresented by a Pack of scoundrell writers’. He was perhaps alluding to the 1740 *Gentleman’s Magazine* which stigmatised Caribbean planters as ‘Enemies to the Negroes, Oppressors, ungrateful and merciless Masters . . . and proud Spoliators of the work of God, who dare make Beasts of human Forms’.27 During the slander campaign of the 1760s, Beckford did his best to extenuate accusations of tyranny by rhetorically underlining his patriotism and dedication to English liberty in his political self-representation – an attempt he was ridiculed for by, for example, Richard Bentley, who questioned Beckford’s self-declared advocacy of freedom by accusing him of flaying his slaves alive and rubbing ‘vinegar, with salt and pepper’ into their bleeding wounds.28 Tobias Smollett, Pitt’s rival Lord Bute’s hired pen, censured Beckford for having had ‘a parcel of Negroes attend his will and pleasure’ in Jamaica where he ‘bastinadoes, hacks, hews, and murders the poor wretches, to shew that he has none of the weaknesses of humanity’. For Smollett, Beckford’s ‘exercise of absolute dominion, over some thousands of his fellow-creatures’ made him unsuited for the government of the free people of Britain.29

The fact that much of the criticism aimed at Beckford focused on his West Indian otherwise shows what an easily vilifiable trait and consequently effective weapon his colonial background posed in the 1760s political and cultural climate. Indeed, Beckford’s racialisation was a part of a broader development of racial anxiety and colonial unease felt in Britain. There was a growing popular hostility towards West Indians who were viewed as ‘the colonial exotic’ long before attitudes towards them hardened into the antipathy generated by the rise of antislavery sentiment in the 1780s.30 Escalated by the rapid expansion of Britain’s overseas empire, early abolitionist discourses, as well as the racial fright caused by Tacky’s slave revolt in 1760, Britons were growing conscious of the threats their expansion presented to the moral and ethnic purity of their nation. Trevor Burnard has shown that the developing ideology of white Englishness, embraced by British Jamaicans in their effort to impose racial boundaries in the aftermath of Tacky’s
revolt, ended up excluding white West Indians from cultural and ethnic membership in Englishness in the minds of metropolitan Britons, as they started getting suspected of secretly harbouring African members in their family trees.\textsuperscript{31} This meant that assimilating to metropolitan polite society grew increasingly difficult for elite West Indians during the second half of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} West Indianness as a hybrid category, ambiguously hovering between whiteness and otherness, was a permeable surface through which racial ‘pollution’ was feared to enter white Englishness, as whiteness was an alarmingly negotiable identity in the West Indies and accordingly adopted by many wealthy coloured Creoles.\textsuperscript{33} These fears of West Indian mixed blood creeping into the British elite found an outlet in formulations of racial ambiguity of white Creoles, aimed at preserving imagined white purity and social order.

Accordingly, the perceived otherness of Beckford extended beyond his cultural and moral alienness, as political pamphleteers made use of distinct racialised rhetoric that latched on to Beckford’s imagined physical difference to discredit him and his politics. In an attempt to undermine his campaign in the 1754 general election, one of the earliest public attacks against Beckford, The History of an Old Lady and Her Family, accused him of associating with ‘Black-a-moor Fellows’ and ‘suck[ing] the Dugs OF CANNIBALS’. Another early attack from 1757, seeking to shake the newly forged alliance between Beckford and Pitt, named him ‘the king of negro-land’ who had brought Jamaican customs to England and identified his ‘creolian soul’ as the source of his tyrannical power over the City.\textsuperscript{34} Similar rhetoric, collating moral and physical otherness, was often used to raise concern over the character of West Indians, as in the poem Tea and Sugar (1792), where the Creole, ‘Slavery’s Prime Minister, of swarthy hue, And sickly look; of various tints combind’ was declared the ‘true epitome of jaundic’d mind’.\textsuperscript{35} Beckford’s racialisation intensified with the political tensions of the 1760s; for example, Tobias Smollett, criticising Beckford’s West India bias during the peace negotiations in 1762, called him ‘a thing produced by a low negroe driver’ with ‘no true British spirit’, and suggested he had sucked his un-English disposition from ‘the breast of his nurse, who was a blackamoor princess, the daughter of an African Caboceiro’ – evoking the early modern belief that breastmilk could transfer the wetnurse’s mental and physical qualities to the baby.\textsuperscript{36} A pamphlet comparing candidates to race horses during the 1768 election campaign depicted Beckford as ‘Lord Chatham’s brown Horse PREROGATIVE ... bred in Jamaica’.\textsuperscript{37} A satirical print of populist John Wilkes’s arrest for seditious libel even portrayed Beckford (in front right) with a black face (Image 2). Beckford’s cultural failings in the virtues of Englishness thus quickly turned into suspicions over his whiteness, as the overwhelming feeling of cultural alienness that Britons felt towards him and West Indians in general was translated into these conceptually vague but culturally persistent beliefs of physical difference.

