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The Bonds of Freedom: Liberated Africans and the End of the Slave Trade

Abstract:

Based on a decade's research on four continents, [*The Bonds of Freedom: Liberated Africans and the End of the Slave Trade*](#) (Yale University Press, 2025) tells the forgotten story of people rescued from slaving ships by maritime patrols, "liberated," then forced into bonded labour to repay the debt of rescue. Using extensive archival research from Sierra Leone, South Africa, Brazil, Cuba, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the book uncovers the contrasting ideas and practices of authoritarianism and freedom that empires and liberated Africans developed during the protracted end of the illegal slave trade.

Short Bio:

Jake Subryan Richards is assistant professor of international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is a historian of the Atlantic world and global history, with interests in legal history, the history of empires, and the African diaspora. Richards's first book, *The Bonds of Freedom: Liberated Africans and the End of the Slave Trade* (Yale, 2025), was named a Book of the Year by the *Times Literary Supplement*. Richards has also published articles in *Past and Present*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and *Modern Intellectual History*. He co-curated the exhibition *Black Atlantic: Power, People, Resistance* at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (2023–24) and coedited the accompanying catalogue. He is a BBC Radio 3/AHRC New Generation Thinker. Richards's next project, a study of polity formation in sub-Saharan Africa as a strategy to avoid illegal enslavement, has received funding from the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (2026–27) and the Independent Social Research Foundation (2027–28).