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# Edmund Burke and the British Empire:
# Slaves, Savages, and Subjectship in Eighteenth Century Political Thought

by

Tacuma Peters

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

in the

Graduate Division

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Wendy L. Brown, Chair
Professor Kinch Hoekstra
Professor Mark M. Bevir
Professor Stephen M. Best

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Abstract

Edmund Burke and the British Empire:
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This dissertation broadens and complicates scholarly understandings of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism by examining how his aesthetics and progressive historiography shaped his criticisms of imperial institutions. This project pursues one of the lines of inquiry opened by scholarship on Edmund Burke and eighteenth century anti-imperialism: the place of slavery and Amerindian dispossession in anti-imperial thought. It provides the reader with greater clarity of the complexities and the tensions in Edmund Burke's political thought concerning the British Empire.

The dissertation argues that Edmund Burke's anti-imperial thought is ambivalent in that certain exploitative and destructive institutions in the British Empire are subjected to scathing, passionate, and sustained public criticism, while others are either publicly defended or ignored. This arises because the moral and aesthetic frameworks that motivate Burke's criticisms of colonialism are accompanied by a progressive historiography that distinguishes between civilized and savage human beings. The distinction between the civilized and the savage result in divergent commitments to reforming unjust and exploitative imperial institutions. Most notably, the divergence between Edmund Burke's sustained commitment to promoting justice in India, and his support of Amerindian dispossession and chattel slavery in the Americas.

This dissertation also gives consideration to Ottobah Cugoano's anti-imperial thought as a complement and challenge to Edmund Burke's anti-imperial thought.

To my parents Jackie and William and my wife Yomaira

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# INTRODUCTION

## Edmund Burke's Ambivalent Anti-Imperialism

In this dissertation, I seek to broaden and complicate scholarly understandings of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism by examining how his aesthetics and progressive historiography shaped his criticisms of imperial institutions. A puzzling characteristic of Burke's thought on the British Empire is the unevenness of his commitment to reform exploitative imperial institutions. For example, he was a profound opponent of the East India Company; however, he was a lukewarm advocate for abolishing the slave trade, and a defender of the colonial dispossession of Amerindian lands in North America.

Through juxtaposing his writings on India with those on colonial slavery and Amerindian dispossession, analyzing his writings on Amerindians primarily through his progressive historiography and aesthetics, exploring his proposals to prevent the dissolution of plantation economies in the Caribbean, and scrutinizing his advocacy for the remote abolition of the slave trade and colonial slavery, I hope to provide the reader with a greater clarity of the complexities and the tensions in Edmund Burke's political thought concerning the British Empire. I argue that Burke's anti-imperial thought displays ambivalence in its variation of criticisms leveled against colonial institutions. I contend that the discernible differences in Edmund Burke's commitment to reform the East India Company and his commitments to reform imperial institutions concerning Amerindians and slaves are best understood through analyses of his progressive historiography and aesthetics.

Recent scholarship has deepened our appreciation of the relationship between political thought and the justification of European empires in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, while also highlighting resistance to dominant ideologies on empire. One of the seminal works in political theory that deals with both imperial ideologies and anti-imperial responses is Uday Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought.*[1] Subsequent scholarship by Jennifer Pitts, Sankar Muthu, Sunil Agnani, and Anthony Padgen has further elucidated eighteenth century European anti-imperialism—one aspect of Mehta's analysis of empire—through diverse explorations of eighteenth century thinkers critical of the existence and practice of European empire.[2]

This project intervenes in the ongoing debate about the nature of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism. In it, I argue that Burke's anti-imperialism, ambivalent in reference to India and Ireland, is even more ambivalent in reference to the Americas, especially regarding colonial slavery and Amerindian dispossession. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term ambivalence as the best description of Burke's general support for the British Empire—his willingness to see it continue as a mode of organization—and his profound criticisms of the practices and foundations of empire in North America (before the American Revolution), Ireland, and India. I

[1] Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[2] Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) examines the anti-imperialism of Kant, Herder, and Diderot; Anthony Padgen, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500-c 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) examines Diderot, Hume, and the ideologies of imperialism from the 16th-18th century; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) examines Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, James and J.S. Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville.

argue that Burke's ambivalence on empire—his support combined with his criticism—should be interpreted as a common convention in eighteenth century anti-imperial thought. However, his anti-imperialism is itself ambivalent in that Burke subjects certain exploitative and destructive institutions in the British Empire are to scathing, passionate, and sustained public criticism, while others he either publically defends or ignores.

I argue that part of Burke's ambivalent anti-imperialism can be traced to the confluence of his understanding of the historical progress of mankind—his civilizational hierarchy— with his hierarchical aesthetics. The combination of a progressive historiography and the hierarchical aesthetics renders Indian civilization as civilized and worthy of sympathy and justice, while rendering slaves and Amerindians uncivilized and less worthy of sympathy and justice. Consequently, Burke is more vehemently opposed to British imperialism in India than he is to slavery in the Caribbean. Similarly, his belief that Amerindians are savage, at the first stage of human history, supports his commitment to the dispossession of Amerindian lands and destruction of Amerindian sovereignty. This gap between his views on empire in India and empire in the Americas characterizes the ambivalence of his anti-imperialism.

This project undertakes an examination of Burke's thought specifically as it relates to empire and chattel slavery. Burke was an Anglo-Irish Member of the Parliament of Great Britain who greatly influenced the history of British politics and the history of European political thought. As a writer and politician, Burke engaged in a range of political debates occasioned by various crises in Europe and throughout the British Empire from 1757-1797. He was a prominent supporter of the American colonists during the American Revolution, a harsh critic of the British rule of India from 1780 until his death, a staunch opponent of the British monarchy interfering with the Parliamentary politics, a known sympathizer of anti-slavery causes, and a proponent of emancipation for Irish Catholics in England and Ireland.[3]

In his speeches and writings, Edmund Burke expressed a complex (and evolving) web of beliefs concerning the nature of civil society; the role of government, property, revolution, chattel slavery, empire; and much more. These expressed beliefs taken together do not represent an answer to a set of perennial questions in the history of political thought, but rather reflect Burke's responses to contemporary political questions. I interpret his writings in light of the idea that he wrote and spoke within particular historical contexts, and with the aim of influencing his contemporaries. I also interpret them with an appreciation of the ways in which his beliefs in regards to topics like the role of government, the nature of authority, the necessity of aristocracy, and the commitment to gradual reform were not static; they were continually evolving from 1757 to 1796.

The impetus for this project was an appreciation of the complexity of Burke's political thought on empire. Initially, I was astonished—as others have also been—by the breadth of Burke's vision of imperial reform, while simultaneously confused by the variability of his passion and the content of his argumentation on imperialism and slavery. I was initially struck by his far-reaching humane and just attempts at reform in India and Ireland and his negative portrayal of Amerindian and slave savagery in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Because of this, I have centered my project on Burke's concern with two distinct regions of the eighteenth century British Empire: India and the Americas. However, interpreting Edmund Burke's expressed beliefs on India and the Americas necessitates the examination of Burke's webs of belief as expressed in occasional writings and speeches that were not directly concerned with slavery or Amerindian dispossession.

[3] Isaac Kramnick, ed., introduction to *The Portable Edmund Burke* (New York: Penguin, 1999), ix.

## INTERPRETING THE PAST: REPARATIONS, HAUNTING, AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL THOUGHT

On April 22, 2010 the *New York Times* published an editorial written by Henry Louis Gates that caused an uproar amongst intellectuals and activists who study slavery. Titled "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game," Gates's piece argued that African collaboration in capturing and selling slaves to Europeans in the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade rendered reparations to African Americans morally and politically incoherent. He wrote, "Given this remarkably messy history, the problem with reparations may not be so much whether they are a good idea or deciding who would get them; the larger question just might be from whom they would be extracted."[4] The next day, the *New York Times* printed three responses to Gates's piece. Eric Foner challenged Gates's conclusion by arguing that America still had the responsibility to confront slavery because Americans maintained and expanded slavery after the U.S. abolition of the slave trade in 1807.[5] From this perspective, the role that Africans played in the trans-Atlantic trade did not override the critical role that Americans (in and out of government) played in developing "the most powerful slave system the modern world has known."[6]

The debate on reparations for slavery and the slave trade has continued, and calls for reparations in the United States have been joined by calls for reparations throughout the Americas. An expected lawsuit by fifteen Caribbean nations suing European governments "for the payment of reparations by the former colonial European countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community, for native genocide, the transatlantic slave trade and a racialized system of chattel slavery" has been developing over the course of two years.[7] This pursuit of reparations represents an intensifying demand of Europe to engage in its colonial and slave trading past in the Caribbean.

Throughout the globe, demands for and arguments against reparations have become one of the key ways in which nations and communities relate to past (and contemporary) injustices. The contemporary debate in the U.S. about slave reparations, and the pending lawsuit by The Caribbean Community (Caricom) are two examples of how political communities are reacting to the ungainly and unwieldy weight of the past in the present. At the center of debates about reparations are the questions of how we should orient ourselves to our past and how we can grasp the power of the past (including catastrophic injustices) to shape our present.

Contemporary discussions of reparations raise theoretical questions concerning the weight and play of history in contemporary life, how to understand the histories of past injustices, and how to conceptualize the links between injustices, both past and present. In this

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[4] Henry Louis Gates, "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game," *New York Times*, April 22, 2010.

[5] Eric Foner, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, April 26, 2010. Foner writes, "It was Americans, not Africans, who created in the South the largest, most powerful slave system the modern world has known, a system whose profits accrued not only to slaveholders but also to factory owners and merchants in the North. Africans had nothing to do with the slave trade within the United States, in which an estimated two million men, women and children were sold between 1820 and 1860."

[6] Lolita Inniss, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, April 26, 2010. Inniss writes, "In another reply, Lolita Inniss maintained that our understanding of modern kidnapping should guide us in the assignation of responsibility for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. She argues that we often place more culpability on those who continue to keep individuals captive, than those responsible for their initial abductor."

[7] CARICOM, *CARICOM REPARATIONS COMMISSION PRESS STATEMENT*, *Caribbean Community Secretariat*, Dec. 10, 2013. Web. Accessed June 6, 2015.

vein, scholars of slavery, capitalism, colonialism, and the Holocaust have sought to rethink the historiography that underpins much of contemporary intellectual and public life. The work of Jacques Derrida, Wendy Brown, Saidiyah Hartmann, and others who critically engaged Enlightenment historiography have become important for those attempting to think through the relationships of colonialism, slavery, and capitalism to the present in ways that deny progressive and triumphant discourses.[8] For many of these thinkers, modern history should not be seen as progressive—i.e. the linear passage of time improving human society and human existence—but rather as having a more ambiguous, regressive, or horrific trajectory. Simultaneously, they do not see the present as the triumph of a grand idea or movement over past barbarism and injustices; in certain key ways, contemporary life is thought to possess qualitatively similar horrors. Scholars, writers, and political activists imagine the connections between past, present, and future in ways that confound easy assignation of injustices to contained temporal spaces. In this space, figures of spectres and ideas of haunting have shaped alternative historiographies that reject linear and progressive understandings of history, while recognizing that past injustices have "countour[ed] contemporary political, social, and cultural life" in ways that escape empirical quantification and materialist understandings.[9]

This project is not a spectral history, but I do take as a point of departure that our contemporary lives and politics in the West are haunted by slavery and colonialism. Many scholars engaged in writing about the history of European empires in the eighteenth and nineteenth century grapple with the specters that haunt both the history of political thought and contemporary life. For example, Uday Mehta states that Chapter Four of *Liberalism and Empire*, on territory, "received its original impetus from hearing [his father] reflect on the geographical unity of India and the enduring costs of its hasty partition in 1947,"[10] an example of how colonialism and decolonization in India shaped two generations. Similarly, an early work of political theory on colonialism and empire, Hannah Arendt's *Origin of Totalitarianism,* grapples with the history of European colonialism, colonial practices, and ideology in order to explore how these shaped 1930s Europe and gave rise to totalitarianism, a movement which underpinned the social and political life of the Soviet Union.[11]

In more recent years, Karuna Mantena, in *Alibis of Empire,* argues that the shifting logic of the Iraq invasion and occupation represented a return to the shifting logic between justifying empire in India based on a civilizing mission and the idea of the dissolution of native society. This reflection in the book's "Coda" ties the history of Britain's colonial past and America's contemporary empire building in subtle, but vital, ways.[12] Scholarly analysis of the subtle ways that the history of colonialism has contoured contemporary life has been invaluable.

However, it is also significant that the moral and political discourses of empire, including discourses on slavery and Amerindian dispossession, continue to shape our understanding of the eighteenth century. Most notably, the discussion of moral and political responsibility that underwrites many positions on reparations and past injustices appears to be drawn from a late

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[8] Ian Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

[9] Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 141.

[10] Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, xii.