Moreover, the seemingly non-racial negative epithets used to describe Beckford were not race-neutral but formed the standard vocabulary in which black people were unfavourably contrasted to whites in eighteenth-century texts. For example, like Beckford, blacks were routinely represented as ‘wild and extravagant’ creatures, excluded from the realm of taste and unable to control themselves through reason – and their contagious proximity was considered to be the cause for Creole degeneration in the West Indies.\textsuperscript{38} There was also an elision between white Creole, white lower-class, and black characteristics in this racialist discourse. Beckford’s whig competitors, worried about his growing
influence in City politics, believed that his Creole background made him ‘naturally’ attuned to the uncouth London mobs who, indeed, brought him his most immediate political successes. The riotous urban rabble were, after all, only one step away from rebellious enslaved Africans, since both were thought to be incapable of reason and thereby freedom.  

Beckford’s populist influence over the London masses was, then, in danger of stripping Englishmen of their independence as it made them his ‘negroes’ to be led as William Pitt commanded, as *The City Farce*, critical of the Beckford-Pitt alliance, warned.  

These racialised descriptions of Beckford and his fellow West Indians should not be waived as simply figurative or metaphorical; instead, the easy collation of cultural and physical racialised characteristics in these pamphlets are an indication of the ambiguousness of racial thought in this period. In eighteenth-century Britain, the origin of human difference was still untethered to biology and could therefore be ascribed to culture as well as nature, the line between the two being somewhat hazy.  

Early modern human difference was conceptualised as artificial and malleable, produced by geographical, climatological, humoural, and human-induced influences, while still inscribed in physical appearances. Silvia Sebastiani has shown that geohumoural and especially climatological racial theories had a profound impact on Enlightenment notions of race, meaning that eighteenth-century Britain was still heavily embedded in these models of human
difference. Accordingly, eighteenth-century racial ideology moved freely between cultural and physical qualities, emphasising polished manners, civilised government, and whiteness as equally significant markers of racialised identity.

This easy elision between cultural and physical otherness is clearly discernible in the more ‘scientific’ literature of the period, where perceived subtle physical differences between Creoles and their Britain-born counterparts were listed along moral and cultural differences. For example, Edward Long famously claimed in the notoriously racist *History of Jamaica* (1774) that Creoles’ ‘cheeks are remarkably high-boned, and the sockets of their eyes deeper than is commonly observed among the natives of England’ to guard them against the ‘almost continual strong glare of sun-shine’ of the torrid zone. The ‘effect of climate’ made Creoles ‘stamped with these characteristic deviations’, even though they were ‘descended from British ancestors’. Long’s influential views were echoed by, for example, Bryan Edwards, John Stewart, and J. B. Moreton, who all ascribed unique physical characteristics to Creoles. They were described as ‘a taller race, on the whole, than the Europeans’; the climate was said to make their complexion ‘yellowish’ or ‘swarthy’, while their association with black slaves rendered their appearance ‘negroified’, unless prevented by a European education. The timeframe for these physical changes varied from a few weeks to a few generations.

While most of the attacks targeted against Beckford were aroused by his open partiality to the West India interest (which in itself was considered unbecoming an English gentleman), they were also very likely partly motivated by actual fears of a ‘creolisation’ of British politics, as West Indians did wield an unprecedented level of political influence in London in the 1760s. In 1762, a libellous writer in *The Auditor* criticised the appointment of Beckford to the office of lord mayor of London. The writer’s goal was not only to claim that Beckford as a tyrannical slaveowner was wholly unsuitable to govern free men of England, but also to raise fear of a Creole invasion of London and Britain itself at a time when West Indians had consolidated their power in the Parliament. He writes that the Creole agenda is ‘to bribe English boroughs, and make so many CREOLES the guardians of British liberty, and the representatives of Englishmen in parliament’, so that the ‘next time you go to St. Stephen’s chappel’ it will be filled with ‘flat noses and thick lips’, and then ‘the sugar-cane [shall] triumph over the hop-pole, and a barbecued hog over the roast-beef of the English’. It is somewhat ambivalent whether the writer imagines the congregation of St. Stephen’s to be white, brown, or black Creole. The racialised physical characteristics he mentions – flat noses and thick lips – were traditionally used to refer to black people, but precisely for this reason the writer may have wanted to use them to highlight the racial ambiguity of white West Indians, whose whiteness was becoming an increasingly contested topic.

**Beckford’s failed masculinity**

What made Beckford such an appealing target for such blatant racialised slander? Despite growing colonial anxiety and hostility towards planters during the second half of the eighteenth century, all West Indians were not automatically racially abused because of their background or ethnicity – at least to the extreme extent Beckford was. Indeed, some Creoles led fairly successful political and social lives and faced little of the open and public criticism Beckford attracted. For example, Edward Long was a respected public
figure; the St. Kitts-born MP Ralph Payne, later Baron Lavington, managed to make his house ‘the favourite resort of the whig leaders’ in the 1770s; and Beckford’s immediate successor as lord mayor of London, another former Jamaican resident Barlow Trecothick, gained even the waspish Horace Walpole’s good opinion. Beckford’s powerful political status, of course, made him a conspicuous target to the extent few other West Indians amounted to. Nevertheless, there were also other differences between him and his socially more successful peers – most significantly, their ability to compensate for their un-British origin with skilful polite gentlemanliness, while Beckford appears to have been unable to shed his West Indian manners and to abide by the behavioural codes of polite English masculinity. According to contemporary observers, Edward Long’s social and political success was based on his cultivated persona and mastery of polite culture, Payne was praised for his personal charm and cultivation of refinement and etiquette, and Trecothick was, unlike his predecessor, ‘a decent man’. In fact, social membership of white Englishness seems to have operated almost like a scale with ‘weights’ of different size, where pedigree, wealth, status, or manners could to some extent compensate for colonial origin. Therefore, for absentee West Indians, polite masculinity grew crucially in importance for successful British self-fashioning.

Accordingly, the second section of this essay analyses the impact of polite performances of masculinity in West Indian self-fashioning and social identity building. It proposes that because Beckford failed to demonstrate the cultural norms of polite masculinity through refined manners, taste, and consumption, he was never truly accepted into the gentlemanly sociability of his peers. Moreover, his un-politeness rendered him un-English, leaving him vulnerable to racialised criticism. I would also like to suggest that Beckford’s metropolitan ostracising, if not the violence of the abuse he faced, was a somewhat typical Creole experience. Since West Indians more often lacked than possessed the cultural capital of metropolitan modes of gentlemanliness, the social success experienced by the likes of Long and Payne was more an exception than a rule. Indeed, according to Natalie Zacek, West Indian absentees were sneered upon by socially discerning Britons to the extent that they tended to socialise mainly within their own peer networks.

William Beckford was known for his lack of decorum and tact. In Parliament, he was often made fun of on the grounds of his outlandish self-presentation. His adversaries referred to him as ‘Alderman Sugarcane’, ‘Rumford’, and ‘Will Hurricane’ and mocked him for his stereotypically Creole vulgarity, pride, and bombastic manner of delivering (often self-congratulatory) speeches. His oratorical style was derided for its wildness, violence, and use of hyperbolic metaphors – or, in short, for his ‘boisterous Indian style’. Especially Beckford’s election campaigning, targeted towards his less polished City supporters, provided plenty of fuel for his critics. The Public Advertiser censured Beckford’s 1768 election day speech, deeming his harangue ‘wild, desultory, and better calculated to catch a Mob, than to collect the deliberate Suffrages of a thinking, independent and free People’ – freedom and independence being, of course, the defining characteristics of a British gentleman. A 1754 pamphlet caustically credited Beckford’s election success to his taking London with ‘a great Mob at his Heels. This Set of valuable Friends had upon every Occasion given him the most distinguishing Marks of their Favour and Countenance. Nor was this to be wonder’d at; for his Abilities were fitted most exactly to the Size of their Understandings’. Beckford’s uncouthness and vulgarity
thus further undermined his claim to gentlemanliness, as his style and persona were continuously likened to the London mob, the source of his political popularity as well as the supposedly natural counterpart of his intellect and behaviour. While Beckford was famous (and certainly useful to Pitt) for his populist oratorial skills and ability to arouse the common people, this simultaneously underlined his ungentlemanliness. Horace Walpole wrote that he was ‘a noisy good-humoured flatterer, bombast as became the priest of such an idol [as William Pitt], and vulgar and absurd, as was requisite to captivate any idol’s devotees, the mob. On that class in the City Beckford had much influence’. 55 Beckford’s conceptual likeness to the vulgar masses further serves to underline the interconnectedness of polite gentlemanliness and white Englishness. Colonial whites, black people, and domestic uncouth rabble were all represented in similar terms of vulgarity, irrationality, and uncontrollability and thereby all excluded from the universe of polite taste and sensibility that defined proper Englishness. 56

Beckford’s lack of gentlemanly self-presentation was most obvious in the realm of speech, which was not only the most important platform for a politician but, as Lawrence Klein has noted, the primary area of gentlemanly display of polite education. 57 Speech was also a crucial component of Englishness, as the nation’s authorised subjects – the educated, urban male elite – identified with the English nation and its ‘racialised correlative, whiteness’ through a range of ‘linguistic performatives’. 58 Creoles, of course, were widely derided for lacking in this cultural marker of white Englishness, and their broken, ‘indolent drawling’ English was ridiculed as a sign of their cultural and racial otherness. 59 Beckford, despite his English schooling, seems to have retained his ‘ugly’ Jamaican accent through his life – a characteristic for which he faced continuous critique.

The sound of Beckford’s voice as well as his style of speaking and rhetoric were often criticised in ways that equated their ungentlemanliness and Creole otherness. Boyd Alexander writes that Beckford was known for his ‘lack of charm, uncouth gestures, an inharmonious voice, a rapid utterance, ill-ordered and ill-digested thoughts, and an impetuous disposition which he was unable to check, and which led him into ridiculous situations’. 60 Even though Beckford had received a remarkably rigorous education at Oxford, every indication of his lack of knowledge of classic rhetoric and thus gentlemanly education was eagerly seized and used as an indication of his West Indian otherness. For example, he never managed to shake the ridicule targeted at him after having given an unfortunate public speech where he claimed to be arguing ‘à priori, [that is,] from facts’. 61 Accordingly, when William Pitt praised Beckford in the House for his efforts during the Seven Years’ War, the response of his fellow representatives was far from flattering, at least according to Horace Walpole’s description: ‘Pitt . . . made an extravagant panegyric on Beckford, who, he said, had done more to support government than any minister in England; . . . The House, who looked on Beckford, as wild, incoherent, superficial buffoon, of whose rhapsodies they were weary, laughed, and groaned’. 62 Beckford’s political image among his peers was thus far from that of the calm and rational British gentleman.

