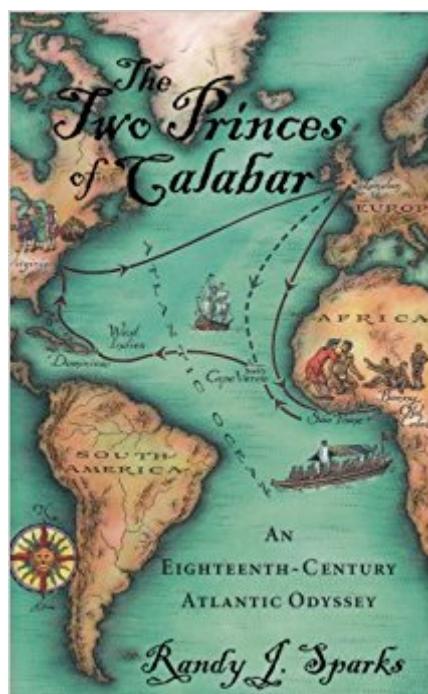


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# The Two Princes Of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey



## Synopsis

In 1767, two "princes" of a ruling family in the port of Old Calabar, on the slave coast of Africa, were ambushed and captured by English slavers. The princes, Little Ephraim Robin John and Ancona Robin Robin John, were themselves slave traders who were betrayed by African competitors--and so began their own extraordinary odyssey of enslavement. Their story, written in their own hand, survives as a rare firsthand account of the Atlantic slave experience. Randy Sparks made the remarkable discovery of the princes' correspondence and has managed to reconstruct their adventures from it. They were transported from the coast of Africa to Dominica, where they were sold to a French physician. By employing their considerable language and interpersonal skills, they cleverly negotiated several escapes that took them from the Caribbean to Virginia, and to England, but always ended in their being enslaved again. Finally, in England, they sued for, and remarkably won, their freedom. Eventually, they found their way back to Old Calabar and, evidence suggests, resumed their business of slave trading. The Two Princes of Calabar offers a rare glimpse into the eighteenth-century Atlantic World and slave trade from an African perspective. It brings us into the trading communities along the coast of Africa and follows the regular movement of goods, people, and ideas across and around the Atlantic. It is an extraordinary tale of slaves' relentless quest for freedom and their important role in the creation of the modern Atlantic World.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While researching a topic in early Methodism, Sparks discovered letters by former slaves to Charles Wesley. The writers were brothers from an elite family in a slave-trading community on the Bight of

Biafra. During a 1767 conflict with another slave-trading clan--an altercation abetted by English slave merchants--the two were seized by a slave-ship captain and launched on a seven-year struggle to get home. They were owned by masters in Dominica and Virginia before succeeding in being taken to England, where their cause was taken up by Methodists, to whose faith they converted. Eventually, freed by English law, they went home, though only upon their second attempt, the first being aborted in a wreck in the Cape Verde Islands. There is every reason to think that they afterwards participated again in the slave trade. Often in dire straits, they prevailed because they were already literate in English and familiar with English manners. Seamlessly weaving great chunks of eighteenth-century documentation into the narrative, Sparks makes the brothers' saga an absorbing true-life adventure. Ray OlsonCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a remarkable account of remarkable events. Of the millions of Africans ensnared by Atlantic slavery, a mere handful returned home. Randy Sparks' vivid exposition is about two African princes, slaves and slave traders, who found their way back to Africa. It is a tumultuous story but given persuasive coherence by Sparks' forensic researches and arresting prose. What he has produced is a finely-crafted miniature: a glimpse, via the lives of two men, into the broader contours of the enslaved Atlantic. The result is a literary treat which raises as many questions as it answers, and which provokes, instructs - and entertains. (James Walvin, Professor of History, University of York)Randy Sparks' *Two Princes*, adds significantly to our growing knowledge of the complexity of human experiences of the Atlantic era, particularly those of people originating in Africa. This engagingly written study adds Ephraim Robin John and Ancona Robin John to the bare two dozen or so known individuals who managed, in spite of the silencing anonymity of enslavement in Africa, to leave records, in their own voices, of the often-surprising stories of their lives. (Joseph Miller, T. Cary Johnson, Jr. Professor of History, University of Virginia)Randy Sparks has done a great service to Atlantic History. The *Two Princes of Calabar* effectively integrates African and Atlantic history into an engaging and enlightening narrative. He succeeds in making the life of the Niger Delta trading states accessible to the general reader and brings their deep and remarkably sophisticated relationships with Europe to light with great style. (John Thornton, author of *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*)Randy Sparks' *The Two Princes of Calabar* is a great story. Great not only in that it is an extraordinary adventure that captures the drama, pathos, anguish, and ultimately the tragedy of the African slave trade, but also great in that it brings together all of the elements of the meeting of Africans, Europeans, and the Americans in the Atlantic. (Ira

Berlin, author of *Generations of Captivity*) While researching a topic in early Methodism, Sparks discovered letters by former slaves to Charles Wesley. The writers were brothers from an elite family in a slave-trading community on the Bight of Biafra. During a 1767 conflict with another slave-trading clan--an altercation abetted by English slave merchants--the two were seized by a slave-ship captain and launched on a seven-year struggle to get home... Seamlessly weaving great chunks of eighteenth-century documentation into the narrative, Sparks makes the brothers' saga an absorbing true-life adventure. (Ray Olson Booklist 2004-03-01) In his brief, informative and wide-ranging account, Mr. Sparks uses the two princes' capture and release as a prism through which to view the religion, commerce, literature and roguery of the time, on both sides of the ocean. It helps to be reminded that nothing in the past is quite so simple--so black and white--as moralists might like it to be. (Stuart Ferguson Wall Street Journal 2004-05-21) The Two Princes of Calabar is an excellent brief study of late 18th-century West African slaving culture, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, British Methodism and the efforts of religious British to abolish the slave trade. (Robert Waters New Orleans Times-Picayune 2004-04-18) This deserves to be read by specialists and by general students of Atlantic history, not only because it underlines the brutality of slavery but also because it offers fascinating glimpses into the fluidity of identities in Atlantic history and into how, consciously or otherwise, Africans helped to promote British abolitionism. (David Richardson Times Higher Education Supplement 2005-01-21)

Required reading for a graduate course on Atlantic World History. Sparks' tale follows two "Atlantic Creoles" from Calabar (SSE present day Nigeria) on their unexpected journey through the Atlantic. Prior knowledge of West African culture is not needed as Sparks will provide the prerequisite background. Overall good, quick read for anyone, not just students (though this is does have scholarly backing).

I read this book because my middle school daughter's teacher recommended for her. It is a great book, full of history from a first hand account. For anyone searching and wanting to know more about the African Slave trade, read this book.

I purchased this book for a US History class (required for course) It describes a different point of view to the the slave trade over three and a half centuries. Not bad, overall.

Good

almost untouched

What a wonderful story, Im sure there are other stories to tell such as this moving tale of two brothers!

This book sounded a lot more interesting than it was. I found the storyline a bit thin as I read and was hoping for more concrete details in relation to the theme.

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