[11] Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* also argued that the rise of Nazism was the result of imperial logics returning to Europe. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

[12] Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 179.

eighteenth century understanding of national responsibility for imperial practices. Thus, the discourses of the eighteenth century anti-slavery and anti-imperial criticisms have become one of the primary conduits for understanding the past.

In *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, Christopher L. Brown describes how the emergence of politically significant abolitionism in the Atlantic world gained its shape and form from the debate on virtue and liberty during the American Revolution. According to Brown, slavery emerged as a political issue in the context of determining which legislative bodies were virtuous enough to govern the American colonies. Supporters of the American colonists' claims for autonomy argued that Parliament's support for the slave trade displayed their lack of virtue and understanding of liberty; in contrast, partisans of British parliamentary sovereignty argued that the American colonists could not be trusted to rule themselves due to their ongoing commitment to plantation slavery—a system that showed a complete disregard for human liberty. Through this debate, slavery was brought to the forefront of imperial politics, and anti-slavery positions were seen as virtuous. Brown writes:

> Now, with greater frequency in the Revolutionary era, the slave system was characterized as someone's fault, as the consequence of laws and policies instituted by particular British officials or specific colonial governments. This sharpened sense of the slave system as the product of human choice and preference enabled radically different descriptions of moral duty. If particular individuals and groups could be held responsible for slavery, then they also could be held responsible for correcting the wrongs they had created. By describing complicity in slavery as proof of collective vice, disputants in the Revolutionary era helped define opposition to slavery as proof of collective virtue.[13]

As Brown argues, slavery came to be seen as a "product of human choice," rather than a natural institution beyond the human will. With slavery seen this way, individuals and groups could be held morally culpable for supporting or even merely not opposing slavery. Eighteenth century anti-imperialists would similarly use ideas of moral and political virtue to challenge the practices of empire.

In Britain, debates concerning the governance of the British Empire were often conducted with the understanding that the institutions under debate were products of human choice, sustained by political, economic, and social engagement, and that Parliament, the king, and his subjects (as citizens and consumers) could be held responsible for injustice abroad. The crux of many of the late eighteenth century debates on the British Empire, including the American crisis, reform of the East India Company, and the abolition of the slave trade, was concerned with the morality of colonialism, and included a complex understanding of what human beings separated by not only large distances, but also cultural differences, owed to one another. Unjust, violent, and exploitative systems of social organization were conceived of in ways that imposed a "moral duty" on individuals and collectives. Recent scholarship on eighteenth century political thought on empire has led to interpretations of eighteenth century political thought that have examined and sought to understand the moral dimensions of anti-imperialism.

For example, Uday Mehta applauds how Edmund Burke embodied and articulated a moral revulsion in the face of the abuses of the East India Company. Mehta writes:

> Perhaps most importantly in this context, no other statesman or thinker expresses the depth of pathos, the pained embarrassment, the capacious compassion, and the sustained moral revulsion for the cruelty, torture, deprivation, and injustice that the company was

[13] Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2006), 153.

> perpetuating. Burke is virtually alone in owning up to this as an indictment of Britain's political and moral rectitude.[14]

Mehta interprets Burke through the dominant moral (and rhetorical) framework of eighteenth century anti-imperialism and anti-slavery; within this framework, the suffering of fellow human beings—especially at the hands of one's compatriots—obligated citizens to act in ways that would alleviate the state of the victims and bring about a more humane relationship. This moral framework is not exclusive to Mehta's interpretative lens, but is rather one that we often use to assess past political actors, especially around historical injustices. An example of this framework can be found in the language of Caribbean countries that have set up a commission to "establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of reparations by the former colonial European countries."[15] It is within the anti-slavery rhetoric that established "particular individuals and groups could be held responsible for slavery, then they also could be held responsible for correcting the wrongs they had created," that reparations makes the most sense, and it is within this same logic of responsibility (amongst other things) that scholars of anti-imperialism have approached their subjects.[16]

As I will argue in this dissertation, the moral and aesthetic frameworks that motivate Burke's criticisms of colonialism are accompanied by a progressive historiography that distinguishes between civilized and savage human beings. The resulting civilizational hierarchies lead to divergent commitments to reforming unjust and exploitative imperial institutions. Thus, one of the primary limitations of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism is its variability based on the identity of the population affected.

## ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Various thinkers studying eighteenth century anti-imperialism have defined anti-imperialism in overlapping and complementary ways. In *Enlightenment Against Empire,* Sankar Muthu describes late eighteenth century anti-imperialism as an outright rejection of empire "as unworkable, dangerous, or immoral."[17] Here, one has the melding of practical and moral concern for the imperial project. Jennifer Pitts does not explicitly name the eighteenth century as a time of "anti-imperialism," but rather sees the century as producing thinkers who posed "a critical challenge to European imperial conquest and rule" and were skeptical "about both particularly imperial ventures, and the general project of unlimited expansion."[18] According to Anthony

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[14] Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 156.

[15] CARICOM, *CARICOM REPARATIONS COMMISSION PRESS STATEMENT*.

[16] Mehta writes, "It is an enduring tribute to Burke, the man and the thinker, that his sympathy and ire and ultimately his political thought are garnered by thinking through and feeling with tactile intensity specific episodes replete with proper nouns, an imagined inhabitation of real places, and an engaged imbrication in vital traditions." Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 157.

[17] Sankur Muthu writes, "Truly anti-imperial political philosophy emerges in the late eighteenth century among a broad array of thinkers from different intellectual and national contexts. A significant group of European political thinkers rejected imperialism outright as unworkable, dangerous, or immoral--for economic reasons of free trade, as a result of principles of self-determination or cultural integrity, due to concerns about the effects of imperial politics upon domestic political institutions and practices, or out of contempt over ironic spectacle of ostensibly civilized nations engaging in despotism, corruption, and lawlessness abroad." Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 4.

[18] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 1. She also writes, "In the late eighteenth century a number of prominent European political thinkers attacked imperialism, not only defending non-European peoples against the injustice of European imperial rule, as some earlier modern thinkers had done, but also challenging the idea that Europeans had

Padgen, various thinkers of the eighteenth century shared common criticisms of empire, as well as common beliefs about the nature of overseas empire. For Padgen, these thinkers were historically similar—but not necessarily the heirs—to ancient critics of empire and later Spanish critics of the Iberian colonization of the Americas. Padgen labels anti-imperial thinkers of eighteenth century "enlightened critics of empire" who shared with their Iberian predecessors

> a strong sense of place, a belief in the particularities, and thus the essential incommensurability of all cultural and political forms of life, the conviction that the goods which modern men sought were radically different from those which their ancient or medieval forebears had sought, and finally, that in terms of this set of temporal and spatial calculations, empires always disadvantaged, sometimes lethally, all those who were caught up in them.[19]

Although there had been critics of European empire, such as Bartholomew De Las Casas, and criticism of Europeans from a contrasting perspective with non-European cultures, such as Montaigne's "On Cannibals," in the eighteenth century these criticisms became an attack on the notion and the existence of empire itself.[20] This attack was rooted in novel notions of morality, culpability, and human agency that circulated in the mid to late eighteenth century.

However, one of the markers of eighteenth century European anti-imperialism, which includes prominent figures such as Edmund Burke and Denis Diderot, was that criticism of empire usually went hand-in-hand with the assumption that some form of empire would be continued. As Anthony Padgen writes, "Decolonization, although never seriously contemplated by anyone, would necessarily involve far more complex, less intransigent solutions than either simple withdrawal or a belief in the final disappearance of the colonizers." Rather than complete decolonization or the severing of imperial ties, eighteenth century theorists often argued that commerce would transform "the older European empires into modern productive and cooperative communities."[21] In this way, eighteenth century anti-imperialism was not dedicated to the complete dismantling of imperial connections, but rather their transformation into more humane and beneficial bonds.

I understand imperialism as represented by canonical theorists of the nineteenth century who offered different and complex justifications for the subjugation and civilizing of non-European peoples. Theorists like Alexis de Tocqueville, J.S. Mill, and Henry Maine would be imperial theorists in the threefold definition given by James Tully:

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any right to subjugate, colonize, and 'civilize' the rest of this world." Ibid.

[19] Anthony Padgen writes, "What the new enlightened critics of empire-Hume, Diderot, Condorcet and Raynal among others--share in common with these earlier writers are four things: a strong sense of place, a belief in the particularities, and thus the essential incommensurability of all cultural and political forms of life, the conviction that the goods which modern men sought were radically different from those which their ancient or medieval forebears had sought, and finally, that in terms of this set of temporal and spatial calculations, empires always disadvantaged, sometimes lethally, all those who were caught up in them. Founded ultimately upon conquest and the ruthless displacement or exploitation of native peoples, the dedication of all the first European empires to the perpetuation of Caesoro-papal projects for universal Christendom also came to seem not merely outdated, but ruinous in some deeper sense." Anthony Padgen, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500-c 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 161.

[20] Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 15.

[21] Padgen, *Lords of All the World*, 154.

Uday Mehta writes, "It is of course true that Burke did not oppose the empire in the sense of calling for its immediate dismantling. He was far too deferential to such weighty and established practices, to countenance what for him would have amounted, in that context, to a 'revolutionary' and therefore morally, politically, and psychologically retrograde alternative." Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 158.

> It is 'imperial' in three senses of this polysemic word. It ranks all non-European cultures as 'inferior' or 'lower' from the point of view of the presumed direction of European civilisation towards *the* universal culture; it serves to legitimate European imperialism, not in the sense of being 'right' ...but, nevertheless, in being the direction of nature and history and the precondition of an eventual, just, national and world order; and it is imposed on non-European peoples as their cultural understanding in the course of European imperialism and federalism.[22]

In this dissertation, I will take Tully's formulation as my point of departure in discussing imperialism and Burke's complicated relationship to it. That is, I will treat the combination of civilizational hierarchy, teleological historiography, and the imposition of culture on others as expressing both the material and political life of imperialism and its ideology.[23]

With this understanding of imperialism at the forefront, I pursue one of the lines of inquiry opened by scholarship on Edmund Burke and eighteenth century anti-imperialism: the place of slavery and Amerindian dispossession in anti-imperial thought. I take a significantly more expansive view of Edmund Burke and empire than Jennifer Pitts and Uday Mehta by including Amerindian dispossession, the trafficking of African slaves, and plantation slavery. I contend that this more expansive idea of empire is in keeping with Edmund Burke's understanding of the British Empire and his commitments to reform the West Indian plantation and the slave trade and to allow for the expansion of the colonies in North America. The focus on the Americas, in particular Amerindian dispossession and colonial slavery, allows for a richer understanding of Burke's anti-imperialism and its limits. Without minimizing the significance of Burke's anti-imperialist orientation toward Ireland and India, this approach provides insight into the deep fabric of his beliefs and theoretical formulations. Examining Burke on the British Empire in the Americas also helps to highlight his differences with other eighteenth century anti-imperial theorists who considered the enslavement of Africans and plantation slavery as a prominent feature of the British and French empires—a feature that was viewed by Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Paine and Denis Diderot as extremely distasteful, morally repugnant, and in need of immediate reform. Jennifer Pitts recognizes the intimate connection between eighteenth century anti-imperialism and anti-slavery when she writes:

> Critics of empire in the eighteenth century regarded European imperial expansion as bound up with, and to some extant analogous to, the horrors of the slave trade and slavery. As P.J. Marshall has shown, British reformers in the 1770s and 1780s—notably Burke and William Wilberforce (like Raynal and Diderot in France)—fought slavery in the West Indies and British injustices in India as twin evils.[24]

It is the recognition of slavery as "one of the most glaring injustices," an injustice that many argued displayed the moral probity of the British Empire and the British nation, that goes unexamined in recent works on Edmund Burke and empire. However, while this could be explained by the ambiguous legacy that Burke would eventually leave on abolition of the trade and slave emancipation, it also limits our understanding of an institution that Burke thought deeply about for the last forty years of his life.

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[22] David Armitage, "John Locke: Theorist of Empire?" *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84.

[23] Karuna Mantena delves into the thought of Henry Maine in *Alibis of Empire*; Uday Mehta explores the imperial dimensions of J.S. Mill, James Mill, and Thomas Macaulay in *Liberalism and Empire*; while Jennifer Pitts examines Alexis de Tocqueville in *A Turn to Empire.*

[24] Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 17.

The examination of Amerindian dispossession in Burke provides a greater understanding of his anti-imperialism by highlighting the limitations of his concern for threatened communities. As Jennifer Pitts puts it, most contemporaries of Burke thought of the conquest and dispossession in the Americas as minor matters. The primary concern for those in the British Empire during the 1770s and early 1780s was how to subdue the North American colonies. However, contemporaries of Burke were concerned with Amerindian dispossession, and the eruption of Pontiac's War in 1763 and the Royal Proclamation of 1764 were significant events in the imperial governance of the empire in North America. Amerindian nations formed a significant barrier to colonial expansion and were often key players in colonial wars between France and Britain.

In *A Turn to Empire*, Jennifer Pitts analyzes Edmund Burke's idea of nationhood in Ireland and India as part of his critical stance towards the British Empire, particularly the ways in which Burke sought to extend the idea of the nation beyond Protestant and English chauvinistic boundaries. This enlarging of the nation can also be seen in the notion of who belongs to the nation, who is a citizen, or in eighteenth century terms: who is a subject. In *Moral Capital*, Christopher L. Brown's analysis of the ways in which early British emancipation schemes articulated a form of subjectship for enslaved Africans points to a rhetorical and theoretical application of belonging that Burke employs in his writings on empire. The Irish, American colonists, and Indians are subjects of Britain, while African slaves and Amerindians are not. The larger question is why are some in the empire thought of as political subjects, while others are denied this status? Relatedly, the question of the variable extension of subject status connects with the idea of belonging to the nation. In order to understand Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism, it becomes essential to figure out who he believed were the subjects of empire and how their rights, liberties, and status were defined.

As has been already noted, the contemporary scholarly and public focus on morality, culpability, blame, and responsibility in relationship to slavery and empire are connected with the language of virtue and ideas of government circulating in the eighteenth century. Scholars have long recognized that Edmund Burke's criticism of the East India Company was deeply influenced by his own theory of passions and aesthetics, and that his rhetorical aim was to widen the moral imagination of the British public to include the Indian victims of colonialism.[25]

At the same time, in Burke's anti-imperial thought, his beliefs about the moral imagination and the extension of sympathy connect with his understanding of the historical nature of human societies. Burke's expressed belief in a progressive historiography played a significant role in his analyses of imperial mismanagement in the British Empire.

Examining Burke's anti-imperialism help us understand whether his progressive historiography fits into the paradigms of difference that have cleaved modern political thought (self/other, colonizer/colonized, friend/enemy), or whether it draws from earlier paradigms of identity that were premised on basic similitude. In this enquiry, the "two Indies" (i.e. India and America) and their indigenous populations are front and center. I examine Burke's progressive historiography as it relates to his writings on empire, as well as on Europe. In particular, I explore the significance of Burke's representation of African slaves and Amerindians as figures

[25] Pitts writes, "Burke's rhetorical strategy throughout the Hastings trial conveys his belief in the importance of sympathy in moral judgment. Burke believed that justice is impossible where there is a failure of moral imagination, and he fought the exclusions of imperial politics--most dramatically in the case of India but also in Ireland--by calling on his British audience to exercise moral imagination and to extend sympathy beyond their traditional circle of moral concern." Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 71.

of savage violence in his writings on the French Revolution. Likewise, I examine the ways in which his progressive historiography adversely affects his commitment to abolition over the course of his life. Finally, I explore whether his analysis of the French Revolution as savage and barbaric has any bearing on Burke's anti-imperialism.

An inquiry into Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism provides us with a window into his understanding of empire, revolution, government, progressive historiography, aesthetics, and much more. It also provides us with access to discourses that still shape our contemporary political, intellectual, and social landscape. By investigating Burke's complex and ambivalent anti-imperialism, I hope to provide the reader with a greater understanding of a key figure in eighteenth century British imperial thought, a key figure in the history of political thought, and aspects of a discourse that still remain relevant today.

# CHAPTER I

## Edmund Burke and India: History, Sympathy, and the Limits of Anti-Imperialism

Scholars have long recognized that Edmund Burke's writings and speeches on India formed a significant part of his political theory. Historians of political thought have highlighted his speech on "Fox's East India Bill" as well as his attempt to impeach Warren Hastings (the Governor-General of Bengal) as important for understanding his political theory. For example, Conor Cruise O'Brien places Burke's challenge to "Indianism," the rule of the East India Company during the second half of the eighteenth century, within his "Great Melody," that is: Burke's unique philosophical contribution to the most important dilemmas of the British politic in the eighteenth century. Similarly, Isaac Kramnick in *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of An Ambivalent Conservative* argues that Burke's first obsession was the East India Company's policies in India, which set the stage for his writings on the French Revolution, his second obsession.[26] Kramnick argues that "[h]is speeches on India provide a majestic display of Burke's conservatism, his respect for the past, this humane disdain for colonial innovators who would destroy local and immemorial custom."[27]

In recent discussions of Burke's political theory, a central debate has revolved around the meaning of his engagement with India. Some scholars, including Uday Mehta and Jennifer Pitts, argue that Burke's attempts to reform the relationship between India and Britain—although constrained by certain blind spots—represent a profound critique of empire.[28] Others focus on the imperial commitments of Burke's criticisms of British rule in India and the darker aspects of his attempted reforms. Stephen White, for example, penned a detailed analysis of the continual subjugation of India under Burke's proposals, arguing that reform in India would transform the East India Company's rule from one of explicit violence and violation into more implicit and milder forms of subordination.[29]

My own argument is that Burke's attempts to reform the East India Company represents both profound critique of empire, and one circumscribed by a commitment to the continuation of British rule in India. I interpret Burke's engagement with India through the lens of his ambivalent anti-imperialism. On one hand, Edmund Burke offers a profound, complex, and sustained critique of the East India Company and its agents. On the other hand, this sustained criticism occurs within the confines of recognizing the right of the British to rule India, and legitimating the conquests of the East India Company. This represents a key aspect of his ambivalent anti-imperialism. However, I argue that one of the chief ambivalences of Edmund Burke's anti-

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[26] Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of An Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 128. The chapter on India is titled "Obsession One: Indianism (1783-1795)."

[27] Ibid.

[28] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 159.
Mehta writes, "No other statesman or thinker expresses the depth of pathos, the pained embarrassment, the capacious compassion, and the sustained moral revulsion for the cruelty, torture, deprivation, and injustice that the company was perpetuating. Burke is virtually alone in owning up to this as an indictment of Britain's political and moral rectitude."

[29] Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (AltaMira Press: Walnut Creek, 2000), 50.

imperialism is his defense of civilized populations (i.e. Indians and Irish Catholics) and his silence and often antipathy towards "savage" populations (i.e. Amerindians and African slaves). In his writings on India, this ambivalence is present in his conceptualization of India as a civilized space, in contrast to the savage spaces of the Americas.

In this chapter, I contextualize Burke's engagement with the East India Company; then, I explore his main criticisms of the Company, in particular the Company's treatment of private property; next, I argue that Edmund Burke's expressed belief in a certain kind of progressive historiography and his aesthetics lead to both a high valuation of India and a dismissal of Amerindian culture. Finally, I explore the legitimization of the conquest of India, which constitutes one of the limits of Burke's sustained critique of British rule in India.

## THE BRITISH IN EAST INDIA 1750s-1790s

The 1750s saw the ascendance of British power on the Indian subcontinent. Through a series of historic battles and maneuvers, the East India Company was able to best its French commercial rival, the French Compagnie de Indies Orientales, controlling larger swaths of India and increasing its trade. During this decade, the Company was transformed from one that solely exercised a monopoly on trade into a political power that ruled over thirty million people and collected revenues from landed property.

Throughout the 1750s and 1760s, agents of the East Indian Company aggressively engaged in diplomatic, military, and commercial maneuvers that exploited the decentralized nature of the Indian subcontinent in the eighteenth century.[30] During this time, the Company increased its prominence and power in Bengal and the Carnatic region through military acumen and deceit.[31] Its constant interference with the political and social structure of India created instability, famine, and war for inhabitants of all social strata.[32]

Burke and other Whigs agitated for the reform of the East India Company through writings and Parliamentary means. Frederick G. Whelan provides a succinct list of the abuses that Burke ascribed to the East India Company after its 1757 conquests. He states that Burke believed the Company was responsible for

> soliciting bribes through manipulation of the India custom of giving 'presents' to rulers; corrupt practices in the awarding of military contracts; various treaty violations, including the use of military force in unjust conquests, and the use of intimidation to pressure neighboring states; the use of renegade native agents to perform directly oppressive tasks, such as transmitting bribes and forcefully extracting taxes; the displacement and expropriation of insufficiently subservient native land-owners; assaults on high-ranking women in violation of local custom; and the execution of one of Hastings's enemies is what Burke interpreted as an act of judicial murder.[33]

The evidence of these abuses were found in the Company's records and became the primary material for Burke's advocacy for reform after he joined the House of Commons Select

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[30] P.J. Marshall has argued that the dominant view of the British as passive before 1757 and the simultaneous collapse of the Moghul Empire has rightfully been the subject of historical revision. P.J. Marshall, "The British In Asia: Trade to Dominion," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II The Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 493.

[31] Frederick G. Whelan, "Burke on India," in *Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 169.

[32] Ibid.,170.

[33] Ibid., 174.

Committee in 1781.[34] During debates on various reforms and Warren Hastings's impeachment, Burke relied upon detailed and graphic accounts provided by the documents of the East India Company to censure the Company's avaricious policies and agents.

From the moment of its inception, for Edmund Burke, the government of India under the East India Company had been wholly destructive. It had replaced functioning political and social institutions that promoted social intercourse with a set of arbitrary institutions and policies that not only disrupted social intercourse, but threatened the very basis of society.[35] Throughout India, those states under the rule of the Company experienced the confiscation of property, abuse of nobility, extortion, fraud, and rapid changes to their civil government.[36] For example, in Bengal, an independent judiciary of Muslims was replaced by one of Hindus and Company men, and revenue collection was restructured into the hands of the Company. These actions usurped both tradition and law. In Burke's own words, Warren Hastings "had the hardiness to conceive and the temerity to execute a total revolution in the form and the persons composing the government of a great kingdom . . . at one stroke, the whole constitution of Bengal, civil and criminal, was swept away."[37] This "total revolution" produced the miseries of revolution, including the destruction of commercial, agricultural, and political stability.

Besides an articulation of the role of Parliament in ensuring that British subjects exercised their power in non-oppressive ways, the debate on the reform of the East India Company produced an idea essential to this dissertation: Edmund Burke's theory of trusteeship. According to Burke, all political power was a trust exercised for the benefit of those ruled by it.[38] He articulates this in his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill." After conceding that the East India Company has the right to both its commercial monopoly and its rule over 30 million subjects, he continues:

> But, granting all this, they must grant to me, in my turn, that all political power which is set over men, and that all privilege claimed or exercised in exclusion of them, being wholly artificial, and for so much a derogation from the natural equality of mankind at large, ought to be some way or other exercised ultimately for their benefit. [39]

Burke's argument that power should be exercised for the benefit of those it affects epitomizes his commitment to good governance as well as the need for the humane treatment of all governed subjects. For Burke, the exercise of power, when properly structured, binds together subordinates and superiors in ways that benefit all.

Burke's concept of trusteeship also functions as a principle of reform and revolution. In opposition to the idea that Parliament did not have the right to reform the East India Company, he argued that the Company breached its trust when it destroyed the very fabric of Indian social and political life, created desolation and destruction, and provided no benefits to Indian people. Due to this breach of trust, the Company could be dissolved or reformed by Parliament, the

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[34] Ibid. 170

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Edmund Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 2 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 492.

[38] Mehta writes, "The abuses Burke identified in the India empire stand out in contrast to his conception of the proper basis and duties of any ruling authority. A key idea, one that may derive from Locke's political philosophy, is that government is properly regarded as a trust from civil society and that magistrates and governors, like trustees, are accountable for ruling justly and in the best interest of the subjects as the beneficiaries of the trust." Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 176.

[39] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 439.

power that first constituted it. Burke argues:

> If this is true with regard to every species of political dominion and every description of commercial privilege, none of which can be original, self-derived rights, or grants for the mere private benefit of the holders, then such rights, or privileges, or whatever else you choose to call them, are all in the strictest sense a trust: and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered accountable, --and even totally to cease, when it substantially varies from the purposes for which alone it alone could have a lawful existence.[40]

Because Parliament brought the East India Company into existence through a charter that was meant to serve British interests, Parliament had the right and power to reform or dissolve it. As Burke wrote later, the reform of the Company could be taken upon "the same principles on which have been made all the just changes and revolutions of government, that have taken place since the beginning of the world."[41] This revolutionary stance taken by Burke is conservative in its nature; the power of the East India Company reverts back to Parliament, not the people or rulers of India.[42]

What made the agents of the East India Company ill equipped to rule India? In Burke's description of their character, they are portrayed as young men both out of their depth and driven to make a fortune. In one passage of his "Speech on Fox's East India Bill" he describes Company agents as "birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting," whose sole purpose is to make "a sudden fortune."[43] However, this is to be expected when political dominion over thirty million people is placed in the hands of those not trained to exercise it. For Burke, the youth of those ruling under the aegis of Warren Hastings (the Governor General of Bengal) is a clear sign of the perverted nature of East India Company rule. Of the youth employed by the Company, he writes,

> To put the matter in a few word,—they are transformed from slippery youth to perilous independence, from perilous independence to inordinate expectations, from inordinate expectations to bound less power. Schoolboys without tutors, minors without guardians, the world is let loose upon them with all its temptations, and they are let loose upon the world with all the power that despotism involves.[44]

The agents of the East India Company combine both unconstrained despotic power and the constant pursuit of money. Unlike those who rule in England, their power is unchecked in India, and their passions have not been shaped by the proper experiences and education necessary to rule. Thus, the business of the Company is executed by "schoolboys without tutors" and "minors without guardians," and done within a context devoid of the counterbalances that characterize politics in England (such as the relationship between Parliament and the monarchy).

