Introduction

Writing a History of the Present

The History of Jamaica was published anonymously in London in three volumes in 1774 (Figure I.1).[1] It made an immediate impact. Edward Long was quickly identified as the author and was soon being called upon to speak with authority on matters connected with slavery. Long's ownership of Lucky Valley, a sugar plantation in the parish of Clarendon, with a labour force of more than three hundred enslaved men, women and children, was the major source of his wealth. After a residence of eleven years in Jamaica, during which time the labour of the enslaved steadily increased the value of his holdings, he could afford to return to England, the place of his birth and his young manhood. Some of the work had been written before leaving the island, but much of it was completed in his house in South Street in Chichester, a town within relatively easy reach of the capital, where he had settled with his wife, Mary, and their young family (Figure I.2). Long arrived in England at a time of significant change. The end of the Seven Years War in 1763 had brought a signal increase in Britain's global power. New territories meant substantial new populations of mixed ethnicities and religious beliefs, provoking questions about the meaning and extent of British subjecthood.[2] When he had left England in 1757, few voices had been raised against colonial slavery, which was commonly accepted as contributing to Britain's wealth. By the time he returned, the question as to whether slavery was legal in England, the land of liberty, had become a matter of public concern.

[1] [Edward Long], *The History of Jamaica Or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island, with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements. Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government* (3 vols., London, 1774). All subsequent references are to the Cambridge facsimile edition (Cambridge, 2010); 'Notice of Publication', *General Evening Post*, 14 July 1774. Thanks to Markman Ellis for this reference.

[2] Jack P. Greene, *Evaluating Empire and Confronting Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

THE

HISTORY

OF

JAMAICA.

OR,

GENERAL SURVEY OF THE ANTIENT AND MODERN STATE

OF

THAT ISLAND:

WITH

Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

ILLUSTRATED WITH COPPER PLATES.

VOL. II.

—— mea fuit semper hâc in re voluntas et sententia, quemvis ut hoc vellem de iis, qui essent idonei susciperе, quàm me;—me, ut mallem, quàm neminem.

CIC. Orat. in CÆCILIUM.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR T. LOWNDES, IN FLEET-STREET.
MDCCLXXIV.

Figure I.1 Title page of *The History of Jamaica*. Reproduced from Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island, with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774). Digitally printed version © Cambridge University Press 2010.

A variety of legal opinions and cases had not settled this point. The slave trade had clearly been legislated for in parliament, but what about slavery? There was no clear legal judgment on this. The Yorke–Talbot opinion of 1729 was that a slave was his master's property whether in England or in the colonies. Yorke (now Hardwicke) had opined in 1749 that a slave 'is as much

Figure I.2 A photograph from the early 1900s of Long's home in South Street, Chichester, where much of the *History* was written. © Gravelroots Archives.

property as any other thing'.[3] In 1767 Granville Sharp had taken up the case of Jonathan Strong, raising the issue of a slave-owner's rights over 'his property' once in England. Other cases were brought to law concerning the kidnapping of enslaved or formerly enslaved persons in the metropole, and the outcomes had been varied.[4] Sharp spent two years studying the law and in 1769 published *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery in England. Or of admitting the least claim of private property in the persons of man in England, etc.*, the first major work of anti-slavery by a British author. The book amassed a considerable volume of legal arguments against slavery. Both pro-slavers and anti-slavers were ready to test the issue in the courts. The case of James Somerset provided the opportunity. Somerset had been brought to England by the man who claimed ownership of him, James Stewart; he had managed to escape, but was subsequently kidnapped on to a ship for passage to the Caribbean and re-enslavement. This became the occasion to test the notion of the 'free air' of England before Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice. Mansfield's judgment in 1772 discharged Somerset and declared slavery to be repugnant in England. He demarcated between England, a place that did not permit the kidnapping of Africans in order to re-enslave them, and the colonies, places where slavery was

[3] Cited in Dana Y. Rabin, '"In a Country of Liberty?": Slavery, Villeinage and the Making of Whiteness in the Somerset Case', *HWJ* 72 (2011), 11.

