

How far was Sarah Forbes Bonetta
the exception to the rule in terms of
Victorian ideas on race?



Contents:

❖ Title page.....	1
❖ Contents.....	2
❖ Introduction.....	3
❖ Research.....	4
❖ Discussion.....	6
❖ Conclusion.....	9
❖ Evaluation.....	9
❖ Bibliography.....	10

Introduction

People have been evaluated and had their destinies predetermined for them solely based on the colour of their skin for thousands of years. I have made the decision to delve into the past and learn what it was like to be a black person in the Victorian era and whether you were treated differently depending on your position in society, despite the fact that it is still prevalent today, hence my research question, *How far was Sarah Forbes Bonetta the exception to the rule in terms of Victorian ideas on race?* The subject of my investigation was a prominent member of society who was in Queen Victoria's inner circle. I have chosen to research Sarah Forbes Bonetta because I believe that she was an important part of British history and deserves recognition for this fact. I am trying to discover if Sarah Forbes Bonetta was treated differently for her skin colour and if she altered the way Victorians looked upon black people, or if she was the exception as she was held close to Queen Victoria and was looked upon in a different manner to slaves and common black civilians. In this time period, racism and science were blended together so if her existence had altered opinions, did she prove science was incorrect and in doing so, made people question their beliefs and the things they thought to be true? I believe that she made a small change in their mentality which has impacted, overtime, the way people of colour are looked upon in society today, however these changes were minimal and an attitude of overt or institutional racism prevails in many modern day societies.

At all
ACI
reasons.

By investigating Sarah Forbes Bonetta, I want to raise more awareness for the positive change she may have caused, and educate others about the way racism has prevailed through time causing black people to have very challenging, laborious lives.

Research

One of my primary resources in this project was the book by *David Olusoga, Black and British: A Forgotten History (published in 2016)*. This book is described as "Vivid confirmation that black history can no longer be kept separate and marginalised". In this book the information I have gathered is very reliable as it connects to some of the other resource intelligence I have reviewed as part of this project. I would also consider the reliability of this information source to be strong as the author is a renowned British historian and presenter. Another reason I would consider this an exceptionally reliable resource is because there are 33 pages of referencing and bibliography for this book.

AO2
credibility

Another valuable source throughout my project was an article by Peter.H.Conlin which had been published by *Inquiries Journal* in 2018. It is about Victorian opinions on race, which were influenced by science and used as an excuse for unjust treatment. This text helped me find decent, trustworthy examples of what Victorian life was like and how some people had different thoughts whereas others were publishing novels on why the white race was more intelligent, or rather, why black people were not as intelligent. As for reliability, *Inquiries Journal* is an open access academic journal which includes a careful editorial process, evaluating via peer review all articles prior to publication in a variety of ways. They have a variety of references that you can find when you go onto their page at the top of every article.

AO2
range
resources
& relevance

The next resource for discussion is from the website *English Heritage*, the author of the article is unidentified as well as the date of publishing. This article is specifically about Sarah and her personal life and experience. It explains how she came to be living in England and how her life was after her arrival. I consider this article as a reliable source, as *English Heritage* draws on a range of other sources and is a well recognised and reputable British institution although, I cannot find any direct references used to support this article.

Now moving on to some video resources, the first of these is a video from Youtube titled, *Sarah Forbes Bonetta: Portrait of Queen Victoria's African goddaughter unveiled* which was uploaded in 2021 and was last accessed in 2022. The account that posted this video is called 5 News which is a British news outlet for channel 5. This is a well known British television channel that is regulated by Ofcom ensuring the reliability of its broadcasts.

AO2
range

Another source I will be utilising is an online article about Victorian women and how they were treated. The article is written by Kathryn Hughes and is titled *Gender Roles in the 19th Century*. It was published by The British Library in 2014. As for reliability, this source is exceptionally reliable with The British Library being a major and probably the best known research library in the UK. There are many related articles on Gender and Sexuality but non direct references. The author is a professor of Life Writing and has a PhD in Victorian history, has won prizes for

journalism and historical writing.