Edmund Burke also characterizes the agents of the East India Company as "without

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Burke writes, "I therefore conclude, what you all conclude, that this body, being totally perverted from the purposes of its institution, is utterly incorrigible; and because they are incorrigible, both in conduct and constitution, power ought to be taken out of their hands,—just on the same principles on which have been made all the just changes and revolutions of government, that have taken place since the beginning of the world." Ibid., 519.

[42] For Burke, Parliament was the ruling power at the center of the British Empire. Burke writes, "The Parliament of Great Britain sits at the head of her extensive empire in two capacities: one as the local legislature of this island, providing for all things at home, immediately, and by no other instrument than the executive power.—The other, and I think her nobler capacity, is what I call her imperial character; in which, as from the throne of heaven, she superintends all the several inferior legislatures, and guides, and controls them all without annihilating any." Edmund Burke, "Speech on American Taxation," 75.

[43] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 462.

[44] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 174.

society and without sympathy with the natives."[45] They are removed from meaningful social interactions with Indians, which does not promote sympathy for or care for those they rule. [46] But there is more: the lack of social intercourse with Indians, combined with their unconstrained passions, affects the social fabric of Britain, not just India. As Uday Mehta argues, the youth of the East India Company "lacking society themselves . . . unsettle the norms of both British and Indian society."[47] Through belonging to neither British society (in its educative checks), nor Indian society (which would promote greater sympathy), the agents of the East India Company threaten the social order in both locales. A more detailed examination of the ways in which Edmund Burke believed British society had been unsettled by the Company's misrule is examined below.

One of Burke's main criticisms of the unreformed East India Company is that the treatment of property in India threatens the health of British society and British political institutions. Throughout Burke's corpus, private property enjoys a privileged position. It is linked to the continuation of civilization in that it serves as the foundation for and influence on liberty, manners, social hierarchy, stability, gradual change, orientation to place, and political power. In this way, private property is connected to a host of concepts concerning the structure of civil and political society. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke argues that property "tends to . . . the perpetuation of society itself."[48] The idea of inheriting property provides the conceptual framework for understanding continuity in society and politics. Thus Burke writes that with the principle of inheritance,

> Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts, wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old or middle-aged or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression.[49]

In this way, the concept of inheritance—the means by which property is perpetuated in unbroken familial chains spanning centuries—becomes the overriding principle for understanding the continuation of society. Laws, liberties, manners, and social hierarchies persist because they are literally passed on through inheritance; in Burke's analysis, this inheritance mirrors the cycle of human procreation and death, as well as the continuation of families and familial wealth. Property (and inheritance) comes to stand in for the continuation of society itself. And the property of India bears the same relationship to the laws, manners, rights, and social hierarchy of India as the property of France or England does to their respective social and political orders.

Thus, for Burke, the confiscation of property through fraud and theft threatened to dissolve Indian society. He consistently interpreted attacks on Indian property as attacks on

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[45] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 462.

[46] He writes, "Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the gray head of an Englishman. Young men (boys almost) govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people than if they still resided in England—nor, indeed, any species of intercourse, but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement. Animated with all the avarice of age and all the impetuosity nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting." Ibid.

[47] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 176.

[48] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 45.

[49] Ibid.

Indian commerce, law, and social stability. As such, he describes the auctioning of the "the landed interest of a whole kingdom" (Bengal) as the greatest calamity.[50] It is this confiscation that led him to assert that

> I was in a manner stupefied by the desperate boldness of a few obscure young men, who, having obtained, by ways which they could not comprehend, a power which they saw neither the purposes nor the limits, tossed about, subverted, and tore to pieces, as if it were in the gambols of a boyish unluckiness and malice, the most established rights, and the *most ancient* and *most revered institutions*, of ages and nations.[51]

These obscure young men of the East India Company treated property as if it were unprotected by law, and could be seized and auctioned at will; they destroyed the most "ancient" and "revered" institutions, and demonstrated the destructive nature of the Company's avarice.

The implications of the Company's confiscation of Indian wealth are not contained on the Indian subcontinent; the destruction of property in India threatened British society as well. As scholars have long noted, the anti-imperial thrust of Edmund Burke's analysis of India was animated by his belief that the behavior of the East India Company in India had a negative effect on British society and political culture. As Anthony Padgen explains, late eighteenth century skeptics of empire believed "the metropolis could never be fully insulated from the consequences of the processes of overseas expansion which it had itself initiated."[52] Burke himself argued that the spoils of India were being circulated amongst the ruling elite, corrupting the social and political structure of Britain. Through the circulation of East India wealth, the bases of aristocracy were being undermined through the marriage of upstart lowborn men with aristocratic women. At the same time, the virtue of the Commons was being undermined because the wealth of India was being used to buy political power in the House of Commons. In this way, those responsible for fraud abroad became the bearers of catastrophe when returning home with their imperial plunder. Of this Burke argues:

> Arrived in England, the destroyers of nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppression and oppressor. They marry into your families; they enter into your senate; they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage; and there is scarcely an house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest that makes all reform of our Eastern government appear officious and disgusting, and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt.[53]

The plunderers of India became allied with interested parties at the highest level of British society who felt obligated to protect those who were destroying India. Of equal import, the plundering of India united the natural aristocracy of Britain—those responsible for guiding politics and society—with those who were responsible for the destruction of the aristocrats of India. This union of agents of the East India Company and British aristocracy transformed the returning Company men—who had demonstrated themselves to be greedy, opportunistic, cruel, and immoral—into social and political leaders. For Burke, the growing power in England of

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[50] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 499.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Padgen, *Lords of All The World*, 173.
[53] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 439.

former agents of the East India Company was a form of corruption because it rewarded fraud and confiscation with social prestige, protected criminals from justice, and prevented the reform of an unjust imperial institution.

The agents of the East India Company had not been shaped by the appropriate social checks and educative constraints placed on those seeking social mobility in old Europe. Rather, they were upstarts who had gathered their wealth abroad, not only beyond social control and approbation, but also in opposition to Parliament and metropolitan authorities. It is in this light that Mehta interprets Edmund Burke as concerned that the "new India money [was] at work subverting the traditional order at home,"[54] especially when the traditional order was the check that landed property had on mobile property, and in the political arena, the check of the House of Lords on the House of Commons. For Burke, who consistently championed the stabilizing force of landed property, the marriage of East India Company agents into prominent families as well as their entrance into the House of Commons threatened the political and social stability of Britain.[55]

One of the greatest dangers to this stability was that these men would enter government and act in their own interests. For Burke, the prospect that "the delinquents of India . . . may be the Commons of Great Britain" was terrifying, not least because the agents of the East India Company had shown themselves to be incapable of ruling for the benefit of others. As Burke argued in his "Speech on Mr. Fox"s East India Bill," the agents of the East India Company showed no sympathy for, nor had any social intercourse with, Indians, and they ruled for their own benefit, not the benefit of those governed.

## INDIA AND HISTORY

Jennifer Pitts and Uday Mehta have both suggested that Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism was founded in part by a lack of trust in civilizational hierarchy, a term that I borrow from Mehta's discussion of nineteenth century political thinkers' search for an "objective scale of civilization."[56] Mehta argues that Burke was more skeptical of civilizational progress than nineteenth century liberal thinkers because he did not use civilization as an argument for colonial rule of non-European populations.[57] Pitts has also attempted to show how Burke's classification of India as civilized was an essential aspect of his defense of India from the Company. Both Mehta and Pitts praise his ability to see through the injustice of civilizational hierarchies.[58] In particular the idea of oriental despotism was a popular ideology that represented Asian cultures as without settled law, Asian populations as enslaved, and Asian rulers as exercising unchecked powers.[59]

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[54] Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of An Ambivalent Conservative*, 128.

[55] Mehta writes, "The empire effects its power through the creation of a class of individuals who are rootless and who afflict the societies they touch with a similar contagion. Lacking society themselves, they unsettle the norms of both British and Indian society." Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 159.

[56] Mehta writes, "Nevertheless, Mill was in fact motivated by a more philosophically serious purpose, and that was to establish on rational grounds a clear scale of civilizational hierarchies." Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 91.

[57] Ibid, 159.

[58] Pitts writes, "His determination to unsettle the notion of oriental despotism was remarkable and even prescient." Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 79.

[59] In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu constructed a model of despotism in which a single ruler exercised arbitrary power over a large country through fear and without limitation by legal or social checks." Frederick G. Whelan, "Burke on India," in *Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and

In *Liberalism and Empire*, Mehta argues that history became one of the justificatory discourses for liberal empire. According to Mehta, civilizational hierarchies and progressive historiography were instrumental to nineteenth century liberal justifications of imperial control. He writes:

> For nineteenth-century British liberalism, of which I take J.S. Mill to be the leading exemplar and James Mill, a supporting advocate, political institutions such as representative democracy are dependent on societies having reached a particular historical maturation or level of civilization. But such maturation, according to the historiography that the Mills established and subscribe to, is differentially achieved. That is to say, progress in history itself occurs differentially. Hence, those societies in which the higher accomplishments of civilization have not occurred plainly do not satisfy the conditions for representative government. Under such conditions liberalism in the form of the empire services the deficiencies of the past for societies that have been stunted through history.[60]

In this way, representative government is seen as suited only for the civilized. Nineteenth century justifications of empire relied on the Scottish Enlightenment teleological view of human history that measured all societies based on the model of European civilization. J.S. Mill and other nineteenth century British liberals would later conceive of India as a space of despotism rather than civilization. As John Stuart Mill famously stated, the principle of liberty that grounds his liberalism does not apply to barbarians. Despotism could be legitimately exercised over those who were uncivilized, because "liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion."[61]

Edmund Burke was unconcerned with the application of representative government to India, not least because he did not privilege representative government as the highest good for society. His concern, in India and elsewhere, was not to determine who was capable of representative government, but rather how those under British rule could be ruled in an orderly fashion. In Mehta's analysis, nineteenth century British imperialism presented itself as the solution to the problems of societies mired in the past—to those who had not progressed to the civilizational level of Europe. In such a teleological vision of history, whereby Europe was seen as the fulfillment of human development and the natural outcome of human history, imperialism was justified by the rationale that it promoted progress in backward societies. Mehta's argument is that liberal empire's commitment to civilizational progress and its use of history as both the measure and plan for social progress tied together liberalism, history, and empire.

The links between nineteenth century liberalism, history, and the justifications of empire had national variations (French, British, German, etc.), and evolved over the course of the century. In "Republicanism, Liberalism, and Empire in Post Revolutionary France," Jennifer Pitts distinguishes between the early nineteenth century British justification of empire as a civilizing mission and the French justification of empire as primarily a return to republican imperial glory.[62] Although there was widespread understanding of the Algerians as barbaric and in need of civilization, the overriding argument for empire was regaining the lost glory that had

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Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 173.

[60] Ibid., 81.

[61] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 24.

[62] Jennifer Pitts, "Republicanism, Liberalism, and Empire in Postrevolutionary France," in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 264.

characterized the decline of France in the global arena.

Similarly, in *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Empire*, Karuna Mantena maintains that the justification of the civilizing mission in British imperial ideology lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century. This dominant discourse was replaced (and complemented) by a discourse of empire preventing the cultural dissolution of organic societies by modernity.[63] The new discipline of sociology emerged as the study of traditional societies threatened by modernity, and as a way of understanding non-European societies as fundamentally fragile and in need of protection. The diversity of nineteenth century European imperial justifications does not detract from the influence of the progressive view of history on imperial justifications. The idea of civilizing barbaric peoples, and ruling over those less civilized, informed all justifications to a greater or lesser extent.

