



Thomas Gainsborough, *Ignatius Sancho* (1768)

Ignatius Sancho biography, from *Contemporary Black Biography* (Gale Group):

Ignatius Sancho was a well-known, self-educated Black man in mid-18th-century London who is credited with having been the first Briton of African descent to participate in civic and cultural activities that had traditionally been closed to people of color. A house slave from early childhood, in young adulthood he became an emancipated employee, working as a butler for the Duke and Duchess of Montagu. Sancho was a composer of music, poetry, and essays, as well as a prolific writer of correspondence about slavery and other political and cultural issues with prominent literary and social figures of his day, including Samuel Johnson and Laurence Sterne. British playwright and actor Paterson Joseph, whose one-man stage production *Sancho: An Act of Remembrance* opened in New York City in 2015, observed in the book of the same name, "Sancho's life was filled with the joy and pain of being at once free and simultaneously caged within his race and place in eighteenth-century society." Joseph added, "Charles Ignatius Sancho is a hero to all black Britons.... And for all of us, of whatever shade, he shows the way to count our circumstances as given, but not the final word on our destiny."

[Letter to Jack Wingrave, 1778:](#)

In some one of your letters which I do not recollect, you speak (with honest indignation) of the treachery and chicanery of the natives. My good friend, you should remember from whom they learnt those vices....I am sorry to observe that the practice of your country (which as a resident I love—and for its freedom, and for the many blessings I enjoy in it, shall ever have my warmest wishes, prayers, and blessings); I say, it is with reluctance that I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East West Indies - and even on the coast of Guinea.

The grand object of English navigators - indeed of all Christian navigators - is money - money - money - for which I do not pretend to blame them. Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth into every part - to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love, society, and mutual dependence: the enlightened Christian should diffuse the Riches of the Gospel of peace, with the commodities of his respective land. Commerce attended with strict honesty, and with Religion for its companion, would be a blessing to every shore it touched at. In Africa, the poor, wretched natives - blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil - are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing - the Christians' abominable Traffic for slaves - and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty Kings - encouraged by their Christian customers - who carry them strong liquors, to enflame their national madness - and powder and bad fire-arms, to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping.