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How historical dramas showcase a diverse seventeenth-century France: *Versailles* and the BBC's *The Musketeers*

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ABSTRACT

Historical dramas are a much-loved genre as audiences can immerse themselves in a time so far from their own. These television shows often portray history in an entertaining and at times educational manner. Despite their popularity, the majority of these shows often represent Europe as a fully White continent in the early modern period. It is only recently that historical dramas have adopted a more inclusive and diverse narrative.

This article will analyse the historical dramas *Versailles* (2015–18) and *The Musketeers* (2014–16), how they portray ethnic minorities in seventeenth-century France and how this relates to historical evidence of the characters and events depicted. Interviews will inform the intentions that the directors, writers and cast members took with their portrayal of characters and storylines. Due to a lack of scholarship, this research is important in understanding the choices behind the style of ethnic minorities in historical dramas, as well as highlighting a diverse early modern Europe.

This study will find that seventeenth-century France was an ethnically diverse country with Africans interacting with King Louis XIV, and how General Dumas, a Black General, inspired the portrayal of a mixed-raced character within *The Musketeers*. The discussion around both dramas will show two different ways in which ethnic minorities have been represented. The research will show that there is much scope to represent an inclusive Europe in early modern historical dramas through the findings of individuals.

Introduction

We can often be drawn in by both the realism and fantasy popular films to feel as though we have acquired an experience of a particular historical event. For these reasons, the historical film and television drama have a primary role in producing a national experience of history (Sturken, 1997).

For over a century, history has been depicted on screen and in historical drama films, and these shows have become a much-loved genre. One of the first historical films, *Ivanhoe*, aired in 1913 and was set in medieval England (British Film Institute, 2009; Stubbs, 2009). The depictions of history on screen have ranged from the medieval period to the modern period, allowing for the portrayal of a vast array of historical events and figures. Audiences enjoy the drama, educational elements and the ability to immerse themselves in a time so far from their own (Matthews, 2016). Only recently have historical and period dramas adopted a more diverse and inclusive narrative with the implementation of ethnic minority storylines which do not solely revolve around slavery. Despite this, there are still few ethnically diverse historical dramas, and analysis of their representation and relation to history has rarely been the focus.

This article will focus on two French-based historical dramas set in the seventeenth century. The television shows which will be discussed are *Versailles* (Mirren, Wolstencroft, 2015–18) and *The Musketeers* (Hodges, 2014–16), with further information regarding these shows available in the appendix. The analysis of these dramas relates to their representation of race, its connection to historical evidence and the portrayal of the period in which the shows are set. This article will argue that there is ample evidence to portray and represent a more diverse and inclusive past, and by doing so will demonstrate how ethnic minorities deserve to be included in historical dramas. Research will show how ethnic minorities existed in early modern Europe, and comparison to their modern depiction on screen will discuss the approach that the showrunners, directors and actors took with their stories. This will then support the argument that historical drama creators are able to use the past in order to represent and relate to a modern audience.

Creating inclusive historical dramas ranges from the representation of diverse events and individuals based on historical facts, to casting ethnic minorities as White historical figures. Both methods have led to criticism. Merle Oberon was the first Asian woman to star in a historical Hollywood film, as Anne Boleyn in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933). Although Oberon's true ethnicity was unknown until after her death, once revealed it sparked discussion around race in Hollywood, with many people feeling deceived by her secret (Sinha, 2016). However, the disclosure of Oberon's ethnicity also led to the revelation that she was the first Asian actress to be nominated for a best actress Oscar award (Lawrence, 2023). Starring in multiple films, Oberon broke boundaries as a South Asian woman in historical films without people realising. Conversation surrounding her performance as Anne Boleyn was raised nearly 90 years later when Jodie Turner-Smith became the first Black actress to play Anne in the 2021 *Anne Boleyn* series (Cummings, 2022). Both Oberon's and Turner-Smith's performances showcase the different ways casting for films and shows works. Although Oberon's casting as the first Asian Anne Boleyn was not intentional, Turner-Smith's casting was deliberate, and she was not the only ethnic minority to be cast in the three-part drama. According to *Anne Boleyn* actress Thalissa Teixeira, the casting of minorities in the show was a way to show how historical figures, such as Anne Boleyn, were viewed and treated as outsiders (Carr, 2021). It was a strategic move to combine history, race and 'otherness'. *Anne Boleyn* demonstrates how the approach to casting and the inclusion of ethnic minorities within historical dramas has evolved.