However, as studies of nineteenth century imperial thought demonstrate, different conceptions of progressive histories fit with different imperial justifications. For example, Henry Maine's conceptualization of India as a "traditional" space devoid of history and in need of protection, led to imperial justification based on the protection of the "traditional," in Asia and Africa.[64] Likewise, a prominent mode of nineteenth century British imperialism relied on an idea that empire was necessary in order to raise the civilizational level of those it encountered. This civilizing mission was premised on the idea of European superiority, but also a belief that this superiority could be utilized to benefit those who it encountered.[65]

Edmund Burke was influenced by Scottish Enlightenment historiography. As has often been noted, his effusive praise of William Robertson showed the similarity between his views and the historiography embraced by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, which conceptualized civilizations in sequential stages. In response to Robertson's *History of America*, which attempted to provide an account of the savage state of the Americas, Burke writes,

> [T]he great map of mankind is unfolded at once, and there is no state of gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement, which we have not at the same moment under our view: the very different civility of Europe and of China; the barbarians of Persia and of Abyssinia; the erratic manners of Tartary and of Arabia; the savage state of North America and New Zealand.[66]

The stadial schemes of the Scottish Enlightenment, in particular Robertson's vision of America, meant that the European past, and the past of all of humanity, could now be studied because that which had only been assumed (i.e. a state of savagery) had been documented. Therefore, those who had reached a level of civility, including Europeans, could reflect on their own distant past in a state of savagery by studying the works of those who documented the lives of Amerindians. According to Burke, the progressive view of history was strengthened by Robertson's theorizing of savagery because it revealed a state that was thought to be lost to time. In revealing Amerindian savagery, Robertson had made it possible—without wild conjectures—to interpret all human civilizations upon a common typology that began with savagery and progressed to higher forms of civilized existence.

The progressive historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment relied on an understanding of the human that featured the savage, the barbarian, and the civilized, on a single progressive

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[63] Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 10-12.

[64] Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 5.

[65] Ibid., 17.

[66] Vanita Seth, *Europe's Indians: Producing Racial Difference, 1500-1900* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 90.

scale. The progressive conception of history was simultaneously universal, in that it presented all human beings as equally formed by the material conditions of their societies, but also profoundly value laden in that it created hierarchies of peoples based on their civilizational attainment. This tension between a universal understanding of man that is still deeply hierarchical lies at the heart of Burke's understanding of history. As Silvia Sebastiani writes in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress*, stadial schemes were "a natural history, in that it was a system for classifying and describing creation, but it also indicated the natural course of the development of societies: the process of civilization, as it came to be known in the second half of the eighteenth century."[67] Describing the natural emergence of European "civilization" from a history of "barbarism" provided progressive historiography with a value-laden and normative framework that privileged the civilized over the barbaric and savage. Such privileging and evaluation can be seen in Burke's criticism of the East India Company's rule in India.

In his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," Burke evokes Amerindians to contrast the difference between savage and civilized people. In speaking about the civilization of India, he states:

> My next inquiry to that of the number is the quality and description of the inhabitants. This multitude of men does not consist of an abject and barbarous populace; much less of gangs of savages, like the Guaranies and Chiquitos, who wander on the waste borders of the River of Amazons or the Plate; but a people of ages civilized and cultivated,—cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods. There have been (and still the skeletons remain) princes once of great dignity, authority, and opulence. There are to be found the chiefs of tribes and nations. There is to be found an ancient and venerable priesthood, the depository of their laws, learning, and history, the guides of the people whilst living and their consolation in death.[68]

Interpreting Burke as simply describing the distance between the "savage" Amerindians (Guaranies and Chiquitos) and "civilized" Indians fits with his expressed belief that good government means acknowledging and governing based on the character of a people (as rebellious, pliant, etc.). However, his description of "abject" (i.e. contemptible, servile, low) barbarians provides an understanding of the evaluative dimensions of his progressive historiography. The civilized is superior to the barbaric, while the barbaric is superior to the savage. In this way, Indians are far superior to their Amerindian counterparts.

Burke's description of the quality of Indians constitutes an argument for the civilizational and historical superiority of Indians over savage peoples. He made a similar argument in *An Account of European Settlements in America,* where the Burkes (William and Edmund) concluded that European civilization was normatively better than Amerindian civilization because it constrained vices while maintaining virtue.[69] The rhetorical power of Burke's description of India derives both from its status of being civilized and from the duration of its civilization. Indians should not be confused with barbarians because they achieved civilization long before Europe was on the road to it.

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[67] Ibid., 90.

[68] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

[69] Burke writes, "It will point out to us the advantages of a religion that teaches a compassion to our enemies, which is neither known nor practiced in other religions; and it will make us more sensible, than some appear to be, of the value of commerce, the art of a civilized life, and the lights of literature; which, if they have abated the force of some of the natural virtues by the luxury which attends them, have taken out the likewise sting of our natural vices, and softened the ferocity of the human race without enervating their courage." Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (London: Pall-Mall, 1808), 1:142.

Interpreting Edmund Burke's civilizational hierarchy and progressive historiography solely as harmless turn of phrase misses the rhetorical power of his contrasts between Indians and Amerindians (civilization and savagery), as well ancient India and ancient Europe (civilization and savagery). The high value attached to ancient and modern India is of equal significance to the low value attached to Amerindian savages who wander American wastelands.

In *Europe's Indians*, Vanita Seth interprets this moment in Burke—and in others such as Abbe Raynal and William Robertson—as signaling a shift from America to India as the primary site for conceptualizing human history.[70] Seth argues that before the mid to late eighteenth century, European thought had focused on what Amerindians revealed about human beings in their natural state. The state of nature trope, in particular that of John Locke's, often led to definitions of human beings as fundamentally rational, while simultaneously conceived of the distance between natural man (Amerindians) and civilized man (Europeans) as primarily the result of European norms and political institutions. Hence the pervasive belief that the state of nature could exist at any moment in European society should political authority break down. However, in the mid to late eighteenth century, the ideas that men were ultimately similar to each other, and that Amerindians represented man's true nature, were complemented by the emergence of India as a significant paradigm in which to conceive of human history and of humanity. India and America were conceived of as representing two distinct histories of mankind: America represented man's natural history, while India represented human history as artifice. Seth writes:

> Whereas the indigenous Americans were the embodiment of man in the state of nature, the Indians represented the civilizational antiquity of humanity. If the Amerindians offered a portrait of man as nature made him—man untouched by time, uncorrupted by false morals, and unscathed by civilization deceits—India appeared to be fast displacing the ancient Greek and Roman worlds as the watering hole of human history.[71]

The development of the conceptual bookends of natural man and historical man (America and India) represented a shift in an understanding of mankind from one in which the idea of identity as grounded in the ultimate similitude of humanity gave way to an idea of identity as grounded in difference. It is within this era that Burke conceptualizes identity as difference produced by history and tradition.

The emergence of a "progressive concept of history" as displayed by Burke and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers led to an understanding of men as produced—but not solely—by history.[72] History became a way to understand not only differences between societies (savage, barbaric, civilized), but also to perceive difference as a fundamental characteristic of humanity. Vanita Seth writes:

> What makes such appeals to history significant is that they were being articulated within the framework of a newly emerging epistemology. Whereas in the seventeenth century and eighteenth century, European representations of difference were articulated in

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[70] "The significance of Raynal's, Robertson's, and Burke's juxtaposition of the Americas and India lies not in the litany of characteristics said to demarcate savagery from civilization—after all, there is nothing new in Burke's privileging of the settled polis over nomadic society." Seth, *Europe's Indians*, 121.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The tradition of empiricism which conceptualizes human beings as shaped by their experiences conceptualized differences between human beings as rooted in the habitual. Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry* displays an empiricist bent in that it argues that all men are affected in the same manner by the external stimuli of "ideas" of the sublime and beautiful. Likewise, Burke's adoption of Scottish Enlightenment historiography, similar to the comparative ethnology of Lafitau, sees the differences between men as the product of education, habit, and manners.

> relation to a predetermined typology of Man (identified through universal traits such as reason, freedom, rights, individuals and human nature), by the late eighteenth century Man gives way to men—a breathless parade of human difference fashioned out of the particularity of history, tradition, language and race.[73]

A new emphasis on diversity within mankind, as well as each human society as distinct through history and other categories, transformed the conception of mankind and man. Seth's argument does not maintain that earlier societies were not aware of time, or saw human beings and society as a-temporal. Instead, she argues that the distinction between the late nineteenth century concepts of history and earlier understandings is that human beings became identified, distinguished, and primarily understood in terms of difference. Human diversity became the paradigm for thinking about humanity, and this diversity was the result of manners, institutions, laws, and the constraining of passions; the diversity of manners, institutions, laws, and constraints of passions were understood as the result of civilizations being at different stages of human history.

However, if India complements America in stadial schemes and progressive historiography, Burke's description of India places it on the same civilizational level as Europe. India is distinguished from the "savage" and "barbaric" peoples of the globe, and shares in the gifts of civilization. Burke highlights the political and social structures that are common to both Europe and India, including civil government, nobility, law, property, writing, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, and populous cities. These various phenomena demonstrate that India is civilized, unlike the "gang of savages" of America. He writes that in India,

> Here is to be found an ancient and venerable priesthood, the depository of their laws, learning, and history, the guides of the people whilst living, and their consolation in death; a nobility of great antiquity and renown; a multitude of cities, not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe; merchants and bankers, individual houses of whom have once vied in capital with the Bank of England; whose credit had often supported a tottering state, and preserved their governments in the midst of war and desolation; millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanicks; millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth.[74]

Nothing could be further from savagery than the markers of civilization quoted above, and the civilization of India is interpreted in stark contrast to Amerindian societies.

Given this contrast, for Burke, the worth of Indian civilization is simultaneously a devaluation of Amerindian civilization. As Seth points out, this contrast between savagery and civilization is not merely a preference for the "settled polis," a notion that runs through Western political thought from Ancient Greece onwards, but rather constitutes a more robust understanding of differences between human beings. Conceptualizing it solely as a preference for settled communities does not adequately account for the ways in which the deficiencies of Amerindians are perceived as an essential aspect of their humanity. As opposed to social contract theorists such as Hobbes and Locke, this humanity is basically shared by a profound similitude between Amerindians and Europeans, so much so that Amerindians could serve as the paradigm of the construction of commonwealths via deliberation. In Burke's progressive historiography, this similitude is considerably lessened, and the essential character and nature of Amerindians (and all peoples) are seen as the result of a society's manners, institutions, laws, and constraining of the passions (i.e. history).

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[73] Ibid.,122.

[74] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

It is at this juncture that a re-examination of Edmund Burke's conception of history and its relationship to empire begins. Mehta's claim that Burke's historical understanding undermined the connections between history and empire, by "seeing through the abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies" is difficult to adjudicate.[75] On one hand, Burke"s justification of empire in India was not premised on a civilizing mission, as is evident in his conceptualization of India as a profoundly "civilized" space; this, when combined with his opposition to conceptualizing India as in need of being ruled by "oriental despotism," supports the claim that history played a positive role in his defense of India. On the other hand, although the civilizational hierarchy displayed in "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill" does not support the exercise of British rule in India for the purpose of civilizing, neither does it support the idea of self-rule or an end to British rule. Similarly, and of greater importance, is the idea that India had attained a high level of civilization, which necessitates a robust defense of those oppressed by the East India Company. Indians are not "savages" with little value, or of low quality; rather they are a civilized people under attack. In this way, the practices of the East India Company are presented as more horrifying because they happened to civilized, not savage, peoples.

Mehta's claim that Edmund Burke "saw through the abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies," must be qualified.[76] Burke rejected one set of "abusive distortions" in the form of the idea of oriental despotism while employing another "distortion" that Amerindians were inferior to both Indians and Europeans. This is a limit of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism in his expressed beliefs about both India and America. It also is a constitutive element of what I argue is Burke's ambivalent anti-imperialism; on display in his writings on India are the ways in which he valued different populations based on whether he considered them savage or civilized.

## INDIA, SYMPATHY, AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION

In *A Turn to Empire*, Jennifer Pitts argues that Edmund Burke displayed a universal vision of justice and morality throughout his writings on empire. She argues that during the impeachment of Warren Hastings and debates on the American crisis Burke rejected a set of beliefs that he labeled "geographical morality" and "geographic justice." She writes:

> Burke often invoked the term geographical morality to condemn the particular form that Britain's exclusionary politics took in India. Geographical morality, for Burke, refers to the systematic refusal to extend the moral and legal standards that the British recognized in Europe to Indians, as members of distant and alien societies.[77]

According to Pitts, in opposition to geographic morality, which led to the stifling of justice and lack of moral consideration for India, Burke expressed a global vision of justice and morality that was not subject to change whether power was being exercised in a distant continent or in the heart of Europe.

Burke's argument in the opening speech of Warren Hastings's impeachment represents a clear example of his understanding of the universal nature of justice and its relationship to imperial rule.[78] He writes:

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[75] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 155.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 77.

[78] "[He] has told your Lordships of his defence, that actions in Asia do not bear the same moral qualities as the same actions would bear in Europe. My Lords, we positively deny that principle...These gentlemen have formed a plan of Geographical morality, by which the duties of men in public and in private situations are not to be governed by their relations to the Great Governor of the Universe, or by their relations to men, but by

> Hitherto we have moved within the narrow circle of municipal justice. I am afraid, that, from the habits acquired by moving within a circumscribed sphere, we may be induced rather to endeavor at forcing Nature into that municipal circle than to enlarge the circle of national justice to the necessities of the empire we have obtained.[79]

What he considers municipal justice—i.e. justice confined solely to a locale—does not accord with the dictates of universal justice and hence imperial rule. The context of this utterance provides important clues to its meaning. First, it occurred at the beginning of Warren Hastings's impeachment—an impeachment that attempted to address crimes and abuses that occurred overseas. Second, it occurred five years after the loss of the thirteen North American colonies due to the refusal by Parliament to govern the colonies in ways that reflected the moral and political dictates of government in England. For Burke, at the heart of the American conflict was an attempt to govern those who were used to British liberties upon principles that were antithetical to British liberties.

