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## Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: National Trust in Jane Austen's Empires of Sugar

Tré Ventour-Griffiths  
*Independent Scholar*, treventourcreative@outlook.com

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## Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: National Trust in Jane Austen's Empires of Sugar

### Keywords

Austen, empire, anit-blackness, white supremacy, heritage

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Jane Austen's literary works and the subsequent screen media adaptations feature beautiful British stately homes surrounded by picturesque landscapes and gardens. The estates in her novels are inspired by real-life counterparts across the breadth of Britain which are then also repurposed as film sets in adaptations to represent the ideals and aesthetics of Regency Britain so celebrated in academic and popular cultural spaces alike. However, in September 2020, a National Trust inquiry evidenced something many already knew: lots of Britain's celebrated heritage sites were sustained by money generated by global colonialism. At least twenty-nine properties are tethered to successful claims made during the compensation scheme, where the UK Government gave £20m to the planter-class for their loss of enslaved people, classified as 'property' by colonial laws. This translates to about £17bn in today's money (UCL). In *Britain's Forgotten Slaveowners*, historian David Olusoga tells us that having lost the 'moral argument' for maintaining enslavement, the planter-class exploited the law to get compensation:

... property was sacred to the British, and the idea that the Government or anybody else could deprive you of [it] was abhorrent ... property and the right to property ran to the very heart of British culture and British law" (Profit and Loss, 00:28:16-00:28:42).

As the National Trust report shows, "[About] one third of properties ... [are] directly connected to colonial histories" (National Trust 4). Thus, the heritage homes of Jane Austen's worlds are rooted in economic racism against Black and Brown people under white supremacy as a sociopolitical system (Mills).

Following the 2020 murder of George Floyd, Britain saw a renewed public reckoning with its imperial legacy. The toppling of colonial statues such as Edward Colston in Bristol City compounded with the state removal of others (Aamna Mohdin and Rhi Storer, *The Guardian*) and a resurgence within education to decolonise curricula – runs adjacent to a significant "culture war" fomented by the right in Britain to what they perceive as a "woke" agenda in the heritage industry (Hinsliff). Where the violent reaction to historical accountability is built on the idea that inquiries into Britain's colonial past are an unnecessary thorn in the bosom of Little England. Simultaneously, while styling themselves as 'The Common Sense Group,' some Tory MPs argued:

History must neither be sanitised nor rewritten to suit "snowflake" preoccupations. A clique of powerful, privileged liberals must not be allowed to rewrite our history in their image (Quoted by Alessandra Scotto Di Santolo in *London Express*, November 2020).

Yet isn't it the job of professional historians to rewrite history? As David Olusoga writes, "Historians should repeatedly point out that the '...rewriting of history' is not some act of professional misconduct but literally the job of professional historians." It's about framing, and the recoil against the National Trust's report, pertinently from sections of the public and British press, shows that Britain is not prepared to deal with its imperial past and how that history has caught up to the present. As even some members reportedly erupted in anger at the Trust's annual meeting:

The backlash comes after the Trust published a 115-page report in September [2020] into links between colonialism and slavery, amid Black Lives Matter protests across the world. ... Churchill's Chartwell home in Kent was highlighted as the war hero was a former Colonial Secretary. However, members of the Trust have lashed out at the report, with some saying they have defamed the war hero's memory (Steven Brown in *Daily Mail*, November 2020).

Still, this is a country that seeks to celebrate the spoils of the British Empire without acknowledging the racism and white supremacy it took to produce many of these heritage sites. Similarly, as Afua Hirsch notes:

I have always wondered how we have managed to contort our memories in such a way as to celebrate abolishing something, while forgetting how fundamental a prior role we played in developing it in the first place. We were not only one of the trade's major protagonists, but also one of its earliest adopters (50).