Whether Beckford’s failings in the polite art of speaking were in reality as manifold and remarkable as his critics claimed, is questionable – especially as he was also celebrated as a gifted orator – but also of secondary importance for my argument. What is evident is that Beckford’s Creole background invited attacks focusing on his
stereotypically West Indian failings in English gentlemanliness. Beckford’s inability to follow the rules of polite interaction reportedly made him the butt of his fellow MPs’ jokes and raillery. Playwright Richard Cumberland wrote on his memoirs of one such occasion, where Beckford and Henry Fox came to visit George Dodington at his country seat:

To Mr. Fox our host paid all that courtly homage, which he so well knew how to time and where to apply; to Beckford he did not observe the same attentions, but in the happiest flow of his raillery and wit combated this intrepid talker with admirable effect. It was an interlude truly comic and amusing. Beckford loud, voluble, self-sufficient and galled by hits, which he could not parry and probably did not expect, laid himself more and more open in the vehemence of his argument; Dodington, lolling in his chair in perfect apathy and self-command, dosing and even snoring at intervals in his lethargic way, broke out every now and then into such gleams and flashes of wit and irony, as by the contrast of his phlegm with the other’s impetuosity, made his humour irresistible, and set the table in a roar.\(^63\)

This little encounter reveals much of Beckford’s position in relation to the social elite. Beckford’s education, wealth, social status, and political influence – if not his pedigree, for his grandfather Peter was the son of a Clerkenwell cloth worker – should have brought him respect within this circle of wealthy gentlemen.\(^64\) However, Beckford’s supposed inability to produce cool and collected verbal interaction excluded him from basic sociable courtesy from his host (who himself was of humble social origin but, unlike Beckford, well-versed in polite skills), thus marking him as an outsider in the company of polite gentlemen.\(^65\)

Beckford’s country seat also testifies to his subtle social exclusion. Despite the studied opulence of ‘Fonthill Palace’, Beckford never succeeded in attracting the stream of powerful visitors he had originally intended.\(^66\) Even though he managed to get the occasional visit from his political allies such as William Pitt, Lord Temple, and Lord Shelburne, his young son’s tutor Robert Drysdale complained in 1768 that ‘there comes very little company in this house’.\(^67\) While Fonthill had become famous as one of the great houses to see for domestic tourists, its host had failed to gain the social acceptance of his peers which regular sociable visits would have indicated.\(^68\) Even the magnificent opulence which drew the tourists in was greeted with mixed feelings. Fonthill’s vast art collections, while praised for their magnificence, were also criticised for having been compiled with little taste; its grandiose furniture was deemed ‘rather gaudy’, and the house itself with its immense riches was pronounced ‘too tawdrily exhibited’ – all stereotypical failures of the colonial nouveau riche.\(^69\)

The bulk of the criticism targeted against Beckford focused on the 1760s and thus coincided with a shift towards more austere expressions of polite masculinity. Scholars have argued that the theatrical ‘ancien régime’ model of the polite gentleman started to give way to a more serious, sincere, and evangelical reconfiguration of masculinity during the 1760s, shifting the emphasis of manliness from outward display towards inward virtue and self-control.\(^70\) Anna Clark has suggested that this change had clear impacts on the political culture of Britain. While overly flamboyant, luxurious, or libertine behaviour could have earlier been compensated with displays of masculine courage such as duelling, a more sober, moralist masculine image had become more popular in politics by the 1770s.\(^71\) Britain’s growing empire was intimately connected to these discursive battles fought over masculinity, as the empire was simultaneously a conduit of luxury and
profligacy to those at home and an antidote against excessive refinement and effeminacy – a space where ‘an austere, forceful, disciplined and martial manliness could restore national spirit and power’. The Seven Years’ War escalated these debates and created a shift towards more disciplined forms of polite masculinity, as the rapid expansion of Britain’s imperial possessions and commerce gave rise to a heightened anxiety over the corruption of luxury to social morality and national strength. At home in Britain, the presence of colonials subjects was problematic, as they were the symbols of both Britain’s commercial success and socially disruptive and potentially corrupt new money. In the 1770s, social hostess Elizabeth Montagu categorically declined to visit the ‘profuse’ West Indians and the ‘magnificent’ nabobs in her neighbourhood for the fear of their foreign habits of drinking rum and eating turtle would contaminate her own household. ‘Commerce has so enriched this Kingdom, that in every County there are some new Gentry who eclipse those ancient Families which once had the superiority, and I must own I love to see it return to them’, Montagu complained, deeming the ‘mellow dignity of a [Country] Gentleman’ infinitely preferable to the ‘crude pride of a Nabob’, thus emphasising the disruptive influence of colonial money on established social order – but also implying that colonial background made true gentlemanliness impossible.