The final source I will be evaluating is another video source from Youtube. The video is titled, *The Tragic Life of Queen Victoria's African Goddaughter Sarah Forbes Bonetta*, and has been posted by an account called Forgotten Lives in 2020 and was last accessed 2023. This video contains information that ties in with all other sources that have been evaluated as there is quite a lot of information detailing her personal life. Forgotten Lives has uploaded many videos about interesting people that have been forgotten in history over the centuries. The information on the reliability of Forgotten Lives is somewhat limited as there is no information available on resources used, editing processes and any pre posting reviews that may be carried out. Although as already mentioned the information provided in this video tally with other accounts detailed above.

Four of the five sources of material used for the project concur with the story of Sarah Forbes Bonetta's life and times. The main differences noted between the sources are merely the level of detail of the articles used to describe her life, but all made crucial observations on the way she was treated and most importantly, around the ideas and concepts of the Victorians' attitude to intellect and race.

The article from Inquiries Journal, was however, not about Sarah Forbes Bonetta's life, but about the way Victorians looked upon race and how it coincided with science and their beliefs. Racism was used as justification for many uncivilised acts such as the Slave Trade and harsh inequality based on colour alone. Scientists such as Galton actually managed to blend racism and science together. He said that "The best social situation is seen in those parts of the world in which the Negro is in his natural subordination to the European".

AD 2722 ✓

Discussion

Without a doubt, race has influenced history and how individuals have been perceived, but there are many secret elements of history that have been hidden due to race. One of these important figures was a young woman called Sarah Forbes Bonetta.

White supremacy

Sarah Forbes Bonetta was a young black girl when she was brought to England from West Africa (now south-west Nigeria) in a raid where her parents were killed. She was brought to England as a gift for the Queen. Although she was treated with respect this may only have been because she was held close to the Queen, intelligent and held high in society. White superiority was used as an excuse for many things in history such as, Slavery, unjust treatment, inequality, the Apartheid movement, and so much more. Sarah may have been treated better than others but this could just be because of her status. Even though she was treated slightly better she was still described in derogatory ways such as 'an excellent specimen of the negro race' purely because she was smart. This proves that Victorian opinions on race hadn't been altered but their opinions on Sarah had been.

different views

Racism was used as a tool of justification for imperial actions as in the Victorian period they were colonising whole countries' populations and believed they were superior to all other races, demonstrated by the fact that Britain did not colonise undeveloped white countries. Once again this ties in with the way Sarah was treated as she was still perceived as though she was of less value than a white child, as she was brought to England as a "gift"¹ which in itself is an abhorrent concept (that people can be exchanged as items, property, or gifts).

In summary, I think that Sarah was considered the exception to the rule and that Victorian and subsequent generations remained entrenched in the thinking of white superiority and black inferiority. Victorian racial prejudice was focused around intellectual inferiority, whereas modern day racism has evolved to be different in its expression. Modern day racism, I think, is based upon perceived differences between races which is not based upon intellect but is more focused upon behaviours.

ABS with to Q.

On the other hand, after she arrived in the UK she was still treated with low expectations and any success she achieved was a surprise as society believed that she was inferior in every way. Although some people's opinions had been changed because of her rank in social hierarchy, many still believed her to be the exception and that she was completely different from other people of colour.

ABS on mode

1

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/osborne/history-and-stories/sarah-forbes-bonetta/>

ABS relevant use resources.

Pseudoscience

Victorian racial beliefs were backed up by pseudoscience. These physical anthropological findings were associated with racial disparity by Huxley, which fueled the idea of white racial superiority. *'No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man'*. Huxley is open about his opinion that the white race is superior to the black race. In this quotation, Huxley cites his scientific education as evidence to support his allegations about racism. Here, it is demonstrated how racism actually infects and entangles itself with science. Racism gained momentum and legitimacy as a result of a ground-breaking anthropological discovery.

Sarah was speculated around as to whether her talents may become impaired after a certain age and that 'though the negro child may be clever, the adult will be dull and stupid'². Although she proved all of this wrong as all throughout her life she was an intelligent, logical woman, sadly this didn't alter opinions on pseudoscience. They believed that she was just an anomaly.

I believe that the evidence reviewed depicts that Sarah was not an exception to the rule, as even though she was a highly intelligent child, society believed that it was only because she was young and under direct influence of the royal inner circle and that once she grew up her black genes would take over making her become naïve and idiotic.