In recent Austen adaptations, a pattern of celebrating Regency culture while denying the labour, blood, and pillage that produced it continues. In this piece I discuss the epistemic violence that continues in Austen spaces that refuses to address what Edward Said long ago pointed out in his discussion of *Mansfield Park*, namely, that the domestic spaces of Austen's landed families are intimately connected with the economic growth of plantation economies in the Caribbean:

She sees clearly that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable, association with it. What assures the domestic tranquillity and attractive

harmony of one is the productivity and regulated discipline of the other. (Said, 109-110)

Given that these observations are not new, we must be explicit about how anti-Blackness structures contemporary denials of Britain's role in enslavement. Moreover, the role of higher education cannot be stricken from the record where "in both colonies and metropole, universities were founded and financed through the spoils of colonial plunder, enslavement and dispossession" (Bhambra, Gebrial et. al. 3). As someone also descended from enslaved people, this is also personal because "family history is colonial history" (Goffe 93), and Britain's celebration of its colonial past is painfully apparent. How ironic it is that I grew up and still live in Northamptonshire, the site of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*? My home county still positions global coloniality in Northampton's Charles II statue atop All Saint's Church (Ventour). With the monarch being a key figure in the Royal African Company (Olusoga 22), his watching the town from the church is a further reminder the role the Church played in enslavement (Walvin). As, it was one of the largest profiteers in the compensation scheme (*Legacies of British Slavery*).

The everyday racism Black people experienced due to white supremacy as a sociopolitical system (Mills), extending from the colonies to the centre in Regency Britain, is evident in Georgiana Lambe's first encounter with Lady Denham in ITV's *Sanditon*. This recent adaptation is based on the unfinished novel by Jane Austen. In episode two, Lady Denham makes a pineapple fruit the centre of her dinner party held in "honour" of West Indian heiress Georgiana Lambe. As Amanda Prescott (2022) argues in her companion piece, here, the pineapple in this scene symbolises both what the colonial centre can extract from plantation labour and how it can display its profit to exoticise the colonised and enslaved peoples in its distant territories. In this encounter and context, audiences are reminded that despite class and rank, women, too, were viewed as "prizes" not people, even by other women. Lady Denham displays the pineapple on her dining table with a proprietorial air, being sure to keep Georgiana in her place despite the latter's wealth. The relationship between race and gender is intertwined, through a Regency encounter with what Moya Bailey coined in 2010 as "misogynoir," as Lady Denham mocks Georgiana for being the daughter of "a slave" while appearing to celebrate her. As the scene goes:

**Denham:** "Miss Lambe, what are your views on matrimony? An heiress with a hundred thousand should be in want of a husband I think."

**Georgiana:** "I don't care to be any man's property, Lady Denham."

**Denham:** “[Chuckles]. Hoity-toity. I should have thought someone like you would be quite used to being a man’s property. Was not your mother a slave?” [Awkward pause].

**Georgiana:** She was ... but being used to a thing and liking it are not the same, my lady.”

**Denham.** “Oh. I’m beginning to think you are a very opinionated young lady, Miss Lambe.”  
[Chuckles] (Episode 2, 24:04-24:51)

Coining the term ‘microaggression’ and calling racism a “contagious disease” (267), psychiatrist Chester Pierce’s ideas also reflect the Denham-Georgiana encounter as the pineapple is produced to represent how Denham feels about Black people. Pertinently when that encounter ends with a Regency iteration of a white woman tone-policing a Black woman (albeit implicitly). “I’m beginning to think you are very opinionated young lady, Miss Lambe” is Lady Denham’s way of saying ‘know your place and shut up.’ If it was not for Georgiana’s money, I think Lady Denham’s racism suggests that enslavement itself would be Georgiana’s “natural place” in the world.

In the twenty-first century, the UK continues to celebrate this racist past. As author-activist George Monbiot says, “the highest award given to British officials who work abroad is the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George” (DDN, 00:00-00:07). Here, there is a drawing of Saint Michael as an angel, with his foot on the neck of the Devil. The Devil is represented as a Black man (Malloch; de Bruxelles; Ayodele). The imagery is clear, denoting whiteness as “good” and triumphant, and Blackness as “bad” and inferior to the “pure” and “white” angelic figure. I would argue similar imagery and dynamics are at work in the recent adaptation of *Sanditon* (2019). Similarly, today white women are still viewed to exist on a higher operating standard of humanity compared to Black women (Accapadi) and in this scene, Lady Denham exhibits her assumed supremacy to Georgiana. Not in terms of class, but in regard to race and gender: she is the imperial conqueror and Georgiana is the colonised. This, I would argue, revisits the dynamics of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George imagery within a scene of Regency civility. Denham need not journey to the colonies to conquer as she can do so in her own home. The exoticisation of the pineapple is implicit violence and though Georgiana is not enslaved, Denham’s references to Georgiana’s parentage and placement of the fruit, express her inherent racism within the frame of a party.

I situate the scene above with other recent adaptations of the Georgian and Regency period. As with Lady Ashford in *Belle* (2013, Asante) and Caroline Mortimer in *The Long Song* (2018, Levy and Williams), Lady Denham’s behaviour follows other period dramas in which some aristocratic white women act as agents of white supremacy. In the BBC adaptation of the Andrea

Levy novel *The Long Song*, Caroline Mortimer (Hayley Atwell) takes Miss July away from her mother proclaiming "... look how adorable the little one is" to which her brother replies, "... bring her then if you like" (Episode 1, 00:10:1-00:10:24). Miss July is an enslaved girl at the time and Mortimer sees her as a fashion item. Albeit a fictionalisation of colonial Jamaica, Mortimer dispels the myth that women did not own enslaved people, further evidenced in University College London's database *Legacies of British Slavery*. The point is that these adaptations are alive to racialised / gender dynamics between women characters but there is still a denial of what these really mean for our ongoing consumption of Regency culture.

We are familiar with this dynamic—in the more explicit violence against Black women and girls by police (AFLO. the poet; TED *Urgency*), including Sarah Reed (Amelia Gentleman and Damien Gayle, *The Guardian*) and Breonna Taylor (BBC). For example, the memes revolving around the original "Karen" terminology "... reference real-world incidents in which Black individuals were harassed by White women in public spaces ... [using] humor, satire, and strategic positioning to perform a set of interrelated social commentaries on the behavior of White women" (Williams, *Memes*). White women committing these heinous acts do so in the knowledge that if the Black victims call the police, it is they that will more likely be leaving in a police car. As Gary Younge states in relation to the Amy Cooper case in New York:

...what she does when she [calls the police] is not only puts that man [Christian Cooper's] life in danger, she puts every other Black man within ... a two-mile radius in danger. [The police] will ask questions later, there may not be later as George Floyd found out ... when you call the state, you expect violence. That's why she felt that he would shut up and go away (*Question*, 00:04:43–00:05:06).

Whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, the racial underpinnings of Britain's social fabric mirror the colonial "racial schema" (Fanon), we can read in Jane Austen's texts and the subsequent adaptations. Despite the absence of a clear critique of race or colonialism, in both the literature and adaptations, the racialised inequality that played a vital role in sustaining Austen's characters and their livelihoods is legible, as Said argued in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

In the context of *Mansfield Park*, lead character Fanny Price leaves her working-class family to live with her uncle Sir Thomas Bertram and her other relatives. He owns a sugar plantation in Antigua maintained by the toil and suffering of enslaved Black people. *Park's* lead characters live lives

maintained by the profits of the sugar economy, yet the question of colonialism and the lives of enslaved Black people is manifestly absent.