After the Seven Years' War, Parliament enacted policies that curtailed colonial self-government and thus robbed subjects of liberties to which they were accustomed. Thus, for Burke, one of the contradictions at the heart of the American conflict was the inability of the English public to recognize that the basic moral and political principles that they held dear should be utilized to judge the rights and liberties of British colonists. Many of his extended arguments during his "Speech for Conciliation with America" were attempts to show the Britishness of the American colonists, through the explication of common moral and political frameworks that united the colonists to the mother country. From Burke's perspective, the attempt of Parliament to transform the established relationship between monopoly and political autonomy after the Seven Years' War was doomed to fail in that "an Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery," not only because this contradicts the freedom-loving characteristics of the English, but also because it leads to an obvious absurdity by which those most concerned with freedom are denying their fellows freedom.[80] For Burke, the American Revolution demonstrated that having a narrow sense of justice (i.e. municipal justice) could ultimately lead to the dissolution of valuable imperial bonds. Thus, he believed that the expansion of the "national" notion of justice was necessary in order to maintain the British Empire.

Not being attentive to the universal aspects of justice could be deeply destructive to imperial governance. The attempts to reform the East India Company and impeach Hastings constituted Burke's rejection of the idea that adherence to local justice at the center of the British Empire could legitimately or effectively govern the extremities of the Empire. From Burke's perspective, municipal justice was not only morally suspect, but also led to destructive policies that were inimical to the prosperity and stability of the British Empire.

Thus I concur with Jennifer Pitts that Burke's ideas regarding justice, morality, and good governance undergirded his criticisms of certain imperial institutions and structural forms of oppression, including the East India Company and the Penal Laws in Ireland.[81] Pitts further argues that Burke's attack on geographic morality was complemented by an attempt to produce

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climates...parallels not of life but of latitudes. As if, when you have crossed the equinoctal line, all the virtues die...This Geographical morality we do protest against. Mr. Hastings shall not screen himself under it." Ibid., 78.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 2 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 134.

[81] Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 77-85.

greater sympathy and thus justice for those affected by colonial mismanagement. We now explore this effort, which Pitts describe as "calling his British audience to exercise moral imagination and extend sympathy beyond their traditional circle of moral concern" in further detail.[82]

In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, sympathy is considered a social passion that allows others to share in the passion of others. For Burke, sympathy brings us out of ourselves and allows us to share passions (whether pleasure or pain) with others. He writes:

> It is by the first of these passions [sympathy] that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.[83]

As a way of connecting to individuals in society, sympathy emerges as one of three social passions (along with imitation and ambition). Sympathy provides human beings with the ability to share in the fortune of others; this emotional connection can be pleasurable or delightful, depending on the status of another, as we remain attentive to the fortunes, concerns, pains, and pleasures of other social beings.[84]

However, sympathy has a dual valence that corresponds with the two kinds of passions explored in *A Philosophical Enquiry*. Sympathy can be triggered by the various passions associated with pleasure, or it can be triggered by the various passions associated with the sublime. In the first case, the sympathizer shares in the pleasure and good fortune of another. In the second case, the sympathizer shares in the pain and misfortune of another. However, Burke believed that our response to another's misfortune is itself multifaceted. He argued that we feel both pain and a certain pleasure in another's misfortune.[85]

To Burke, the pleasure that accompanies sympathy serves a greater moral end. "Delight" in the pain of others fascinates and captures the sympathizer, and thus leads to engagement rather than disinterest. The simultaneous experience of delight and pain holds us fast to tragic scenes while encouraging us to help others. Burke states, "The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer; and all this antecedent to any reasoning."[86] The substitutive aspect of sympathy, as well as its complex bundling of delight and pain, means that other peoples' misfortunes cause us to seek remedies for their suffering. Burke claims that the multifaceted moral rules of delight and pain in sympathy are the result of "Creator," and thus part of providential order.[87]

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[82] Ibid., 71.

[83] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 41.

[84] Andrew Rudd writes that imaginative sympathy "whereby a person can enter into the thoughts and feelings of another through the exercise of imagination...is generally traced to the moral philosophy of the mid eighteenth century, notably the writings of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith." Andrew Rudd, *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770-1830* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 2.

[85] Burke writes, "I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others." Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 43.

[87] Burke writes, "And as our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted, in the distress of others." Ibid., 42.

According to Burke, rhetoric is the best art for evoking sympathy. This is primarily because he conceptualized words as the most powerful tool for evoking all passions. He writes:

> Now, as words affect, not by any original power, but by representation, it might be supposed, that their influence over the passions should be but light; yet it is quite otherwise; for we find by experience that eloquence and poetry are as capable, nay indeed much more capable of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases.[88]

Although Burke argues that words are more effective than other arts in affecting others, the reasons behind why language is able to affect passions are underexplored in *A Philosophical Enquiry*. However, the literary examples that Edmund Burke sprinkles throughout the text, as well as his discussion of rhetoric, proceed under the assumption that the reader recognizes how language and words can move individuals to tears, terror, and action. If this seems ungrounded by argumentation, it might be because Burke's methodology is to provide "a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions."[89] As such, the validity of some of Burke's assertions rests on the reader comparing his experiences to the examples provided throughout the text.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, the power of poetry and rhetoric rests in its ability to affect people. Burke writes:

> In reality poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact descriptions so well as painting does; their business is to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves. This is their extensive province, and that in which they succeed the best.[90]

As such, rhetoric, poetry, and speech function as means for affecting sympathy. In a deliberative body, such as Parliament, sympathy can become part of the complex rationale for supporting legislative action. In his defense of India, Burke's rhetoric relied on the simultaneous casting of Indians as sympathetic victims of the East India Company, and the Company's agents as avaricious and immoral characters.

Christopher Reid in "Burke as Rhetorician and Orator," explains that Burke's style was influenced by a commitment to emulating the intensity of the great ancient orators such as Pericles and Cicero.[91] In a break with contemporary rhetorical styles, Burke used passion to inflame the passions of his audience. Reid writes:

> The orator's capacity to be himself moved (through willed identification with a cause or as the first audience of his own words) was understood as a precondition of this transfer of emotion and consequently of persuasion itself. This was the principle known as ipse ardere, to be oneself aflame, which Cicero elaborates at length in *De oratore*.[92]

One of the key rhetorical strategies of Edmund Burke's writings and speeches on India was to inflame the minds of his audience (i.e. *ipse ardere*) in order to promote sympathy for Indians. According to Jennifer Pitts, Burke believed justice in India was only possible when British

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[88] Ibid., 158.

[89] He writes, "Could this admit of any remedy, I imagined it could only be from a diligent examination of our passions in our breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions." Ibid., 1.

[90] Ibid., 157.

[91] Christopher Reid, "Burke as Rhetorician and Orator," in *Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46.

[92] Ibid., 48.

authorities interpreted Indians as worthy of sympathy. Of this, she writes:

> Burke's rhetorical strategy throughout the Hastings trial conveys his belief in the importance of sympathy in moral judgment. Burke believed that justice is impossible where there is a failure of moral imagination, and he fought the exclusions of imperial politics—most dramatically in the case of India but also in Ireland—by calling on his British audience to exercise moral imagination and to extend sympathy beyond the traditional circle of moral concern.[93]

Pitts is correct in asserting that Edmund Burke sought to extend the moral imagination of the British. This is clearest in his attempts to shorten the conceptual distances between the "civilized" West and the "barbaric" East, and elicit sympathy for the social and political elite of India. In his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," Burke attempts to shorten the conceptual distance between Europe and India, particularly in his comparison of Bengal to Germany. After discussing the similarities of both regions, Burke explains that his rationale for comparison is

> not for an exact resemblance, but as a sort of a middle term, by which India might be approximated to our understandings, and if possible, to our feelings, in order to awaken something of sympathy for the unfortunate natives, of which I am afraid we are not perfectly susceptible, whilst we look at this very remote object through a false and cloudy medium.[94]

The awakening of sympathy must come through a comparison to Germany, because India's remoteness had up to this point prevented sympathy. The type of "imaginative sympathy" that Burke articulated was within a tradition of thought that not only articulated how sympathy was possible, but also challenged sympathetic connections. As Andrew Rudd states, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers often maintained "the strength of an idea was held to be in proportion to its physical proximity to the self, so that a person sympathises more readily with someone or something that is close at hand."[95] The idea that sympathy could be extended over large distances and to foreign people was met with skepticism.[96] However, Burke famously rejected such bounds to the sympathetic imagination and invited his readers to extend sympathy to remote places and foreign peoples and thus extend the political and moral obligations of the British. His employment of the "middle term"—in this case Germany—served as an attempt to close the distance between England and India, and thus go beyond the perceived limits of sympathy. At the same time, Germany serves as "the cloudy and false medium" that is necessary even if not quite accurate.

One of the profound challenges of the East India Company is that common ideas about India's civilizational status had shaped the impressionable minds of young agents of the East India Company. India was where "young men (boys almost) govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives,"[97] and as such are predisposed to abuse their power. Because they conceived of Indians as being in a "degraded and servile state" and as "vile and miserable slaves," the agents of the East India Company treated Indians without any consideration of their feelings and without any sympathy.

For Burke, it was Parliament's role, as an assembly of deliberation and in its majestic "imperial character," to overcome the obstacles of distance, foreignness, and chauvinism and to

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[93] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 71.
[94] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.
[95] Andrew Rudd, *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770-1830*, 2.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 462.

reform the East India Company to build sympathy between ruler and ruled.[98] By rendering India less remote and more similar to Europe in the minds of his audience, Burke hoped to bypass the impediments to sympathy (including unfamiliarity and bias) and produce greater justice.

Burke vehemently rejected the claim that the East India Company could act despotically without constraint for local customs and laws simply because India had a history of despotic rule. According to Burke, the extensive laws and commitment to the protection of property in India belied the claim of oriental despotism. The property of India before the East India Company was as stable as the property of Europe. During his impeachment of Warren Hastings, he writes:

> I mean to prove that the people of India have laws, rights, and immunities; that *they have property*, *movable and immovable, descendible as well as occasional*; that they have property held for life, and that they have it as well secured to them by the laws of their country as any property is secured in this country; that they feel for honor.[99]

The evoking of various forms of property was meant to demonstrate that Indians did not live under despotic governments. Burke appeared to hope that the portrayal of various forms of Indian property protected by law would strike Britain as similar to its own relationship between monarchy, property, and law, whereby the Magna Charta was seen as a guarantor of protection from confiscations of property. Similarly, Burke's argument that Indians have a "feel for honor," or have a code of honor similar to chivalry, appears as an attempt at portraying Indians as possessing the spirit and manners that he believed accompanied property ownership.[100] Burke suggests that the vast network of sentiment, law, and hierarchy that exists in Europe has an Indian corollary that must be protected from destruction by the East India Company.

Edmund Burke's defense of India involved attempts to widen the moral imagination of his audience and to cultivate its sympathy for Indians. However, like his civilizational hierarchy, it had profound negative consequences for his understanding of empire in the Americas. Even though sympathy creates a desire to alleviate the suffering of others, its intensity varies according to the social standing of the human being under consideration, as well as the sensitivity of the observer. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, sympathy is "a sort of substitution" in which we are "put into the place of another man." This ethical component to sympathy is only possible because it is accompanied by a pleasure in the tragedies of others. For Burke, sympathy is tied to delight in others' miseries. Thus he writes:

> I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others; for let the affection be what it will in appearance, if it does not make us shun such objects, if on the contrary it induces us to approach them, if it makes us dwell upon them, in this case I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or another in contemplating objects of this kind.[101]

We are captivated by the pain and misfortunes of fellow human beings and feel something akin to pleasure. At the same time, this delight is no trifling thing, but rather a powerful emotion that pulls us towards scenes of misery. In Burke's aesthetic theory, we find that sympathy depends on delight. However, it becomes clear that the amount of delight in the misfortune of others is not uniform but depends on characteristics and circumstances of the people affected.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry* Burke argues that when the great are brought to ruin it

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[98] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," 134.

[99] Edmund Burke, "Speeches in General—First Day," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 207.

[100] Edmund Burke, "Speeches in General—First Day," 207.