AO3
link to Q

The opposing point of view is that she was an exception to the rule as she was treated subsequently better than other people of her race and even though they believed that she was an anomaly, she was still treated with some respect compared to others of her race and intelligence.

AO3/2 different interpretations/views

² Conlin, P

Victorian Women

AOT
organisations
= evaluator
by criteria

Victorian women were looked upon as a different species from men. There were expectations of men leaving the home to work and women were expected to stay at home to perform or to oversee domestic affairs. Although women didn't go out to work they were expected to have a sort of education which was known as "accomplishments"³. These "accomplishments" included an education in music, singing, drawing, dancing and modern languages. The Victorians attitude towards women frowned upon women displaying a high level of educational accomplishment. Highly educated, overtly capable and smart women were known as "blue stockings". Blue stockings were not thought of to be attractive by most men and were unlikely to make good marriage material. Women were thought to be physically weaker but morally superior to men, hence thought to be more suitable to staying in a domestic setting.

I believe that the evidence considered portrays that Sarah was an exception as she was a woman which may have meant that society believed that they had to be careful with her and her emotions as she was a delicate thing. She was even forced to marry a man named James Davies. This also shows that she was given the education on how to be a functioning woman in society, once again proving that her ties to Queen Victoria had an influence on the way she was treated as Victoria ordered her to be educated properly.

On the other hand, this man was black, exhibiting that she was only worth that of someone else of her race and that it was inhuman to be wed to someone white. She was thought to be strange and special for being intelligent and instead of being called a blue stocking, she was called an anomaly, almost as if she wasn't human. The fact that she was still forced to wed to a black man even though she was a 'blue stocking', proves that less was expected of their race and it was acceptable for them to marry anyone.

AOS L2 different views
good understanding

³ Hughes, K

Conclusion

In conclusion, after consideration of the evidence, I believe that Sarah Forbes Bonetta was not an exception to the rule in terms of Victorian ideas on race. I think this because she was brought to the UK as a gift which shows the consistent dehumanisation that black people were subjected to. She was treated slightly better but was still referred to with derogatory terms and may have only been treated in a positive manner as she was close to the Queen and others around her felt obliged to treat her this way.

AO4 ✓ Conclusion with limited evidence
4/ needs to be clearer throughout.

Evaluation

Throughout this project I have run into many obstacles although I have managed to overcome them. My idea started with a completely different hypothesis but it did not have enough detail for me to answer with enough depth and detail required for this project. During this project I have learnt many skills such as retrieval, research, essay writing and perseverance. I learnt that you can't do everything at once and sometimes you have to take a break and come back to it. .

I was also slightly impeded when I took a holiday during and beyond the Christmas break meaning I couldn't do any research or in fact any work at all. I have also had a bad cold in the week preceding the deadline for this draft which has meant that I had to work on the project, although I didn't feel very well.

Should I embark upon this type of project again I will do the write up with more time, as I left this quite late. I would also enhance my project by doing more research and gaining a more thorough understanding of my project and the subject I am studying.

AO4
need
deeper
deadline

AO4
more
improve

AO4 4/ Limited reflection on process

Referencing and Bibliography

A01

1. Hughes, K. (2014) Gender Roles in the 19th century,
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century> (accessed 7th January 2023)
2. Olusoga, D. (2016) Black and British: A Forgotten History, Macmillan
3. Conlin, P (2018) Victorian Racism: An Explication of Scientific Knowledge, its Social Character, and its Relation to Victorian Popular Culture,
<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1719/victorian-racism-an-explication-of-scientific-knowledge-its-social-character-and-its-relation-to-victorian-popular-culture> (Accessed 10th January 2023)
4. Author and published date not known, Sarah Forbes Bonetta, Queen Victoria's african protegee,
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/osborne/history-and-stories/sarah-forbes-bonetta/> (Accessed 16th October 2022)
5. (2021) The Tragic Life of Queen Victoria's African Goddaughter,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5RwGSEDZTU> (Accessed 13th December 2022)
6. (2020) Sarah Forbes Bonetta: Portrait of Queen Victoria's African goddaughter unveiled,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn7ZQAikBDc> (24th January 2023)

A02
clear bibliography -
I am not sure
all resources used
are on here.