As a racialised man in a fanbase evidently filled with white women, when I have brought up discussions of race or colonialism in Austen before, I have been met with ‘white defense’ first and foremost, followed by racism (Sudbury; Fitchue & Fitchue; DiAngelo). The term ‘microaggression’ (Pierce) is disproportionate to the effect when the impact is huge, like ‘death by a thousand cuts’ (Vassell). The whiteness in many of these fan groups is so violent that for any fan that comes from Black, Indigenous, Asian or any other group racialised outside of whiteness [BIPOC], to mention race or colonialism in relation to canon or any period drama is a mandate for white violence – either in the comments sections or direct message. As Austen texts were not produced outside of the value-driven society they were written in, resistance to these discussions is an indication of the epistemic racism of the education sector where global northern white Eurocentric knowledges are depicted as superior to that of the Global Majority. Through the gatekeeping enacted by the admins of many of these groups, and though they are not institutions per sé, I see the same practicing of ‘institutional whiteness’ (Ahmed *Declarations; Nonperformativity; Phenomenology; Included; Hunter Birminam; Whiteness*) I have witnessed in higher education. As Leeds-based social justice organisation White Spaces write, such inequity persists “...through the positing of some bodies rather than others as the subjects of the institution (who the institution is shaped for, and who it is shaped by).” Like many of her literary contemporaries, Jane Austen was the product of her gentle class, and this brings us to axiology and the valuation of intellectual ideas during the time in which she was writing. In Austen’s novels, dowries and the legacy of fictional estates like Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice* and Donwell Abbey in *Emma*, are certainly assumed to be best passed on and maintained by moral patriarchy. When we follow the money of the real sites in the modern-day, we see many were built off the profits generated from chattel enslavement:

...the practice of enslaving African people was a fundamental part of the British economy in the late seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Large numbers of landowners and members of the wealthy middle classes invested in commerce that was linked directly to the slave trade, including sugar production in the Caribbean, and many people with surplus funds had investments in merchant companies involved in the slave trade, such as the South Company and the Royal African Company (National Trust 5-6).



And while *Mansfield Park* considers enslavement at a distance and through the white gaze, it is still clear on how sugar production benefited the wealthy classes in Britain and that this system was what also in-part maintained patriarchal power. Yet, white women also owned enslaved people, as historian Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers writes: “Ownership and control went hand in hand, and for white girls who had slaves, developing techniques of management and discipline was an important aspect of their early training. For those who were newly inducted into slave-owning communities, ‘the plantation was a school’ where they learned how to be propertied women” (4). If we turn to Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*, living at Rosings Park, the estate of her late husband, we are never told how characters like them made their money nor the inequity had to exist for their lifestyles to exist. In *Mansfield Park*, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris are also sustained by the Bertram estates in Antigua. It may not be explicit in Austen’s novels but the world and lore she built in-text was deeply involved in and enriched by not only enslavement, but colonialism as a complex web of political systems. Some may believe this is more explicit in *Mansfield Park* and *Sanditon* because there are references to coloniality threaded through. However, a contextual understanding of colonialism is vital to fully understanding Austen’s work, reminding us how whiteness functions invisibly. As John Hartigan Jr. states, “Whiteness [...] asserts the obvious but consistently [overlooks] ... that whites are racially interested and motivated. [It] both names and critiques hegemonic beliefs and practices that designate white people as “normal” and racially “unmarked” (1).

However, although the 1999 Patrocoa Rozema adaptation of *Mansfield Park* has Fanny supporting the abolitionist movement, and further shows that Thomas’ alcoholism derives from him experiencing his father’s brutalisation of enslaved people, I believe this also centres the shame and guilt of white people (Cheng; Matias). In a system made to benefit white people (centring white emotions and feelings), the fact the adaptation’s Fanny and Thomas get to feel the way they do is a reminder of how white people historically and now, are still seen to be on a higher frequency of humanity—ultimately centring white privilege, leaving the enslaved at the fringe of this story.

While the role of race and colonialism in Austen has been well understood historically, contemporary adaptations seldom make this transparent. Neither this nor the exploitation that had to exist for Austen’s characters to live as they did. *Park* depicts flamboyant levels of wealth and privilege, with Thomas coming and going from the plantation society. The epistemicide is committed as the novel presents enslavement as a necessary evil. British enslavement was mainly in the colonies and “unlike the situation in America, most British people saw the money without the blood” (Eddo-Lodge 5). It was easy to disassociate these country estates from colonial violence in the Global South since references to colonialism throughout the literary canon appear regularly

as they are “taken for granted . . . threaded through, forming a vital a part of the texture of linguistic and cultural practice” (Said, *Culture*, 104).