For decades, there have been calls to create more diverse films and shows. In 2014, radio presenter Nihal and actor Lenny Henry came together to form part of a new Independent Diversity Advisory Group to ensure the BBC were achieving diversity

targets (Kumar, 2014). Although the inclusion of ethnic minorities is far from perfect, the Advisory Group is just one example showing how improvements have been made to diversify dramas, whether based on historical figures and events, or fictional.

In 2013, shortly before the formation of the Advisory Group, the film *Belle* (Asante, 2013) was released, focusing on the life of Dido Belle, an actual mixed-race British woman in the eighteenth century. The film combined history and fiction to tell Belle's story of how she was a free woman yet had to deal with society's racism (Sutherland, 2021). Netflix's *Bridgerton* (Wright, 2020), set in the nineteenth century, also included a vast array of Black actors, and the second season included South Asian actors. Based on historical romance novels, although there are some historical figures, the show is mainly fictional but quickly became Netflix's most viewed show (Posti, 2024). A more recent film, *Chevalier* (Williams, 2022), focuses on the eighteenth-century, actual mixed-raced musician Joseph Bologne. As with many inclusive historical dramas, the intention behind *Chevalier* was to highlight an important yet forgotten part of history, with the directors and actors embracing the historical aspects of Bologne's story (A star is reborn, 2023). These examples show the ways in which directors and showrunners have opted to include ethnic minorities, whether based on history or fiction, and have allowed for a more inclusive past to be represented.

As is evident from these examples, the majority of diverse historical, or period, dramas are mainly set in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Inclusive dramas set earlier are hard to come by, which is why the analysis of television (TV) shows set in the seventeenth century is important. Shows like *Anne Boleyn* and *Bridgerton* have received criticism regarding their historical accuracy, whether related to the events portrayed or the inclusion of minority actors, and the focus rarely resides on what these dramas can inform people about the past (Slattery, 2021). Research of the shows discussed in this article will provide an insight into the lives of individuals in the early modern period, how they have been portrayed on screen and what this conveys about the direction and approach that the showrunners, writers and actors take when combining history with drama.

A lack of shows based in seventeenth-century France does not mean there is a lack of interesting historical events. Seventeenth-century France is rich with history. Louis XIV ruled for over half of the 1600s, 72 years in total, and his reign was certainly not dull. Known as the 'Great Century', France was one of the strongest countries in Western Europe, with Louis XIV granting himself power over the government (Black, 1999). The court was also subject to the performance of the arts such as theatre and ballet, with the King partaking in dances (Prest, 2001). Authors such as Alexandre Dumas set many of their books in seventeenth-century France. However, researchers have been late in regarding the presence of ethnic minorities in early modern France. It was only during the 1980s–2000s that historians began to focus on the lives of the Black population in France (Duprat, J. 2020).[i] This has also impacted on the inclusion of ethnic minorities within French-based historical dramas. Despite this, *Versailles* (2015–18) focuses on a White-centred French court and country, whereas *The Musketeers* (2014–16) depicts a diverse France. Historical evidence will show that ethnic minorities lived in seventeenth-century France and were welcomed in Louis XIV's court.

Historiography

There is an abundance of research relating to the depiction of history on screen. Historical research in the media, and how it has represented the past, has been present through the study of Medievalism which analyses how the Middle Ages has been depicted since the fifteenth century (Marsden, 2018). General analysis of film, TV and history also exists in various ways from the approaches to representing history on screen, to how audiences influence the portrayal of the past. However, research relating to the representation of race in the

past through historical dramas set in seventeenth-century France has been scarce (Duprat, 2020).[ii] The necessity to combine historical evidence and literature on TV provides an opportunity to showcase the importance of analysing how race has been portrayed on screen through historical evidence. Due to the absence of research into this aspect, this study has opted to challenge the narrative around history, historical dramas and the representation of ethnic minorities.