[4] Katherine Paugh, 'The Curious Case of Mary Hylas: Wives, Slaves and the Limits of British Abolitionism', *S&A* 35.4 (2014), 629–51.

legitimate.[5] Abolitionists claimed this as a great victory, though the judgment only freed the individual man. Pro-slavers reacted with horror.

Long found himself in a very different atmosphere from the England he had left in 1757. His right to his human property was being challenged. His first act was to pen a furious polemic against Mansfield who had attempted, as he put it, 'to wash the blackamoor white'.[6] But his history, if it were to be authoritative, needed something much more than polemic. In the wake of the Somerset decision, it was a matter of urgency to persuade his metropolitan audience that colonial slavery was essential to British wealth and power. The necessary corollary was that black people were not equal and were born to serve those who were white. He was writing for a colonial as well as a metropolitan public, and he hoped to persuade white colonists of the need for change. If the island were to have a secure and settled future, their conduct must be modified. The Somerset trial had marked an iconic moment, a moment of rupture in metropolitan understandings of racial difference, when thinking about the slave trade and slavery as in some respects un-English broke through a common sense of its acceptability. This marked a new conjuncture, a time of intensifying struggle, when anti-slavery voices were no longer marginalized but moving into the centre ground of politics and culture. The protracted struggle that gradually ensued only concluded more than half a century later with the abolition of slavery in 1834. This was a moment that ushered in a new conjuncture, new articulations of racial hierarchy and new struggles over the meanings of race and freedom.

Long had three priorities: the first to defend slavery and the colonial system, the second to put Jamaica on the Enlightenment map, the third to identify the success of the colony with that of his family. What kind of writer was he and what kind of text did he produce? As a boy he had been schooled in the classics and he knew much of Homer by heart. The adolescent Long was a passionate reader of *Mr Spectator* and was greatly influenced by Addison's notions of 'taste' and 'politeness'. He had tried his hand at writing as a young man in England in the 1750s and had published several issues of a periodical, as well as a novel. Over his lifetime he wrote in many different forms – satires, polemics, novels, books of manners, political pamphlets, petitions and press reports – as well as the *History*. Writers could use the power of print to spread their knowledge and understanding. As a man of letters, following in the footsteps of others he had read, not least Hume and Smollett, he was convinced that

[5] There are many accounts of the Somerset case and its context. See particularly Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital. Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006); Dana Y. Rabin, *Britain and its Internal Others, 1750–1800. Under Rule of Law* (Manchester, 2017).

[6] [Edward Long], *Candid Reflections upon the Judgement Lately Awarded by the Court of King's Bench in Westminster Hall on what is Commonly Called the Negroe Cause by a Planter* (London, 1772).

writers should aim at a comprehensive knowledge of society.[7] His training as a lawyer in London had meant honing the skills associated with presenting arguments and clarifying legal points. His years serving in the assembly, Jamaica's legislative body, had given him extensive political experience of debate and argument, both in the colony and in its troubled relations with the mother country. He had an intimate knowledge of the workings of the colonial state. The best historians, as Addison and Hume agreed, were those with experience of public business, possessing a familiarity with men and things.[8] His membership of the white creole elite, assured because of both his ancestry, his marriage and his property, meant that he was a part of the colony's ruling class; he could expect an audience, both in the metropole and beyond. His experience as a planter, together with his family connections to one of London's leading West India merchant houses, meant that he could write knowledgably, from a slave-owner's perspective, on sugar and commerce. The influence of Davenant and the political arithmeticians had fed his capacities as an 'actuarial historian', with interests in trade, populations and demography, the workings of economic life.[9] Living on the fringes of the Enlightenment, since Jamaica did not figure in Enlightenment thinking, he engaged with its writers and was enthusiastic as to the importance of natural history and the history of humankind.[10] His voracious curiosity, belief in the importance of education, instruction and improvement, interest in comparison, conviction that he had abandoned superstitious fears and desire to make his readers familiar with distant things all marked him as an Enlightenment man. Tristram Shandy's satire on Enlightenment learning, with its focus on 'knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, enigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical and obstetrical', might have been penned with Long in mind.[11] His property and education ensured him the status of a gentleman, a man who could write and expect to publish and be noticed from a secure landed position.[12] He was both a 'planter historian', representing, he hoped, a 'planter ideal', a man of public spirit and benevolence, and a 'planter philosopher', as