Moreover, in Austen’s writing of enslavement in *Mansfield Park*, whiteness is centred with Fanny Price noting how she loves listening to Sir Thomas “... talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. It entertains me more than many other things have done” (179). And with Andrew Davies’ adaptation of *Sanditon*, it could be argued that Georgiana is there almost as a motif for the colonial presence in the West Indies. Falling in love with a Black man called Otis, she is problematised. She must keep the relationship secret from her white male guardian, Sidney Parker, as much because he is from a lower class and without wealth. Such a relationship, even in a 2019 adaptation, remains taboo. Otis is finally dismissed from the plot as a gambler, unworthy of Georgiana’s love or inheritance.

Because *Sanditon*, and all of Austen’s work, takes place within a colonial context, it brings us to consider how Black women were seen through the white patriarchal gaze. As George Yancy states:

Through the white imaginary ... the Black body vis-à-vis the white body is a site of a peculiar paradox. [It] is both desirable and yet disgusting. Think here of white male enslavers and “slave masters” who raped Black women who were deemed subpersons, chattel, ugly, foul, ... ungodly creatures. [...] How does one rape enslaved Black women without falsifying one’s own assumptions about their status as “beasts of burden” or one’s own white status as “civilized”? In other words, think about the lynching of Black male bodies and how white males hovered over [them], making sure that the nooses were fitted correctly, touching Black genitalia while castrating those intimate parts that were said to be nasty and despicable. These cases constitute forms of violent, racially perverse, intimacy that implicated white male desire, disgust, and hatred (7).

The racialised and sexualised dynamics of the nineteenth century’s colonial reality, however, are largely disregarded by *Sanditon*. Georgiana, after her failed relationship with Otis, is reappropriated by Sidney into her role as heiress. Yet, earlier, she becomes frustrated, in the scene when she tries to board a stagecoach by herself (Davies, 2019, Episode 2, 32:31). She is an heiress not yet in control of her fortune, unallowed agency over her own wants

or desires. And symbolically, Sidney, as Georgiana's guardian, castrates Otis, in ways that follow the dynamics Yancy describes.

In the period, Black Georgian men such as those part of the Black Poor, as well as Bill Richmond, Francis Barber, James Gronniosaw and Olaudah Equiano – these latter two in the Sons of Africa group – all decided to marry white women (Olusoga 110). For Otis to choose Georgiana and vice versa, ultimately decentres the “desirability” of whiteness (Freedom, 00:45:10–00:46:35). However, beyond that, it recentres Black love as a tool of resistance (hooks). In episode four, Otis secretly visits Georgiana, and their love and happiness is emphasised (Episode 4, 00:20:38). But it is not allowed to last. Otis and Georgiana choosing to love each other poses a further threat to the structure of inheritance big country estates were built on. By choosing a Black man, she threatens white primogeniture as her Black husband would inherit and come to own the actual profits of enslavement. Such a union would be a form perhaps of nineteenth-century reparations: a Regency example of the “Black Pound” (Jenkin). We might turn to *The Woman of Colour* (1808) to see a plot where a Black Caribbean heiress, Olivia Fairfield is compelled to marry her white, English cousin, Augustus, to ensure the flow of her father's profit from his plantations, back to the structures of white primogeniture in the colony.

Otis marrying a wealthy Black woman complicates colonial ideas that Frantz Fanon comments on as racial epidermal schema: “a man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least, like a n-----” (86). In short, Otis aspires above the constructed white ideas of Black men. He is already working for social and racial justice as part of the Sons of Africa, a powerful, Black-run abolitionist group who wrote petitions and letters to the ruling classes of Georgian Britain. Whilst the Sons of Africa were a Black abolitionist group, the white supremacist system they campaigned against is what delivered the labour of enslaved Black people into the pockets of the plantocracy, thereby funding large British country estates, as the National Trust report makes clear.