As a West Indian embodying the dangers of racial diversity, effeminate luxury, and tyrannical authoritarianism the empire raised, Beckford was caught in the middle of these debates. While his performances as a polite gentleman were lacking enough according to ancien régime standards, his profligate masculinity was nevertheless more or less tolerated before the 1760s, along with the likes of Lord Sandwich, Francis Dashwood, or John Wilkes. When the polite gentleman then became increasingly defined by his disciplined austerity, Beckford’s boisterous form of manliness left him increasingly vulnerable to moralist attacks. Like many other ancien régime politicians, Beckford was famous for his libertine behaviour. It was common knowledge that he had at least eight illegitimate children with three different women in addition to his only legitimate son William Thomas. According to Horace Walpole, Beckford made no attempt to hide this fact but rather boasted about it: “Lord Holland’s youngest son being ill, and Beckford inquiring after him, Lord Holland said he had sent him to Richmond for the air; Beckford cried out, ‘Oh! Richmond is the worst air in the world; I lost twelve natural children there last year!’ There were also public speculations of his having, in addition to his English illegitimate offspring, a host of mixed-race children left behind at Jamaica, where he was rumoured to having played ‘a Stallion to the African Fillies, on whom his Get is very numerous’. Another common West Indian stereotype, Beckford’s libertinism was taken as a manifestation of his Creole licentiousness, but it was also in growing conflict with notions of polite masculinity which were becoming less accommodating of openly profligate behaviour from elite men.

Beckford’s ungentlemanly behaviour thus played a central role in his racialisation. A similar fate awaited other colonial men of luxury; Robert Clive, the notorious nabob, became increasingly vilified in the 1760s for his outlandish opulence and ended up allegedly taking his own life in 1774. Romita Ray has drawn attention specifically to how Clive’s masculinity was othered as resulting from colonial corruption during the public dispute and official inquiry into the dealings of the East India Company during the 1760s. Other denigrated nabobs included, for example, Warren Hastings, Joseph Price, and Sir Thomas Rumbold. The extent to which polite masculinity, Englishness, and
whiteness were intertwined is further exemplified by discursive representations of macaronis – the paragons of luxurious effeminacy – who were rendered nationally questionable by their deviant masculinity and branded as Italienite or Frenchified fops. As Amelia Rauser argues, their adoption of ornamental, inauthentic versions of manly politeness made them viewed as un-English. 82 Nabobs, West Indians, fops, and macaronis were thus discursively linked by their shared love of luxury, aesthetic exuberance, and love of sensual pleasures, which effectively challenged the plain modesty of gentlemanliness. 83 For this, they were all branded similarly nationally suspicious characters. This porous negotiability of politeness/Englishness/whiteness also meant that men of impeccable pedigree, wealth, status, and ethnic background had considerable leeway for breaking behavioural codes and embracing deviant or competing forms of masculinity – as did, indeed, many of the aristocratic libertines and fops of the period. 84 For the likes of Beckford, whose colonial background already set them back in terms of white Englishness, performances of manly politeness became crucially important for successful British self-fashioning and peer recognition.

Conclusion

This essay has examined a caricatured image of William Beckford, painted by his political opponents. Their portrayal of him as the tyrannical, ungentlemanly, racially suspect Creole was, of course, grossly opportunistic and at least partly exaggerated. However, this representation of Beckford as the archetype of a West Indian slaveholder opens a window into the fears Creoles secretly raised in the minds of Britons. Beckford’s powerful position and his self-proclaimed West India advocacy made him a highly visible and lucrative target for political attacks. Moreover, because Beckford was so blatantly not quite and embodied failings in both gender, class, national identity, and ethnicity, his persona was like a lightning rod that attracted openly the sort of racialised critique that most Creoles faced only covertly. Beckford’s othering was an effective political strategy because it tapped into the shared prejudice that Britons harboured against West Indians and which found an outlet in the popular prints, novels, and caricatures of the period. Accordingly, it can be seen as a manifestation of the heightening feeling of imperial anxiety, crisis of British masculinity, and fear of overseas corruption polluting British moral, cultural, and ethnic integrity during a turbulent time in Britain’s imperial politics.