[101] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 42.

provokes the highest sympathy in civilized and feeling people. First, he argues that our response to the misfortunes of others is greater than our response to the successes of others. Then, he argues that in our identification with the misfortunes of others, our sympathy and delight is increased if the person or object is "excellent." Burke writes:

> The prosperity of no empire, nor the grandeur of no king, can so agreeably affect in the reading, as the ruin of the state of Macedon, and the distress of its unhappy prince. Such a catastrophe touches us in history as much as the destruction of Troy does in fable. Our delight, in cases of this kind, is very greatly heightened, if the sufferer be some excellent person who sinks under an unworthy fortune. Scipio and Cato are both virtuous characters; but we are more deeply affected by the violent death of the one, and the ruin of the great cause he adhered to, than with the deserved triumphs and uninterrupted prosperity of the other.[102]

Sympathy, already a powerful passion, is most powerful when evoked in response to the plight of great characters. Sympathy is also stronger in narratives that incorporate sublime elements (destruction and fear), rather than those that involve beautiful elements (success and comfort); thus Scipio, who enjoyed great success as a Roman general, evokes less delight and sympathy than Cato, who defended the Roman Republic from Julius Caesar's designs. For Burke, Cato represents our fascination with the destruction of greatness, including the destruction of "great causes," one that even outstrips our appreciation of seamless great deeds. Two decades later, in Edmund Burke's speeches and writings on India, the destruction of greatness becomes one of the chief rhetorical strategies to promote sympathy, reform the East India Company, and bring Warren Hastings to justice.

The clearest evidence that Burke's defense of India was premised on aspects of his understanding of rhetoric as seen in *A Philosophical Enquiry* rests in his admission that he intentionally focused on the portrayal of Indian nobles as tragic figures. In his "Speeches in General—Third Day" of Warren Hastings's impeachment, Burke argues that the destruction of India's nobility provides the best framework for interpreting the destruction of Indian society. He claims:

> [I]t is wisely established in the constitution of our heart that mankind interests itself most in the fall and the fate of great personages. They are the objects of tragedy everywhere, which is addressed to our passions and feelings, and why? Because men of great place, men of great rank … cannot fall without a horrible crash on all the others that are about them. Such Towers cannot tumble without the ruin of Cottages.[103]

Burke reiterates that sympathy and delight in the misfortunes of others is heightened when it is about "great personages." The constant focus on royalty and the privileged is the result of our natural tendency to feel deepest for these great men, one that accords to the natural structure of society and human passion. However, whereas in his explication of the variability of sympathy and delight in *A Philosophical Enquiry* he focuses on the contrast between success and misfortune, in his speech on third day of Warren Hastings's impeachment, he adds a social dimension to why this occurs: the fall of the great also affects the lowly. Thus, he argues that his

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Burke, "Speeches in General—Third Day," 308. In his Fox's East India speech, Burke states, "I shall only add a few circumstances that may tend to awaken some sense of the manner in which the condition of the people is affected by that of the prince, and involved in it,—and to show you, that, when we talk of the sufferings of princes, we do not lament the oppression of individuals,—and that in these cases the high and low suffer together." Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

focus on Indian nobles during the impeachment does not mean he is unsympathetic and unconcerned for those of lower stations: “Towers cannot tumble without the ruin of Cottages.” By placing the elite as the emblem of a common calamity, through the image of falling towers, Burke contends that sympathizing with superiors could also accommodate sympathy for subordinates.[104] Thomas Paine contested this perspective when he claimed that Burke "pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird."[105]

The valorization of the “great men” in Burke’s aesthetics and political writings has obvious connections to his theorizing of natural aristocracy as the best form of government. In Burke’s political thought, great men (the landed aristocracy and those born to lower stations who have distinguished themselves) are those who guarantee the preservation, the stability, and order of society.[106] Burke argued on numerous occasions that a natural aristocracy should govern all social and political institutions in order to ensure that chaos does not reign throughout society.[107]

The naturalization of hierarchy in politics, society, and the emotions (the eliciting of sympathy) has repercussions for Burke’s understanding of empire in India and the Americas. Returning to the discussion of India and history, I contend that Edmund Burke’s conceptualization of India as “civilized” positions it as great in comparison to other societies. India’s high position in his civilizational hierarchy is analogous to the position of a privileged class in his political and social thought, as well as the “great personage” in his aesthetic thought. Thus, I argue that Burke’s understanding of human nature as naturally more sympathetic to great personages privileges the “civilized” amongst nations, just as his aesthetics privileged aristocracy within the nation.

Burke’s conceptualization of European and Indian civilization as superior does not mean that Burke was merely a chauvinist or racist. Nor does an aestheticized civilizational hierarchy mean that Burke could not be sympathetic to “savages” or those conceptualized as existing at earlier stages of human history. However, it does mean that based on his aesthetics and progressive history, savages are less natural objects of sympathy when tragedies befall them. This lesser sympathy does not mean that the savage or lowly are placed outside of all sympathy or are not included in a vision of global justice. Rather Burke defended these populations with a lesser intensity, and more importantly, the reforms advocated are less extensive.

The difficulty in interpreting Edmund Burke’s thought on sympathy through the lens of his historiography and aesthetics is that it opens up questions about whether there are links

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[104] In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke argues that hairdressers or tallow-chandlers were not fit to rule the France, nor were country lawyers, or small time clergy. He writes, “Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression if such as they, either individually or collectively, is permitted to rule. In this you think you are combating prejudice, but you are at war with nature.” Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 43.

[105] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philip (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 102. “Not one glance of compassion, not one commiserating reflection that I can find throughout his book, has he bestowed on those who lingered out the most wretched of lives, a life without hope in the most miserable of prisons. It is painful to behold a man employing his talents to corrupt himself. Nature has been kinder to Mr. Burke than he is to her. He is not affected by the reality of distress touching his heart, but by the showy resemblance of it striking his imagination. He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird. Accustomed to kiss the aristocratical hand that hath purloined him from himself, he degenerates into a composition of art, and the genuine soul of nature forsakes him. His hero or his heroine must be a tragedy-victim expiring in show, and not the real prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon.”

[106] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 43.

[107] Edmund Burke, “Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 176.

between his theory of sympathy, the value that he attached to civilizations, and the values that he attached to aristocracy. Are those who are more sympathetic more valuable, and more worthy of justice? Does Burke have a universal code in which all human beings are morally equivalent?

Edmund Burke did not believe that there are exact moral equivalences between people of different strata and different civilizations. Burke would likely have rejected exact moral equivalence as a reductive and "mechanical" way to conceptualize the differences between members of the same society and differences between civilizations. Reducing every man or woman to a single moral standard or equivalent would strip them of the value and meaning which they have due to their positions within the complex web of their social relationships. As he famously laments in response to the destruction of chivalry, "On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order."[108] A strict moral equivalence between individuals of different social backgrounds would be the moral version of the rights of man; it would demand that treatment and consideration of a person could be articulated without reference to their context, their social status, or reference to how they have been shaped by their place in the world.

However, although I interpret Burke as hostile to strict moral equivalences between people of different social strata as well as different civilizations, I also interpret him as committed to a vision of humanity where people no matter their status (as high or low) are worthy of moral consideration. His theory of trusteeship, which insists that power should be used for the benefit of those subjected to it; his belief that unconstrained power was likely to be abused; and his belief in sympathy as a passion that can and should lead to the alleviation of another's suffering, all point to a thinker who was committed to articulating beliefs with the goal of promoting greater justice. However, he was also a thinker whose understanding of justice decried the reducing of a queen to mere woman, and would see an equal valuation of the civilization of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas as ridiculous.

I believe that the best way to interpret Edmund Burke's aesthetics of greatness and his progressive historiography is as parts of his larger web of beliefs. Relative to his beliefs on empire, they contribute to his moral reasoning when determining the extent and immediacy of reform, or even whether such reform is necessary at all.

As will be explored later, Burke did sympathize with African slaves and did see the slave trade and colonial slavery as both horrific and in conflict with moral norms. However, this did not lead to an impassioned or public stance for systematic and immediate reform of slavery or the abolition of the slave trade. Similarly, his writings on Amerindians often show commiseration for the destruction of Amerindian nations, but do not lead Burke to articulate an anti-imperial stance on Amerindian dispossession or the destruction of Amerindian sovereignty. Instead, oftentimes Burke's rhetoric on slavery and Amerindian dispossession position Amerindians and African slaves as unsympathetic and frightening figures. In many of his writings on empire in the Americas, Amerindians and African slaves are figured as violent savages, a figuration that places them at the lowest level of Burke's civilizational hierarchy, while simultaneously rendering them unsympathetic due to the threat of violence.

The focus on his historiography and aesthetics/rhetoric is not meant to be the only rationale for his defense of India. It is not because India was civilized and had royalty that Edmund Burke attempts to reform the East India Company and bring its agents to justice. Rather, these accompanied other beliefs concerning the necessary limitation of the exercise of power, the corrosive influence of East India Company agents on the social and political stability of Britain,

[108] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 67.

and the necessity of promoting better commerce in India. The focus on Edmund Burke's historiography, rhetoric, and aesthetics as they relate to the distance between Indians and Amerindians, and his aesthetics that privilege "greatness," is most important as it relates to Burke's anti-imperialism and his views of the British Empire in the Americas.

However, the focus on these aspects, although possibly minor when related to other concerns, would not necessarily be minor to Burke. I believe it mattered mightily to Burke that the horrors of the East India Company were falling upon a civilized people and not a "gang of savages" like the Chiquitos. Just as it matters that in the natural order of things, the great—whether persons, causes, or civilizations—provoke the greatest sympathy. Remaining attentive to the progressive historiography, aesthetic, and rhetorical dimensions of Burke's writings on India helps make sense of Burke's expressed beliefs in ways that he would understand.

## EDMUND BURKE AND SUBJECTSHIP

One of Edmund Burke's conceptual and rhetorical moves in his attempts to reform empire is to evoke the notion of subjectship for those populations that were being ruled in unjust and impolitic manners. As with his writings on Ireland, the French Revolution, and plantation slavery, his writings and speeches on India display a meditation on the idea of membership in the British Empire and its meaning. Subjectship in the eighteenth century has a rough connotation to our modern notion of citizenship, except that subjectship is to membership under the ancien régime in Europe prior to 1789, what citizenship is to membership under the new democratic governments after 1789.

Edmund Burke was a part of a cadre of thinkers on empire who employed novel notions of subjectship in attempts to reform abuses throughout the British Empire. In *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, Christopher L. Brown argues that subjectship was rhetorically and conceptually extended to various populations within the British Empire after the Seven Years' War. After acquiring a host of new territories, British intellectuals turned their attention to understanding how this new, larger, and more diverse empire could be ruled without dissolution from internal and external causes.

As Brown argues, imperial thinkers "aimed to keep colonists from antagonizing the established residents in the acquired territories," meaning that authorities of the Crown and Parliament sought to prevent rebellion and bloodshed by promoting policies that would promote stability.[109] Brown writes:

> As policies aimed at lessening antagonism between settlers and entrepeneurs and conquered populations was a new order of subjugation. In this new order, Whitehall did not permit British entrepreneurs to enjoy free rein in the new territories. Ministers preferred managed subjugation to naked exploitation, if only to secure the submission of His Majesty's new subjects.[110]

Burke attempted to mitigate the more exploitative and destructive aspects of colonial regimes, institutions, and governmental policies in India. His attempts to reform the East India Company were an attempt to transform "naked exploitation" into "managed subjugation," a type of subjugation that did not rob Indians of their property and their livelihoods.

In *Moral Capital*, Brown describes subjectship as the long tradition of a sovereign

[109] Ibid., 226.
[110] Ibid.

providing protection for individuals in return for obedience. This protection also denoted a membership in a larger social and political structure. Brown writes, "The relationship also conveyed membership: although subjects could and did hold different ranks, in theory, each could rightfully claim certain privileges, not the least of which was the right to hold real property and the right to equal consideration under the law."[111] An understanding of Edmund Burke's extension of subjectship to Indians requires attention to his attempted reforms as articulated in his "Speech on Mr. Fox"s East Indian Bill" and his explicit claims that Indians are British subjects. The reforms that Burke desired in India in 1783 were aimed at protecting Indian property from the greed of the East India Company. They were meant to fulfill the duty of a sovereign (in this case Parliament) to protect its subjects from those who would violate the right to property.

Within this framework of protection and the extension of rights, Burke asserts that Fox's East India Bill would be India's "Magna Charta."[112] The bill would have guaranteed, through British legislation, the protection of Indian property from despotic and fraudulent seizure. Burke argues:

> This bill, and those connected with it, are intended to form the Magna Charta of Hindostan. Whatever the Treaty of Westphalia is to the liberty of the princes and free cities of the Empire, and to the three religions there professed—whatever the Great Charter, the Statute of Tallage, the Petition of Right, and the Declaration of Right are to Great Britain, these bills to the people of India. Of this benefit I am certain their condition is capable: and when I know that they are capable of more, my vote shall most assuredly be for our giving to the full extent of their capacity of receiving; and no charter of dominion shall stand as a bar in my way to their charter of safety and protection.[113]

Parliament's protection of Indian property challenges what Burke believed to be at the foundation of the Company's abusive rule. Because the civil and criminal law of India had been systematically destroyed by the revolutionary despotism of the Company, one that is geared towards confiscation and fraud, any stability in India—whether it be in government, commerce, or social relations—would rely on the replacing of the laws that had been overturned with new ones. However, instead of the old native laws and powers protecting property, British laws would protect India through a "Magna Charta." In this way, Fox's East India Bill and other Parliamentary bills reforming the East India Company would become the "charter of safety and protection," an extension of Indian subjectship by Parliament.