[7] John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–1780. An Equal, Wide Survey* (London, 1983).
[8] Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989).
[9] The term is utilized by Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic. Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC, 2005).
[10] Unlike the family of the Johnstones, based in Scotland, he did not personally know any of these writers, but they were central to his thinking. Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires. An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011).
[11] Lawrence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* [1759] (Oxford, 2020), 50.
[12] Elizabeth Bohls stresses the importance of his position as a 'colonial gentleman' to his rhetorical strategies, but he was also an English gentleman. *Slavery and the Politics of Place. Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770–1833* (Cambridge, 2014).

demonstrated by his engagement with the Enlightenment thinkers on the nature of human beings. Despite his insistence on his identity as a free-born Englishman, he was also a Jamaican patriot.[13] We might now think of him as a diasporic figure, living across the two islands and attempting to negotiate that space. After years of active involvement in colonial politics, he had no interest in a seat in the House of Commons, as other West Indians did, hoping for influence 'at home'. Rather, he chose to write: that would be his political intervention.

History by the mid-eighteenth century was widely understood to be an important vehicle of national understanding.[14] Long's title, *The History of Jamaica*, was somewhat misleading, since only a small part of volume I comprised a historical narrative.[15] The subtitle clarified the scope of the three volumes: it was a *General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island, with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements. Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government*. This was hardly a conventional history, given the modest amount of material dealing with the past in narrative form. But centring the relation between past and present was at the heart of Long's project. His story was of the development of the 'infant colony' to what he hoped to depict as a settled and stable society. His *History* is perhaps best described as *a history of the present*, a political, economic, social and cultural representation of Jamaica in the 1760s. It tells us of the workings of racial capitalism in this particular mid-eighteenth-century Atlantic form, framed by a mercantilist system which structured the relation between metropole and colony. This was a system rooted in the 'Guinea Trade', the capture of Africans and the utilization of their lives and labour on Caribbean cane fields to produce sugar for export to Britain. Its mercantile base, the source of credit, was in London; its plantation regime was shored up by a colonial state designed to fix racial hierarchies. Long describes the workings of government and the law, the organization of capital, the production and reproduction of an economy and

[13] Denis Benn describes Long and Bryan Edwards as 'planter historians' in *The Caribbean. An Intellectual History, 1774–2003* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2004); Tim Watson describes the form as 'creole realism' in *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 2008); David Lambert depicts the 'planter ideal' in *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, 2005); Silvia Sebastiani describes Long as a 'planter philosopher' in 'Global Integration, Social Disintegration: Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* 1774', in Jeremy Adelman and Andreas Eckert (eds.), *Nations, Empires and Other World Products: Making Narratives across Borders* (forthcoming); Edward (later Kamau) Brathwaite, first opened my eyes to the importance of creole patriotism; *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford, 1971).

[14] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race. Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003).

[15] He was writing on the eve of a historiographical transformation: his work, a 'compilation', was of the mid-eighteenth century.

society built on cane, the plants that could be harnessed to commerce, the islands' inhabitants designated as free and unfree, white and black, the landscape transformed in the interests of the production of wealth and the protection of white power. Black rebellion and white fears haunt the text. Long worked hard in his writing to suppress his own anxieties and persuade himself and others that nature had ordained racial difference and inequality. He would attempt to control the world through his text.

A 'sheer variety of narrative forms' were employed by eighteenth-century writers such as Hume, Goldsmith and Robertson. Long followed this practice.[16] In the new world of print and expanding audiences, authors needed to find forms of historical narrative that met the demands of a commercial society, recognizing the values of the merchants, traders and professionals who constituted sections of this new reading public. Some of these writers were increasingly aware of the growing audience of women: Long addressed them in his more sentimental writing.[17] Conjectural history, with its combination of history and social theory and emphasis on social relations, forms of property, production and stadial thinking, the history of manners, accounts of travel and natural history, biography and novels were all defining themselves in relation to more traditional concepts of history. There was space for many different genres.[18] As Long instructed his eldest son, Edward Beeston, who was then studying at Trinity Hall in Cambridge, on the distinction between history and literature,

> I am thinking that in reading History, our attention is chiefly applied to Facts: and to the manners, vices and virtues of Mankind. But that we must look for the beautiful and exact in stile or composition in writers of a different Class, whose subject is not embarrassed with historical narrative or technical Description, Therefore, that one should not hope to study the elegance of language in Historical Tracts. There may possibly be some exceptions to this opinion among the Antients, as well as the moderns . . . I am partial to Cicero for I cannot but esteem his the most complete model of elegant writing among the Romans: His language so easy yet so polished, and his periods so harmoniously turned.[19]

[16] Mark Salber Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57.2 (1996), 297–316.