Beckford’s attempts to break into Englishness were not compromised by his ungentlemanliness alone. For example, his failing to compensate for his shortcomings through the prevalent West Indian strategy to respectability of marrying into British nobility also played a part, further illuminating the scale-like functioning of mid-century identity politics. Beckford ended up marrying a widow of a West Indian planter who, despite being the granddaughter of a Scottish peer, did not have a pedigree high enough to compensate his colonial background and unsatisfactory gentlemanliness. 85 In this respect, a revealing contrast to Beckford’s social tribulations is the successful integration of his own sister Elizabeth. Elizabeth Beckford married Thomas Howard, second earl of Effingham in 1745, and after his death in 1761 became Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte. 86 This ‘incomparable Countess’ entertained duchesses, earls, and other nobility in her Chelsea home much in the way her brother had aspired to but failed. Contemporary descriptions of Lady Effingham show that she, contrarily to her brother,
had managed to assume and perform the polite manners and values required to compensate for her colonial background.87

Elizabeth Beckford’s smooth path into the British elite also highlights the importance masculinity played in the construction of acceptable Englishness. Impoverished gentry marrying West Indians heireses was a widespread cultural stereotype in Georgian Britain, indicating that women’s cultural otherness appeared less threatening than men’s – perhaps since women as subordinates did not pose a direct political threat. In a patriarchal society, women’s foibles never carried equal social and political weight to men’s; therefore, men’s potentially corrupted bodies, manners, and minds were, as sites of power, sources of the most intense racial anxiety. Disciplining masculinity was therefore crucial to constructing racialised Englishness, and men breaking the norms of polite and increasingly sober masculinity were rhetorically and socially punished for their digressions.

Notes

1. Horace Walpole, Memoirs of the Reign of King George III, The Yale Edition, (ed.), Derek Jarrett, 4 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), pp. 177–8.
2. Matthew McCormack, The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005), pp. 2, 82–8; Philip Carter, ‘An “Effeminate” or “Efficient” Nation? Masculinity and Eighteenth-century Social Documentary’, Textual Practice, 11:3 (1997), pp. 429–43; Hilary Larkin, The Making of Englishmen: Debates on National Identity, 1550–1650 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 8. On the relationship between Englishness and Britishness as markedly separate but also overlapping, see e.g. Linda Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness: An Argument’, Journal of British Studies 31:4 (October 1992), pp. 309–29; Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992); Peter Mandler, The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006). In this essay, I examine Englishness as an ethnic identity that Georgians understood as distinct from Britishness, which was seen more as a political concept. Englishness also held special cultural meaning within the culture of politeness, which was markedly a fashionable elite and urban discourse of identity building. Thus, I speak of Britain as the geographical location of Britons, but of Englishness as a cultural, national, and racialised identity.
3. Jennifer DeVere Brody, Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), pp. 9–13; David Lambert, White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 35–6; Simon Gikandi, Slavery and the Culture of Taste (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), pp. 98–102; Roxann Wheeler, Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Mary Floyd-Wilson, English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 62; Kathleen Wilson, The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 43–8.
4. E.g. Kim Hall, Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995), pp. 147–8; Margaret W. Ferguson, ‘Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko’, in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds), Women, Race, and Writing in the Early Modern Period (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), pp. 209–224; Nell Irvin Painter, The History of White People (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), pp. 165–83.
5. Simon Gikandi, Slavery and the Culture of Taste (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), pp. 79, 99; Wheeler, Complexion of Race, p. 9; Wilson, Island Race, p. 16.
6. Wilson, Island Race, p. 155.
7. E.g. Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Cecily Jones, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627–1865* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2014); Verene A Shepherd, ‘Gender and Representation in European Accounts of Pre-Emancipation Jamaica’, in Verene Shepherd (ed.), *Engendering Caribbean History: Cross-Cultural Perspectives, a Reader* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2011), pp. 210–21; Onni Gust, *Unhomely Empire: Whiteness and Belonging, c.-1760–1830* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021); Tillman W. Nechtkam, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010); Brooke N. Newman, *A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2018); Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004).

8. Rosalind Carr, ‘The Gentleman and the Soldier: Patriotic Masculinities in Eighteenth-Century Scotland’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28:2 (2008), pp. 102–121, on 111. See also Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660–1800* (Harlow: Longman 2001); Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996); Karen Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity, circa 1650–1800’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 296–311.

9. Carter, *Men and the Emergence*, pp. 60–76; Michèle Cohen, ‘Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England’, in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds), *English Masculinities 1660–1800* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 44–61; McCormack, *Independent Man*, 1–2; Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014), pp. 17–30.

10. Carr, ‘Gentleman and the Soldier’, p. 107.

11. Wilson, *Island Race*, pp. 14–25; John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987); Karen Downing, *The Gentleman Boxer: Boxing, Manners, and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England*, *Men and Masculinities*, 12:3 (2010), pp. 328–52; Shaun Regan and Francis De Bruyn, ‘Introduction’, in *The Culture of the Seven Years’ War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2014), pp. 1–24, on 5–6.

12. Susan C. Greenfield, “Abroad and at Home”: Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, in *PMLA* 112 (March 1997), pp. 214–28, on 220; J. B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners*, new ed. (London: Parsons et al., 1793), p. 105.

13. A *Letter to a Right Honourable Person. And the Answer to It . . . with Notes Historical, Critical, Political, & c.* (London: W. Nicoll, 1761), v.

14. Alexandra Shepard, ‘From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 281–95, on 293.

15. See e.g. *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003); Charles W. Mills, ‘Materialising Race’, in Emily S. Lee (ed.) *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race* (Albany: State University of New York, 2014), pp. 19–42; George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011).