Analysis of TV shows and how they relate to history is not a new practice, nor has it been limited to a specific era or genre. Jerome de Groot has discussed the different ways history has been portrayed on screen in his book *Consuming history: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture*, wherein he states:

> This ability to conceptualise the past in such a complex way, as fiction, live action, a familiar aesthetic trope and actual history of a sort again demonstrates the dynamism of television audiences and their capability of engaging with texts from multiple standpoints (de Groot, 2016, pp. 225–6).

Within his book, de Groot focuses on different genres which include documentaries, docudramas, historical dramas and comedy. He argues that period dramas opt to be more entertaining than historically accurate, allowing the audience to gain a glimpse into the period. This has been beneficial for this study when researching the production of historical dramas, and the approach that has been taken by the showrunners to combine history and TV. However, de Groot's analysis stems more from the approach of portraying history on TV, focusing on how public historians interact with history and the different ways in which history can be portrayed. The chapter on historical dramas does not focus on social issues such as race, ethnicity, class or gender (Mandler, 2010). Public historian Faye Sayer takes a broader view in her book *Public history: A practical guide* (2015). The chapter dedicated to the portrayal of history on screen also discusses the different forms of media used, and why historians used them to communicate history to the public. However, Sayer also draws on issues relating to the role of race, gender and class, allowing for a more nuanced discussion, which is absent from de Groot's work. Despite this, de Groot and Sayer both discuss the role national identity plays within historical films and shows, with Sayer arguing that in recent years, an approach has been taken to adopt wider, inclusive stories telling a part of history which is often unheard, such as the film *12 Years a Slave* (Sayer, 2015). Sayer does not discuss in detail the role of race and ethnicity in historical dramas; however, the change in narrative surrounding the rise of more inclusive and diverse historical films and TV shows is important for the analysis of this study. The changing stance of diversity on screen showcases how, year after year, more ethnic minority storylines and characters are being included in historical dramas, and that there is more focus on implementing history rather than fiction.

Over the past couple of decades, research into ethnic minorities in early modern Europe has taken a more prominent role. Dr Miranda Kaufmann's book *The Black Tudors: An untold story* focuses on the Tudor and Stuart period, and her research brings to light ten free Africans within the early modern period (Kaufmann, 2017, pp. 1–4). Through records and documentation, Kaufmann uncovers the status of Africans in Tudor society from their arrival in Britain, their baptism, employment, to their deaths. Since its publication, Kaufmann's research has brought about a change in the education system, with teachers coming forward to include *The Black Tudors* in the classroom (Lewis, 2018). The book has also influenced the TV show *Southwark*, currently in development, which focuses on an ethnically diverse Tudor period. (Ravindran, 2020).

Kaufmann's book is not the only one to report on Africans in Europe, but as the main focus of *The Black Tudors* is Tudor England, research has been picked up elsewhere. Peter Fryer's book *Staying power: The history of black people in Britain* (Fryer et al., 2018) provides a further insight into Africans in early modern Scotland. Lorimer states that Fryer's section on the sixteenth century allows for a more

detailed account of African musicians, their role in the Scottish royal court and how they became much sought after (Lorimer, 1988). Indeed, Fryer's account of an African drummer in the Scottish court supports the existence of Africans in early modern Britain and how they reached the status of being employed by the monarchy (Fryer et al., 2018). *Staying power* is also not limited to the early modern period but rather Fryer develops his book further by expanding his research to the modern period. Not only does he discuss their lives, but the author also focuses on racism that Black people experienced (Markus, 1985). Originally published in the 1980s, the republishing of *Staying power* in 2018 shows how research into Black people in Britain is still a current subject, with Paul Gilroy stating, 'His book also added substantively to what we knew about our past. The main text, which flattened as it drew closer to the present, consolidated a constellation of key personalities, problems, and events' (Gilroy et al., 2018, pp. xiii–xvi). Although research has been conducted into an ethnically diverse Britain in the early modern period, the same level of interest, relating to race, is not present for early modern France and has largely been based on overseas colonies. The aspect of race in seventeenth-century France will be explored further in the article.

Although there is an abundance of research relating to an ethnically diverse early modern Europe and the depiction of historical adaptations, this historiography shows how, often, the two are not combined. The little research public historians have conducted on how race has been portrayed through history usually stands alone from the findings of historians who specialise in the seventeenth century. The lack of room to explore the representation of marginalised people in historical dramas can lead to a White Western view on how history has been written. This viewpoint needs to change in order to discuss a wider, more diverse aspect of history.

Versailles

Versailles was once the most expensive TV show to be produced in France, costing around 30 million euros (Chrisafis, 2017). As you watch the show, you are immersed in grandeur, with the use of locations such as the Palace of Versailles, and the costumes and wigs are particularly impressive. *Versailles* would be considered high-end TV with almost two million people tuning into each episode (Plunkett, 2016).

Although in an interview, Simon Mirren, co-creator of *Versailles*, stated that he did not want the show to be a period drama but something more modern, the show largely focuses on historical events that occurred during Louis XIV's reign (Kraus, n.d.). However, despite the substantial budget, the vast cast and all the glitz and glamour, *Versailles* falls down in its inclusion and representation of ethnic minorities.

Versailles begins in 1667 when Louis XIV, played by George Blagden, is around 27 years old. The show opens with his dream to turn his father, Louis XIII's, old hunting lodge into Versailles Palace. From there, viewers watch Louis XIV's trials as a King, his political and romantic matters, poisonings and murders at court, and the storylines of other nobles as Louis seeks to establish himself as the head of state. Although the show is based on historical events, it is not entirely a historically accurate show, with historian Greg Jenner stating 'that it's a series grounded in broader historical truths' (BBC, 2016). Although there are a handful of ethnic minority traders and diplomats who meet with the King, the main form of diversity is through the King's brother Philippe d'Orléans, played by Alexander Vlahos, who is a cross-dressing gay man. There are virtually no ethnic minority main characters, apart from Sophie de Clermont who is played by half-Iranian actress Maddison Jaizani.

In episode three, the camera pans to a painting of two of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan's daughters with an enslaved Black child. In the show, this painting resides in the chambers of Queen Marie-Thérèse, played by Elisa Lasowski, and the character also happens to have an African dwarf called Nabo, played by Marie-Agnès Gang. This episode is the only reference to Black servants or enslaved people in *Versailles* despite historical

evidence of their presence in French court. Historically, Black enslaved people became fashionable in the seventeenth century, and this stemmed from royalty's hand in the slave trade where France was involved in African slavery in West Indies plantations which cultivated crops, sugar, tobacco and coffee (Baird, 2014, Munford, 1986). It showed how for wealthy nobles, minorities were considered exotic, and they were used as a visible representation of the nobles' wealth. Enslaved Black people became a statement in households to the point where they were included in many royal portraits. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why there are no other Black servants throughout the series. The actual painting was created decades after those events portrayed in the show. Despite this, it is interesting that the show incorporated Nabo into the storyline. People with Dwarfism, in the early modern period, were viewed as an entertaining spectacle and had been bought since the sixteenth century, starting with Catherine de Medici (Adelson, 2005). Although historical evidence is unclear as to the origins of the real Nabo in France, it is speculated that he was gifted to the Queen when she married Louis XIV (Adelson, 2005, p. 24). In the show, Nabo has a close relationship with Marie-Thérèse but unfortunately, his story was cut short after he was murdered in episode two after the Queen gave birth to a Black baby.

Figure 1. Françoise-Marie de Bourbon, known as Mademoiselle de Blois, and Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, known as Mademoiselle de Nantes (Vignon, 1690)

The scandal of the Black baby was another interesting storyline to include. Historically, rumours have been circulating for decades that the story of the royal Black baby was false, or perhaps she was an illegitimate daughter of Louis XIV, rather than Marie-Thérèse (Blumsom, 2016). Speculation continues, with no concrete confirmation that the birth of the Black baby even happened. However, there is evidence to suggest that there was a Black nun called Louise Marie Theresa who did exist in seventeenth-century France, and the royal family took an interest in her, in particular the King himself and his second wife Madame de Maintenon. Maintenon visited Louise on several occasions, and the nun once referred to Dauphin, the King's son, as her brother (McCloy, 1945). Although this does not confirm that Louise was the daughter of royalty, it shows that there was a free Black woman in seventeenth-century France who had a close relationship with the King and Queen of France.

Although *Versailles* covers up events until around the 1680s, the story of the Black baby was only mentioned again when Prince Annaba, played by Marcus Griffiths, arrived in France from Assine. In

the show, Prince Annaba came to France in episode three to organise a trade deal with Louis XIV. The end of the episode saw the Prince's hand being forced to make a deal on the King's terms. He was shown the Black baby, implying that he was the father, and learnt that the King of Assine, his father, had died. Thus Marie-Thérèse's Black daughter was never seen or heard of again, the implication being that the Prince took her away.

Figure 2. Louise Marie-Thérèse, the Black Nun of Moret (Mason, 2024)

During his time at Versailles, he was met with friction between the King and what can only be described as racism from the court members. When Annaba first arrived at the palace, Sophie de Clermont admired how attractive he was, and another court member stated, 'How can he be handsome if he is Black?' Later in the episode, courtiers step aside to make way for the Prince as he walks through the hall; however, it is clear from their expressions and body language that this was not out of respect, but fear. Neither Mirren nor Wolstencroft, the second co-creator of *Versailles*, have spoken about the intention behind the court's reaction. Therefore, it is difficult to identify the reason behind this choice.

Historical advisor Mathieu da Vinha discusses how his role was to guide and confirm facts and details for the screenwriters. He also emphasises that the show is fictional and not historical, (Château de Versailles, 2020a).[iii] Vinha also states that the aim of the first season was to portray the role of nobility and build Louis up as the head of state (Château de Versailles, 2020b).[iv] Therefore, the treatment of Prince Annaba also would have shown that the King was in control and the court's reaction could have been due to the assertion that Annaba had no power. However, with the aim of creating a modern show, it also could have been a depiction of racism to relate to a modern audience. Even though Mirren and Wolstencroft's intention is uncertain, it is clear that the portrayal of the Prince in the French court was to undermine his status.

Prince Annaba was a real person. Historically, he arrived in France in 1688 from the Ivory Coast in West Africa and remained there for around ten years. He was treated as royalty and a few years later he was baptised and given the name 'Louis' in honour of the King (Halbert, 2011). Historians disagree regarding whether Annaba was a real Prince, or whether Louis XIV became the godfather to him, with Kenneth J Banks agreeing that he was (Banks, 2007). Phillipe Halbert argues that it was in fact another man, Jean-Baptiste de Lagny, who became the Prince's godfather instead. Either way, the treatment of Annaba in the show is vastly different to the treatment he received at the court of Louis XIV. He integrated into French society for almost 10 years and was favoured by the King. With Louis XIV at the height of society and culture, it is highly likely that French courtiers would have also accepted and treated Annaba with great respect. Seventeenth-century France saw a range of Asian and African embassies visiting Paris, therefore they would not have been an unusual sight for courtiers (Welch, 2017).

Prince Annaba's treatment in France would have also been determined by how race was viewed. The idea of race did not exist in the seventeenth century in the same way it does in the twenty-first century, although that is not to say racism did not exist.

French society judged one another based on their wealth, fashion, class and religion (University of Cambridge, 2016). The court of Louis XIV was very rigid, with courtiers adhering to strict rules. The way nobles interacted with the King, where they sat during performances and dinner, all depended on their rank in the class system. The closer courtiers were to the King or his family, the more chance they had of being a part of his activities (Lewis, 2016). This once again shows how Prince Annaba would have been welcomed and accepted within the French court due to his high status as a royal, wealthy man.

Although *Versailles* did include some ethnic minorities, they were not represented in a way that was true to history. Their storylines were changed so that they faced racism, or at least contempt from courtiers, instead of being welcomed and accepted as history claims. The portrayal of minorities in *Versailles* prompts the idea that they either did not exist in seventeenth-century France, or if they did, they were not treated kindly. This is a stark contrast to how the BBC's *The Musketeers* portrayed ethnic minorities – they had a multitude of storylines and were accepted without the presence of racism.

The Musketeers

Despite the fact *The Musketeers* is based on a fictional novel, *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, it takes a better direction in the storylines of the ethnic minority characters, and their portrayal is more historically diverse than *Versailles*. Although it is based more than 30 years before *Versailles*, it boasts a variety of ethnic minority characters, who are both recurring and minor characters, and it tackles storylines which involve slavery, refugees and interracial relationships. It also had a similar budget as *Versailles* with the first two seasons costing around 25 million dollars (The Location Guide, 2015). One of the main characters, Porthos, is a musketeer, played by Howard Charles, a British Jamaican actor. Unknown to many, Dumas was a Black man, and his father was a Black General in the eighteenth century. He based some of his most famous books on his father's adventures, including the character of Porthos. Adrian Hodges, the creator of the show, decided to cast a mixed-race actor as Porthos to honour Alexandre Dumas' heritage (Creamer, n.d.). Despite Hodges' statement that the intention for the show was not to be a period drama, but to be a modern show, similar to Mirren's statement, the involvement of ethnic minorities brings awareness to an unknown part of history. It also highlights the diversity of France in the seventeenth century. This is shown by his research into the author's life, and Charles also prepared by researching General Dumas (Jeffries, 2014). Despite this, he does not claim that his research influenced the way he played Porthos, and he was able to create the character as his own by working with the writer (MYM Buzz, 2016b). Charles also defended the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the show by stating, 'There were many people who looked like me back when these stories are set' (MYM Buzz, 2016a). Hodges' and Charles' historical research showcases the role history played in *The Musketeers*, and the significance of portraying important diverse stories.

To avoid confusion between Alexandre Dumas the author, and his father who was also called Alexandre Dumas, this section will refer to the author as 'Dumas' and his father as 'General Dumas'.

Porthos' storyline significantly revolves around his identity and heritage. In season one, he reveals that his mother was enslaved and moved to France once she was freed. She passed away when he was five, and episode five shows where Porthos grew up. In season two, he discovers his real father is Marquis de Belgard, a wealthy, White man. Porthos' story ends when he becomes a general in the army, marries Elodie, a White woman, and becomes a stepfather to her daughter, whom he names Marie-Cessette after his mother.

The inspiration behind Porthos resides in the life of General Dumas. Historically, the general's mother, Marie-Cessette, was an enslaved African woman,

and his father a wealthy, White Frenchman, Marquis Alexandre Antoine Davy de La Pailleterie. General Dumas was brought to France as a teenager, where he was officially recognised as the Marquis' son, but he was never to see his mother or sisters again (Reiss, 2012). He was well educated and later joined the army where he worked his way up the ranks to lieutenant, and then general. He married Marie-Louise, a White woman (Reiss, 2012). He also worked under Napoleon Bonaparte where their relationship was a mix of praise and tension as the Emperor had the power to demote the general, which he succeeded in doing (Brown, 1976). As can be seen in the show, Porthos' storyline follows similar themes to the real life of General Dumas. Porthos named his stepdaughter after his mother, also the name of General Dumas' mother. He discovered his wealthy father and worked his way up to become a general. Therefore, not only was the casting of a mixed-race actor a way to honour Alexandre Dumas, but it went further by implementing elements from the history of his father and grandparents. However, a significant difference is Porthos' upbringing. As mentioned previously, General Dumas was educated when he was brought to France and he essentially lived the lavish lifestyle his father did, by living in a big house and being taught by the best teachers. Porthos was brought up in poverty, in the Court of Miracles, which is another way *The Musketeers* showcases this important, but unknown, part of history.

Figure 3. Equestrian portrait of General Dumas (Pichat, 1883)

The Musketeers portrays the Court of Miracles as slums, the home of thieves, criminals and people living in poverty, which is an accurate representation of the Court in the seventeenth century. Henri Sauval was a French researcher in the 1600s who documented what life was like in the real Court of Miracles. He reported that the area was overcrowded, with many families and children living in sloped rooms. Prostitution was rife, and pickpockets thrived, with people also pretending to be unwell to beg for money (Berger, 2006, pp. 207–20). Although within his research there was no mention of ethnic minorities living in the Court of Miracles, it is a possibility. One of the earliest records is in 1571 when enslaved Africans were brought to France but were later freed as 'slavery did not exist in France' (McCloy, 2014, p. 12). It is likely these Africans stayed and built their lives in France; however, depending on their skills and employment opportunities, the possibility of them living in a place like the Court of Miracles cannot be ruled out. The portrayal of the Court in the show reflects Sauval's findings. The Court was overrun with men and women of all ages living there alongside children, who were also pickpockets, and one person pretended to be disabled in order to gain

sympathy from the musketeers. Porthos' childhood best friend, Charon, played by British Jamaican actor Ashley Walters, was also raised in the Court of Miracles. This again shows how the BBC's *The Musketeers* made an effort to show the diversity of the population of France.

Despite slavery being illegal in France, the French were still involved in slavery outside of the country (Peabody, 1994). Episode three introduced Bonnaire, played by James Callis, whose plans to build a slave ship and farm tobacco abroad were discovered by Porthos. During the early modern period, France had colonies in the Caribbean which began as tobacco plantations. It then became part of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, with France supplying European countries with millions of enslaved people (Dobie, 2010). With Porthos' own mother once enslaved, it evoked strong emotions from him and he attacked Bonnaire, but Athos stopped him by saying 'slavery is cruel and disgusting, but it is not a crime' (Hodges et al., 2014, *Commodities*, 30:32-30:34). Although transporting enslaved people to France was illegal, and anyone who did arrive in this way was instantly freed, Athos' statement is not incorrect as France continued to enslave and trade to their colonies. Bonnaire's plans were later approved by King Louis XIII, and Porthos' reaction showed the reality of how French officials dealt with slavery. This episode implemented a part of history relating to the French slave trade and how, although it was unlawful in the country, it was welcomed elsewhere.

The representation of France in *The Musketeers* was much more realistic than the France depicted in *Versailles*, as it showed life beyond the royal court and focused on the average life of French people, rather than that of French nobles. In *Versailles*, it is only in the final season that life outside the palace is shown, and although it followed working-class citizens and their anger around food shortages and tax raises, it was still from a White-centred perspective. Although the aim for neither drama was to be historically accurate, the way in which *The Musketeers* represents ethnic minorities details a part of history which is often overlooked.

The final season of *The Musketeers* dealt with issues which surround refugees, some of whom were also ethnically diverse. Although there is more evidence of citizens fleeing *from* France rather than *to* France, the introduction of refugees in the show also introduced Sylvie, played by British Brazilian actress Thalissa Teixeira. Her storyline continued the theme of interracial relationships within the show. Her father was a White man, and her mother was likely Black, and she had a romantic relationship with Athos, with whom she later starts a family. As discussed previously, General Dumas' parents were an interracial couple, and he later married a White woman. Historical evidence shows that interracial marriages typically occurred in French colonies between French men and enslaved women, and it was not necessarily frowned upon – in fact, it was encouraged. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, there was an emphasis on conversion to Christianity to legitimise the marriages, and Louis XIV's minister formed a policy encouraging White Frenchmen to marry women who were not White (Fredrickson, 2005; Roach, 2023). This links to the attitude of French society towards others. The issue of class, social status, wealth and religion were particularly important to be able to integrate into French society. Although Sylvie and Athos did not get married, nor was there any dialogue on their religious beliefs, it is apparent that White French men were typically able to marry whoever they wanted, and with Athos being a Captain of the musketeers, his status would have worked in his favour had he eventually married Sylvie.