[17] See, for example, [Long], *The Sentimental Exhibition; or, Portraits and Sketches of the Times* (London, 1774). In his novel and periodical writing, Long was attentive to the inward dimensions of private life, an arena that did not figure in his *History*.

[18] Joanna De Groot, *Empire and History Writing in Britain, c. 1750–2012* (Manchester, 2013); Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1997).

[19] Long to Edward Beeston Long, 17 October 1780, in R. Mowbray Howard, *Records and Letters of the Family of the Longs of Longville, Jamaica, and Hampton Lodge, Surrey* (2 vols., London, 1925), I. 146–7.

In a moment of perhaps *faux* modesty, Long drew the epigraph for his *History* from Cicero: 'This was always my wish and my judgement in this case, that I would rather any suitable person undertake the case rather than me, but rather myself than nobody at all.'[20] He clearly hoped to be an elegant writer himself, in the manner of the ancients. His 'compilation', as he diffidently named it, would combine a narrative of the 'Facts' of history, with a depiction of the 'manners, vices and virtues of Mankind', plus the 'technical Description' of estate management, sugar production and trade.[21] All this would sit alongside other forms: maps, engravings, poetry, georgic and picturesque renditions of the beauties of the island with their detour to the imaginary, even an occasional satirical piece.[22] The use of these different genres with their shifts in tone and vocabulary enabled contradictions and tensions in his writing and thinking. His optimistic vision of the economic benefits of commerce, or the civilizing effects of conditions of capture and enslavement on Africans, both aligned with progress, was juxtaposed with medicalized discourses, languages of infection, pollution and disorder associated with miscegenation, rebellion and the ever-present threat of illness and death. Long's voluminous writings bore witness to the discordant elements of his thinking and his strenuous efforts to keep his psychic balance.

His deliberate intent in writing the *History* was laid out for his readers in his opening pages. There was no adequate account of Jamaica, he wrote; several histories had been published but they only gave general outlines. This was very unsatisfactory for those who intended to settle there. He was hoping, he might have added, for many new settlers and these volumes were to encourage them. 'Having spent some years of my life there, I thought I could not devote my leisure to better purpose, than endeavouring to give an idea of its products and importance to Great-Britain.'[23] His expertise as an eyewitness was thus established: his residence had equipped him to write from experience, record with authority. Critics of slavery often wrote from hearsay; his account would be different. The naval and military history of the island was already well covered, nor would he record the speeches of governors, for they were neither entertaining nor instructive. Indeed, he produced a heavy critique of the character of the governors and their many abuses of power. He would deal with 'civil and military establishments', products, commerce, climate, soil, agriculture, counties, towns and 'natural curiosities'.[24] He would display, he promised, 'an

[20] Thanks to Tom Harrison for his translation from the Latin.
[21] Long, *History*, I. 2.
[22] Beth Fowkes Tobin discusses the centrality of the use of different genres to developing eighteenth-century ideas about land, labour and natural resources in the tropics; *Colonizing Nature. The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760–1820* (Philadelphia, 2005).
[23] Long, *History*, I. 1.
[24] Ibid., I. 2.

impartial character of its inhabitants of all complexions' (a claim he did not meet), 'with some strictures on Negro slaves in particular, and freed persons, and laws affecting them'. His aim, he stressed, was to be accurate about commerce, for Jamaica was a commercial colony, its sugar the source of British wealth (Plate 5). It had been difficult to find adequate statistics on trade and he had been obliged to make use of many authors, hence the sense of a compilation. Since there was no adequate account of the early history of conquest and what followed, he would narrate those years, having consulted the best authorities he could find. That was the time (1655) when his great-grandfather, Samuel Long, had arrived in Jamaica, with the English military, and had settled on the island, establishing the plantations which were the source of family wealth. Though never explicitly stated, the *History* would be a record of the success of his family as well as of the island: the development from an 'infant colony' to a settled state; the uneven passage, from Samuel's early years as a colonial pioneer, to the disaster that befell Edward's grandfather Charles; the problems faced as a consequence by his own father, Samuel, and the rescue that he had effected, resulting in the possibility of the longed-for return to England.