16. Wilson, *Island Race*, p. 155.

17. Lynn Abrams, ‘The Taming of Highland Masculinity: Inter-personal Violence and Shifting Codes of Manhood, c.1760–1840’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 92:1, pp. 100–22; Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness’, p. 314. See also e.g. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), Ch. 6 & 7; Ian Campbell, *Renaissance Humanism and Ethnicity Before Race: The Irish and the English in the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013); Hall, *Things of Darkness*, pp. 11–12.

18. Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 13.
19. On the trope of the West Indian, see Sypher, “The West-Indian as a ‘Character’”; Carol Barash, ‘The Character of Difference: The Creole Woman as Cultural Mediator in Narratives About Jamaica’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23:4 (Summer 1990), pp. 406–24; Aleksandra Hultquist, ‘Creole Space: Jamaica, Fallen Women, and British Literature’, in Mona Narain & Karen Gevirtz (eds), *Gender and Space in British Literature, 1660–1820* ([s. l.]: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 33–48; Newman, *Dark Inheritance*, pp. 133–41. Sir Peter Pepperpot is the foolish Creole character in Samuel Foote’s play *The Patron* (1764).

20. Amy Frost, ‘The Beckford era’, in Caroline Dakers (ed.), *Fonthill Recovered: A Cultural History* ([London]: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 59–93, on 59–61; Horace Walpole to Richard Bentley, 23 February 1755, *The Yale Edition of Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 35 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 1973), pp. 210–11; ‘History’, The Fonthill Estate, https://www.fonthill.co.uk/history/, accessed 6 September 2018. On West Indian attempts to mediate their identity through buying country estates and other conspicuous consumption, see Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, pp. 105–9; Nechtmann, *Nabobs*, p. 165.

21. Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), pp. 52–75.

22. Gauci, *William Beckford*, pp. 52–75.

23. Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, pp. 118–19.

24. On black Britons, see e.g. *Britain’s Black Past*, ed. Gretchen H. Gerzina (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020); David Oluosoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Macmillan, 2016); Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733–1833* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2018).

25. Gauci, *William Beckford*, pp. 103–14; Peter D. G. Thomas, *George III: King and Politicians 1760–1770* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), pp. 12–13.

26. Gauci, *William Beckford*, p. 203; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2012), pp. 4–8, 46–55, 98–101; Jack P. Greene, ‘Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution’, in P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), pp. 208–30, on 226; Wilson, *Island Race*, pp. 129–31; Nechtmann, *Nabobs*, p. 136. Anti-slavery sentiment and racial anxiety were not necessarily at odds, as abolitionism was at least partly fuelled by the fear of white degeneration into moral corruption and tyranny as well as racist wishes to bring ‘savage’ blacks to humanity (see e.g. Brown, *Moral Capital*, Ch. 1; Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune*, 196–207).

27. William Beckford to James Knight, 18 June 1743, BL Add. MS 12,431, ff. 125–6; Gentleman’s Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, XI (1741), pp. 145–47, 186, quoted in Brown, *Moral Capital*, 34. Knight prepared a book manuscript titled *A History of Jamaica* to this effect but never published it. The manuscript is held at the British Library, BL Add. MS 12,416.

28. [Richard Bentley,] *Patriotism, a Mock–Heroic*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Wilkie, 1765); Gauci, *William Beckford*, pp. 121–2. On Beckford’s patriotic rhetoric, see Gauci, *William Beckford*, p. 88.

29. Gazeteter and London Daily Advertiser, 2 July 1762; *A Collection of all the remarkable and personal passages in the Briton, Mr Briton, and Auditor* (London: [s.n.], 1766), in *A select collection of the most interesting tracts, which appeared during the years 1763, 1764, and 1765* (London: J. Almon, 1766), p. 11.