In the Georgian period, pro-enslavement writers depicted Black women as “femininity free” so much so that the “ideological defeminisation” of Black women dismissed Black motherhood and “devalued maternity” (Beckles 11). Prior to the 1770s, one account claims that on arriving in Barbados, to be: “astonished to see some women far gone in pregnancy, toiling in the field, and others whose naked infants lay exposed to the weather sprawling on a goat skin, or in a wooden tray. I have heard with indignation, drivers curse both them and their squalling brats, when they were suckling them (Dickson 12). Denham sees Georgiana – not in the position of human female (as a white woman would be seen), but as subhuman. These ideas are consistent with

misogynoir (Bailey) and imperialist representations of Black African diasporic women's bodies.

Through the production of knowledge in academia, racialised stereotypes dominated how Black people were viewed. *Sanditon's* pineapple scene is underpinned with pseudoscientific racist ideas, produced during the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Angela Saini argues "what Europeans saw as cultural shortcomings in other populations in the early nineteenth century soon became conflated with how they looked" (11). Edward Long, the main historian of the plantocracy in the period who wrote the definitive account of Jamaica through a white supremacist lens, believed in the inferiority of Africans describing them as "the parents of every that is monstrous in nature" (383). So, before Georgiana is given chance to exist as a human being, she is already in opposition to white European standards of humanity, reason, rationality, and in the buzzword of the era: civilisation. Epistemologically, audiences are being given a partial narrative. Georgiana may be of the wealthy classes, but Lady Denham has a deep-seated racism that will never accept Georgiana as anything close to equal. Her beliefs are perfectly synonymous with her nineteenth-century culture. How much has this changed in how we read Austen today?

Austen's omission of how her characters generated their wealth that funded expensive lifestyles is not a meaningless absence. As Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie tells us, "Power is not only the ability to tell the story of another person but make it the definitive story of that person" (*TED Danger*). The author's decision to forget to mention how these families made their money is embedded in erasure and violence. This is also true of the telewriters and screenwriters that choose to adapt Jane Austen texts to screens and omit enslavement and empire. It is also violent to omit the role of racial hierarchies that laid the epistemological contexts that came to underpin the conditions that went on to develop racial capitalism.

Like many authors in the English canon, Jane Austen is a household name, and the epistemicide in her work has had devastating consequences. Today, she is still viewed as some of the *creme de la creme* of English writing (Horn; Greer). And though her class gives her certain allowances, she does not benefit from all the privileges that she should had she been white, "...based on the perception of conforming to society's expectations" (Bhopal 4). These privileges are evident in characters like Charlotte Heyward (played by Rose Williams) and *Mansfield Park's* Fanny Price with whiteness applied to the upper-middle classes – like Georgiana's peers – "in which other forms of hierarchies based on language, dress, education and taste distinguish one group from another" (Bhopal 29).

Austen's epistemicide could impact how present-day Global Majority people read and watch these stories. For students engaging with *Sanditon* and *Mansfield Park*, it would be reasonable to compare the lifestyle of the Bertrams to the story of Georgiana Lambe. For both novels the sociohistorical context they exist in cannot be overlooked in any critical analysis, as one shows how it is possible to think about the gentry without much thinking about colonial expansion, while the other shows Black women's social mobility in the metropole. Moreover, the raced, gendered, and class-based violence that can occur even to those set to inherit £100,000. Georgiana, albeit an heiress, is ultimately a prop of white supremacy.

Remedies to the erasures and silences that persist in Austen spaces regarding colonial wealth are available from critical race studies and from scholars who analyse the Global South. Bhambra and colleagues (2018) argue that subjects revolving around works made in the Global North are so frequently "enduringly pale, male (and often stale); where people of colour do appear, they are all too often tokenistically represented" (6). In analysing *Sanditon* through a lens of whiteness, future discussions could include how, even as a Black character, Georgiana is an agent of whiteness. How Georgiana is viewed makes clear that colonialism was more than land dispossession and physical brutality, but also a colonisation of the mind (@afuahirsch; Thiong'o). Kehinde Andrews argues that to maintain the subjugation of Africans throughout enslavement, their culture had to be eradicated, as "Europeans didn't just enslave us; they sought to break us up in order to control us" (109). During these years, they were the things the Global North interpreted as typically African, including languages and belief systems in pursuit of convincing the oppressed of their own rootlessness and unbelonging. Replacing them with European equivalents, tying into to how the "Psychosis of Whiteness" is "rooted in the political economy" (Andrews 194).