Maintaining the liberties of the colonists, free-born Englishmen, was a primary concern. Long was writing from an *entailed inheritance*, as Burke was to imagine it, 'derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity', the special nature of English liberties, 'an estate especially belonging to the people of this kingdom'.[25] He and his fellow colonists owned this inheritance. They would pass it to their sons and grandsons. Their English liberties were their birth-right and their security. Regrettably, those liberties had been threatened, and he would have to detail many abuses of power. Those living in 'remote parts' of the British empire were subject to 'consummate tyranny' and 'injustice' meted out to them by crown-appointed officials. 'The subjects here', he wrote, 'May be compared to the helpless offspring of a planter, sent to the distance of many thousand miles from his parent, exposed to the imperious domination of strangers, and exiled beyond the reach of fatherly protection.'[26] Here was a key metaphor: the helpless colony, gendered as masculine, was neglected by the mother country, characterized as both maternal and paternal, which was failing to exercise proper fatherly protection. Rather, 'imperious strangers' were exercising unwarranted 'domination' and misuse of power. The best remedy for this, he argued, drawing on his knowledge of the improper prorogations and dissolutions of the assembly that he had witnessed, was frequent meetings of that elected body. Then the representatives of the 'commons', as he described them, the white freeholders, could bring offenders to justice. While the Romans had dealt

[25] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1790), 47.
[26] Long, *History*, I. 3.

properly with the officials of their distant colonies, the same could not be said of the 'Mother-state', which had allowed provincial governors, 'so horrid a group', to exercise unlimited '*insolence of office*'.[27] Mindful of the voices of those critics of the planters who were beginning to have weight, Long reported that when the colonists

> complained of violations done to their liberty, the enemies of the West-India islands have often retorted upon them the impropriety of their clamouring with so much vehemence for what they deny to so many thousand negroes, whom they hold in bondage. 'Give freedom' (say they) 'to others, before you claim it for your selves.'[28]

Yet, he reminded his readers, the Romans and Athenians had also held others in servitude, and it was noteworthy that the more they valued their independence, the more indulgent they were to their slaves. For who doubts, he asked rhetorically, that the servant of a freeman would be better treated than 'the servant of an enslaved person'?[29] He was not suggesting, he hastened to add – thinking no doubt of the Somerset case and Mansfield's verdict that slavery was repugnant in England – that slavery should be introduced into a *free* country, but, 'where it happens to be *inevitably* necessary' and where it was 'under proper limitations' and in no way threatened the liberties of the parent state, then it should be recognized.[30] It was the liberties of the colonists, their 'birth-right', their 'possession of British freedom' and 'spirit of independence', that would secure the safety of the 'mother-state'.[31] Slavery must not enslave the parent state. For Britons to be free, colonists must be free to enslave. There were two kinds of freedom: freedom from tyranny and freedom to impose it on others. Colonists' freedoms, his argument ran, would ensure the good treatment of their human property. Like Roman patriarchs they would administer justly. In a plantation economy slavery was '*inevitably* necessary', for white men could not labour in the tropics. The liberties of the colonists, and indeed of the empire, depended on the enslavement of others.

In concluding his introduction, he apologized for the confusions and repetitions that had resulted from his attempt to write 'a complete history', noted that those who came to Jamaica 'do not emigrate for the purpose of compiling histories, but avowedly that of accumulating money', and submitted his 'unpolished *survey of Jamaica*' to his readers.[32] His story aimed to be one of progress in civil society, from days of disorder to well-established forms of governance, settled towns and well-run plantations, and in the natural world,

[27] Ibid., I. 4.
[28] Ibid., I. 5.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., I. 6.
[32] Ibid., I. 6, 8.