30. Trevor Burnard, ‘Powerless Masters: The Curious Decline of Jamaican Sugar Planters in the Foundational Period of British Abolitionism’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 32:2 (June 2011), pp. 185–98; Natalie A. Zacek, ‘Cultivating Virtue: Samuel Martin and the Paternal Ideal in the Eighteenth-Century English West Indies’, *Wadabagei*, 10:3 (2007), pp. 8–31, on 10–11; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 274–5; Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 114. See also Louis Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016), 191; Candace Ward, *Crossing the Line: Early Creole Novels and Anglophone Caribbean Culture in the Age of Emancipation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), pp. 2–7; Wylie Sypher,
'The West-Indian as a “Character” in the Eighteenth Century’, Studies in Philology, 36:3 (1939), pp. 503–20, on 503–7.
31. Burnard, ‘Harvest Years?’. See also Vincent Brown, Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2020), 213–16; Newman, Dark Inheritance, pp. 110–14; Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, pp. 69–70; Brody, Impossible Purities.
32. Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, pp. 175–80, 203.
33. Sara Salih, Representing Mixed Race in Jamaica and England from the Abolition Era to the Present (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 3; Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, pp. 5, 14.
34. The History of an Old Lady and Her Family, 2nd ed. (London: M. Cooper, 1754), pp. 16, 18; ‘The City Farce. As it was acted at Guild-Hall, in the Month of April 1757’, in The New Foundling Hospital for Wit. Being a Collection of Curious Pieces in Verse and Prose by Several Eminent Persons, part 2 (London: 1768), p. 68; Gauci, William Beckford, p. 90. On cannibalist representations as a form of racialising, see e.g. Gananath Obeyesekere, Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
35. [Timothy Touchstone], Tea and Sugar, or the Nabob and the Creole (London: J. Ridgway, 1792), p. 11.
36. A Collection of all the remarkable and personal passages, p. 11.
37. City Races [London: [s.n.] 1768?], [i].
38. Gikandi, Slavery and the Culture of Taste, pp. 94–100. See e.g. Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), 150; David Hume, ‘Of National Characters’ and ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, in E. F. Miller (ed.), Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, orig. 1777. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).
39. Charles W. Mills, The Racial Contract (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 12–19; Gauci, William Beckford, p. 139.
40. ‘The City Farce’, p. 68.
41. Jenny Davidson, Breeding: A Partial History of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), pp. 6–9.
42. Sebastiani, The Scottish Enlightenment, Ch. 1; Wheeler, Complexion of Race, pp. 24–8.
43. Wilson, Island Race, p. 12; Wheeler, Complexion of Race, p. 177; Mills, Racial Contract, pp. 20–30.
44. Long, History of Jamaica, 2 vols, pp. 261–2.
45. Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, 2 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1793), pp. 6–15; John Stewart, An Account of Jamaica, and Its Inhabitants (London: Longman et al., 1808), pp. 152–64; Moreton, West India Customs and Manners, pp. 104–13; The Importance of Jamaica to Great Britain, Consider’d (London: A. Dodd, [1740?]), pp. 7–8. See also e.g. Wilson, Island Race, pp. 153–5; Louis Nelson, Architecture and Empire in Jamaica (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016), p. 191; Justin Greving, ‘Accounting for Lady Nugent’s Creole House’, Arris 23 (2017), pp. 16–27.
46. Trevor Burnard, ‘Harvest Years? Reconfigurations of Empire in Jamaica, 1756–1807’, The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 40:4 (2012), pp. 533–55.
47. B. W. Higman, ‘The West India “Interest” in Parliament, 1807–1833’, Australian Historical Studies, 13:49 (1967), pp. 1–19.
48. Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser, 2 July 1762. These claims had some truth to them, as not only Beckford but also his three brothers had indeed tried to buy themselves borough seats in the parliament. (See A Short Account of the Interest and Conduct of the Jamaica Planters (London: M. Cooper, 1754)), p. 3.
49. W. P. Courtney and Andrew J. O’Shaughnessy, ‘Payne, Ralph, Baron Lavington (1739–1807), politician’, in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, accessed 5 May 2020; Walpole, Memoirs of the Reign of King George III, 4 vols, p. 178; Kenneth Morgan, ‘Long, Edward (1734–1813), planter and commentator on Jamaican affairs’, in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, accessed 5 May 2020.
50. Courtney and O’Shaughnessy, ‘Payne, Ralph’: Walpole, Memoirs of the Reign of King George III, 4 vols, p. 178; Morgan, ‘Long, Edward’.
51. Natalie Zacek, ‘Creoligarchs: Being West Indian in Georgian London’, Symposium ‘Ongoing’ Mobilities in the Early Modern World, University of Manchester, 4 March 2021.
52. History of an Old Lady, pp. 16, 18; ‘The City Farce’, p. 68; Horace Walpole to Lord Hertford, 27 January 1765, The Yale Edition of Walpole’s Correspondence, 38 vols, pp. 498–9.
53. The Public Advertiser, 19 March 1768.
54. History of an Old Lady, pp. 15–16.
55. Walpole, Memoirs of the Reign of King George II, 3 vols, pp. 53–4.
56. Gikandi, Slavery and the Culture of Taste, p. 99.
57. Lawrence E. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 4. See also Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, pp. 1–4; Soile Ylivuori, Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 218–19.
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60. Boyd Alexander, England’s Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford (London: Centaur, 1962), pp. 32–3.
61. A Collection of all the Remarkable and Personal Passages, p. 11.
62. Horace Walpole, Memoirs of the Reign of King George II, The Yale Edition, ed. John Brooke, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), p. 54.
63. Richard Cumberland, Memoirs of Richard Cumberland, 1 vols (London: Lackington et al., 1807), pp. 190–1.
64. Gikandi, Slavery and the Culture of Taste, p. 120.
65. On George Dodington’s background, see ‘George Bubb Dodington’, The Spectator Online, 15 November 1919, accessed 5 April 2019; A. A. Hanham, ‘Dodington, George Bubb, Baron Melcombe (1690/91–1762), politician and diarist’, in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, accessed 16 October 2019.
66. Gauci, William Beckford, p. 161; Frost, ‘The Beckford era’, pp. 66, 73.
67. Robert Drysdale to Rev. James Nairne, 13 October 1768, reprinted in Wiltshire Gazette, 14 February 1924.
68. On the importance of visiting to social networks and identity, see e.g. Hannah Greig, The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), Ch. 4; Amanda Vickery, The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), pp. 196–209.
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