Via Georgiana Lambe and the incident with the pineapple, we can see how discourses of race operate amongst the British upper-middle classes: through motifs and subtle symbols, rather than the bloody violence one would have seen on Sir Thomas' Antiguan sugar plantation. However, as educators continue to struggle to teach these sorts of texts to racially diverse groups, one recommendation would be to look at them through a critical race lens. If we read *Georgiana* through an intersectional gaze, we can argue that her experiences of the world may lend its ear to "... the violence ... many women experience ... shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (Crenshaw). Responding to Black Lives Matter, and calls to decolonise *curricula*, this is now more vital in the period drama fanbase than ever, an audience dominated by white women, where Global Majority women, such as Amanda Prescott and Bianca Hernandez, have faced racism for pushing for more diversity and representation. The stories of Jane Austen are interlinked with the social histories of National Trust sites, buildings, and grounds. We as

the consumers cannot talk about the work of Jane Austen, even outside of *Sanditon* and *Mansfield Park*, without discussing the colonialism, racism, and class inequalities the lives of her character were built on. Furthermore, the ostentatious levels of wealth the characters she wrote therein possess. Without looking at her work in the context of historic inequalities, meaning both colonialism and the subjugation of the working-class, epistemicide endures in pretending her stories revolved around capital generated by ethical business practices. And in the context of race, this means acknowledging the ‘racial epidermal schema’ (Fanon) that underpinned enslavement and how anti-Blackness at least in-part came from that system (Williams, *Capitalism*).

Another way of reading Austen is possible because the backdrops of her texts are not mere fictions fixed within the construct of The Story, but a means for discussing colonial history. For many fans whose heritage derives from the Global South, this is entwined in our family history, and as more speak out in support of greater diversity in period texts, many continue to face racism in the fandom. Other fans may even think these texts are beyond modern critiques, but we could also argue that it would be an equal act of violence to dismiss the roles historic inequalities played in the conservation of many British country estates. Since the estates in Austen’s work were more than likely based on the image of Regency Britain, including the decision to present global coloniality out of sight out of mind. When Austen does talk about it, whiteness is centred. A raw example of violence in print, doing untold damage to our understanding of the roles of colonialism, race, and empire, with “the great wealth of the few [dependent] on the poverty of the productive many” (Higman 5).

In conclusion, using her novels as a conduit, audiences today could further examine how what the National Trust exposes: Jane Austen’s novels, show us, if we wish to see it, the context of race, empire, and how those that owned some of these properties were complicit in this violent system of racial capitalism. Georgiana Lambe existed in a society where it was possible for people like her to be kidnapped off a London Street bound for enslavement in the West Indies. As David Olusoga tells us what nearly happened to Jonathan Strong:

In 1765, a teenage boy was brought to [St Bart’s Hospital]. His name was Jonathan Strong, and he was a slave. ... the man ... [claiming] to be his owner had beaten about the head and neck with a pistol and then dumped him in the street to die. ... he had been found in the street by a minor civil servant called Granville Sharpe who brought him to [St Barts] [...] Two years later, Jonathan Strong was abducted and sold to a Jamaican slave owner. Determined to keep his freedom, he asked Sharpe

for help. Sharpe didn't have any legal training, but he went before a magistrate and successfully argued for Strong's release. What Granville Sharpe discovered was the case of Jonathan Strong wasn't an isolated incident. Black people were routinely being kidnapped on the streets, bundled onto ships bound for slavery in the West Indies (Freedom, 00:22:19–00:23:25).

Georgiana is a Black heiress living in Regency England, but she is not treated in accordance with her class, and lives “at an intersection of recognized sites of oppression” (Delgado and Stefancic 58). In this context, the National Trust report gives Jane Austen fans the opportunity to understand British anti-Blackness and its history, as well as how the economics of enslavement had a direct impact on the conservation of country estates.

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