Despite Mirren's and Hodges' reluctance to portray the shows as historical or period dramas, both shows were based on historical events. The difference between the two creators is that Hodges intended to honour Dumas' history, which he did with the casting of Porthos, and the development of his character and storyline. The portrayal of Black characters and their stories represented a diverse French society, whereas Mirren and Wolstencroft's portrayal was essentially a White-centred France. What should have been a portrayal of a wealthy

Prince Annaba, who courtiers were in awe of, was replaced with the Prince experiencing prejudice and remaining at the mercy of Louis XIV throughout his stay. In truth, the Prince had a fascinating history and was honoured and respected by the King. Historical dramas will never be an accurate portrayal of history; they are intended to entertain viewers, not educate them. Nevertheless, people watch historical dramas because they are both entertaining and include elements of history (Warner, 2009). Therefore, it is still possible to include diverse characters and stories within historical shows. This, of course, has been seen with *The Musketeers* by the creator, cast members and the direction the writers took with the storylines. *The Musketeers* showcases putting ethnic minority stories at the forefront rather than on the sidelines, as *Versailles* did.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how ethnic minorities have been represented in historical dramas and how their portrayal has related to historical evidence which detailed their existence in early modern France. A continuation of research over the past few decades has allowed more to be known about individuals who lived in seventeenth-century Europe, the majority of whom were free. The individuals discussed within this article have shown that minorities in the early modern period were not always enslaved, nor did they always have low-ranking jobs. General Dumas' rank in the army, as well as his interactions with Napoleon, and Prince Annaba's interactions with Louis XIV are simply Black individuals who were employed and worked alongside those with high status. Not only does historical evidence show that there is scope to include and represent ethnic minorities in historical dramas, but the shows analysed in this article also showcase how early modern France was not completely White. A variety of individuals and events depicted in the shows highlight the different ways ethnic minorities contributed to European societies.

This article has provided a unique perspective on how history has been used for historical dramas and its relation to race. Due to the nature of the topic, the research methods were inventive and contribute to a wider discussion regarding history on screen.

This article has shown that ethnic minorities have every right to be included in early modern historical dramas, and there is an abundance of stories to be told. There is an opportunity to conduct further research related to history and historical dramas. Marginalised communities, for example, related to disability, sexuality, gender and class, have all been represented in some way in historical dramas. Therefore, there is scope to research how their portrayal on screen supports the depiction of an inclusive past. Through historical dramas, viewers can see an inclusive history with the representation of relatable characters, and ethnic minority viewers can see their place in history.

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Appendix

Historical Drama Biographies:

Versailles (2015–18) is a historical drama which follows the life of King Louis XIV, played by George Blagden, from 1667. The show was created by Simon Mirren and David Wolstencroft, who were also the main writers. Over the three seasons, *Versailles* was directed by 10 people, with Christian Langlois directing the most episodes (*Versailles*, TV Series 2015–18). With the storyline residing mainly on Louis XIV's path to glory, the show largely focuses on the King's court, which consists of White courtiers. However, international diplomats and traders interact with the King, promoting the idea that minorities were welcomed and received by Louis XIV.

The Musketeers (2014–16) is a TV show produced by the BBC. Inspired by the book written in 1844 by Alexandre Dumas, the show is set in Paris, 1627 and follows four musketeers. *Athos*, played by Tom Burke, *Aramis*, played by Santiago Cabrera, *Porthos*, played by Howard Charles, and *D'artagnan*, played by Luca Pasqualino are the stars of the show. *The Musketeers* was created by Adrian Hodgens who was also one of the main writers and he opted to portray a modern show

with a historical basis through the portrayal of a diverse France and the history of General Dumas through *Porthos (The Musketeers* TV Series 2014–16).

[i] Author's own translation.
[ii] Author's own translation.
[iii] Author's own translation.
[iv] Author's own translation