Edmund Burke explicitly calls Indians subjects, and in his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," he rejects the claim that the bill would increase the influence of the crown while identifying Indians as "fellow-subjects." He writes:

> But as to this bill, whether it increases the influence of the crown, or not, is a question I should be ashamed to ask. If I am not able to correct a system of oppression and tyranny, that goes to the utter ruin of thirty millions of my fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects, but by some increase to the influence of the crown, I am ready here to declare that I, who have been active to reduce it, shall be at least as active and strenuous to restore it.

As a Whig who consistently fought against the influence of the crown in Parliamentary affairs, Edmund Burke's statement that he would support an enlargement of the crown if it ended the

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume II* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 441.

[113] Ibid.

oppression of thirty million Indians is meant to be a declaration of the depth of his commitment to the reform of the East India Company. The term "fellow-creatures" places Indians within the domain of existence or nature, while the term "fellow-subjects" places Indians within the domain of a membership in a more exclusive category: subjects of the king (and Parliament).

The extension of subjectship occurs within the context of seeking justice for Indians, attempting to extend the moral imagination of the British public, and also to elicit sympathy for the oppression of Indians at the hands of the East Indian Company.[114] The significance of Burke claiming Indians as subjects of both the British crown and the laws of Parliament extends beyond India to other portions of the British Empire. The application of the concept of subjectship will be denied to African slaves and Amerindians: those conceived of as savage and servile in Burke's writings on India.

## CONCLUSION

Although extensive, Edmund Burke's attempted reforms of the East India Company were circumscribed by his expressed belief that the British had a right to rule India. Jennifer Pitts rightly describes this aspect of Burke's political thought as "the limit of his critique." She writes:

> Burke's unwillingness to question the legitimacy of the Company's very existence, like his decision to 'draw a veil' over the injustice and violence that had (so recently) established British power in India, marks the limits of his critique of British power in India. Within these limits his criticism is uncompromising, but this concession to the possible legitimacy of British rule in India is considerable.[115]

As stated before, eighteenth century anti-imperial thinkers did not argue for the dissolution of empire, but advocated the transformation of empires through commerce and better government; therefore, Burke's commitment to the continuation of British rule is in keeping with many of his contemporaries. However, his legitimizing of the two-decade-old, despotic, and contingent conquest of India poses a greater difficulty to those scholars who interpret Edmund Burke's writings on India as anti-imperial. Drawing a "veil" over the conquests in India is different than accepting that the conquests in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean are irreversible. Whereas the European colonies in the Americas were at least one hundred years old, and European powers could not reasonably affect a "simple withdrawal," India was conquered less than thirty years before and therefore was not a long-established institution.

It might have been ill-advised, impolitic, and provided Britain's enemies with further prestige and wealth; however, severing ties with India could be seen as more salient than other of a question as the Caribbean colonies. This appears to be subtly acknowledged by Burke in his "Speech on Fox's East India Bill" when he states, "[I]f we are not able to contrive some method of governing India well which will not of necessity become the means of governing Great Britain ill, a ground is laid for their eternal separation, but none for sacrificing the people of that country to our constitution."[116] Burke's speech hinting at the possible dissolution of bonds between India and Britain occurred two months after the Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolution, and

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[114] Burke writes, "I confess, I wish that some more feeling than I have yet observed for the suffering of our fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects in that oppressed part of the world had manifested itself in any one quarter of the kingdom, or in any one large description of men. That these oppressions exist is a fact no more denied than it is resented as it ought to be." Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 71.

[115] Ibid., 70.

[116] Edmund Burke, "Fox's India Bill Speech," in Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 5, ed. P.J. Marshall (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1981), 383.

ratified American independence from Britain. Although discarded as an option in Edmund Burke's later writings on India, the idea of separation was at least theoretically available in reference to India, and articulated as a live possibility by Burke.

I interpret Burke's commitment to the East India Company as exemplary of his general ambivalence toward empire and imperial practices.

In *Liberalism and Empire*, Mehta argues that Edmund Burke was not an "enlightened imperialist." Although Mehta concedes that Burke was ultimately supportive of British rule in India, he claims that Burke's varied criticisms go beyond the scope of any imperialist. He writes:

> Much of what he [Burke] says about the British rule in India is squarely within the framework of a plea for good government; none of it is a plea for India self-government. He is substantially concerned with the moral and political probity of those, like Governor Warren Hastings and Paul Benfield, who violated the norms of good government and in doing so abused power and the public interest. But to conclude from all this that Burke was merely an *enlightened imperialist*, an apologist laboring to secure the empire on surer and more commendable foundations, would be thoroughly to miss the tenor of his thought and the significant challenge that he presents to empire and to the ways of thinking and acting that sustain it.[117]

The argument I have developed in this chapter concurs with Mehta that Burke was not "merely" an enlightened imperialist. Rather, I have suggested that he is best understood as an ambivalent anti-imperialist. On the one hand, he advocated for British trusteeship, natural aristocracy, the continuation of long-standing institutions, civilizing missions, and a more humane empire in India, Ireland, Africa, and the Americas, while also criticizing various forms of avaricious and destructive imperial government. Likewise, any charge that Edmund Burke was an apologist for the British in India ignores his passionate critique of the East India Company.

Burke's fundamental ambivalence toward the British Empire could be described as a general commitment to British rule alongside profound criticism of extant imperial practices. The criticisms that Edmund Burke leveled at despotic, unjust, violent, and misguided imperial policies and institutions form the core of what scholars have interpreted as his anti-imperialism. However, this anti-imperialism as immanent critique has its own internal ambivalences, especially if examined from within the British Empire. The chief ambivalence is that those societies and peoples considered civilized are passionately defended from imperial aggression, while those populations considered savage are portrayed less sympathetically and are left relatively undefended. Likewise, those institutions and agents that affect "civilized" peoples become candidates for immediate, systematic reform, while those institutions and agents that affect "savages"—including Amerindians and Africans—are not candidates for immediate, systematic reform. The parts of the arguments that deal with the Americas will be explored in the following three chapters.

[117] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 119.

## CHAPTER 2

## SAVAGERY, DISPOSSESSION, AND REVOLUTION: AMERINDIANS IN EDMUND BURKE'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

The scholarship on Edmund Burke and America is divided on the meaning of his approach to Amerindians. On one hand, thinkers such as Jennifer Pitts and Luke Gibbons interpret Burke as critical of American colonists and as a defender of Amerindians. For example, Pitts believes that his views changed over time to be more sympathetic to Amerindians. She writes, "Burke's writings, of course, evince considerable exclusions and blind spots. Some of these, like his early dismissive assumptions about the savagery of Native Americans, were tempered over the course of his life."[118] In a similar vein, Luke Gibbons writes that Burke "was not entirely without sympathy for the plight of the Indians, manipulated as they were by competing colonizing forces into disastrous alliances that almost led to their destruction."[119] Both authors argue that Burke understood that Amerindians were victims of European colonialism, and that he was in some ways critical of American colonists' treatment of Amerindians.

However, there are others such as Linda Colley, Margaret Kohn, and Daniel O'Neill who all have a less generous take on Edmund Burke's writings on Amerindians.[120] For example, Colley writes, "How do we reconcile these outbursts [the constant evoking of Amerindian savagery], which struck even his admirers as excessive, with Burke's abolitionism, or his well known campaign against British injustices in India?"[121] Colley sees Burke's portrait of Amerindians as savages as incongruous with his apparent concern for African slaves and Indians. Kohn and O'Neill see in his description of Amerindians in *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, not only a civilizational hierarchy, but also descriptions that will become key for his response to the French Revolution.[122]

Burke's constant evoking of Amerindian savagery would appear at odds with other aspects of his political theory only if one considers him both an abolitionist and a committed anti-imperial thinker. However, it is not clear that Colley fully appreciates the limited nature of Burke's abolitionism in its use of Scottish Enlightenment stadial schemes or the content of his criticisms of British rule in East India.[123] I contend that Pitts's reference to Burke's views of Amerindians changing over time is unfounded, and instead argue for the relative stability of his negative portrayal of Amerindians and the stability of the sources of the portrayal. Likewise, I contest the emphasis that Gibbons places on Burke's recognition of the ills of colonialism on Amerindians, and his claim that Burke grew more sympathetic to Amerindians over time.

Of equal importance, this chapter argues that Edmund Burke's writings—especially those on the American Revolution—display a disregard for Amerindian sovereignty and property rights. In various places, Burke celebrates the encroachment of American colonists and the disappearance of Amerindian land, while he attributes very little standing to the political

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[118] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 62.

[119] Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186.

[120] Ibid.,187.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Margaret Kohn and Daniel O'Neill. "A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America," *Political Theory* 34 (2006): 192-231.

[123] The content of his criticisms of the East India Company have already been discussed in the previous chapter.

structure of Amerindian governments. As such, I argue that unlike his views of Indian and Irish peoples, Edmund Burke does not conceive of Amerindians as subjects with rights and liberties that need to be addressed by imperial reform. In fact, I contend that Burke thinks of Amerindians as outside of empire, always threatening it, and yet representing its real borders.

This chapter is structured as follows: the first section deals with Burke's historical understanding of Amerindians; the second with Amerindian dispossession; the third with Burke's denial of the status of subject to Amerindians; the fourth with Burke's constant evoking of savagery in his political theory; finally, the last section examines whether Burke's views became more sympathetic over time.

## SAVAGERY, PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND EMPIRE

The writings of Edmund Burke on Amerindians display an understanding of historical change and the historical progress of mankind influenced by Scottish Enlightenment historiography. As scholars have pointed out in reference to his writings on the French Revolution as well as his writings on history (in response to a review of Robertson's history of America), Burke understood different human civilizations as occupying progressive stages in human development, which began with savagery and ended in civility.[124] However, whereas it is clear that by the late 1770s Burke believed in a progressive historiography, his early writings do not display this belief. I contend that Edmund Burke's progressive historiography can be discerned in his *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, in particular his portrayal of Amerindian societies. In Burke's writings from 1757 onward, Amerindians are conceptualized as savages.

The figure of the savage traces its roots to the beginnings of Western political and social thought; as J.G.A. Pocock notes, the concept of savagery originally denoted those nomadic tribes that lived outside of the Greek polis.[125] The savages of ancient Greece were not considered fully human due to their lack of social and political practices such as philosophy, art, and politics as practiced within Greek city-states.[126] As Pocock succinctly puts it: "'Barbarians' and 'savages' were thus defined as lacking, either accidentally or essentially, some attributes of humanity."[127] The modern notion of savagery drew upon these ancient roots and applied them to the Amerindian cultures of the New World.

The link between Amerindians and savagery was established early when claims of cannibalism circulated around European encounters with Amerindians. This linkage of cannibalism with contemporary peoples would remain a hallmark description of Amerindians. As Vanita Seth writes"

> Cannibalism maps the European imagination onto the social geography of the New World, enveloping the Indian into a repertoire of images that long preceded their discovery—images that roamed over the surfaces of travel writings, scholarly dissertations, poetic verse, artistic canvases, and religious treatises traversing a history from ancient times to the sixteenth century, from the sixteenth century to the present. [128]

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[124] Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*; Kohn and O'Neill, "A Tale of Two Indias," 192-231; Linda Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[125] Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Barbarians, Savages, and Empires*, 158-159.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Vanita Seth, *Europe's Indians: Producing Racial Difference, 1500-1900* (Durham: Duke University

Amerindians were placed within already existing categories within European thought, including the category of savagery. However, their incorporation into the category of savagery reconfigured it in profound ways. For example, the etymology of the word cannibal is derived from "the pronoun 'Carib,' the Indian inhabitants of the Antilles were widely recorded to eat the flesh not only of their enemies but of their children."[129] As such, Amerindians were seen as contemporary equivalents of the ancient Greek tribes who engaged in *anthropophagi*.[130] In this sense, Amerindians were seen as exemplars of the category of savagery after European contact with the Americas.

A primary source of Edmund Burke's initial understanding of Amerindians is Joseph-Francois Lafitau, whose work was published not long before Burke's. Burke explicitly accepts a progressive historiography that Lafitau articulates in *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (1724). Following Lafitau, Burke placed Amerindians at the first stage of human civilization, in a state of savagery, and as such at the beginning of human history. In the section of *An Account* titled "The Manners of Americans," he writes:

> And they all form a very striking picture of the most distant antiquity. Whoever considers the Americans of this day, not only studies the manners of a remote present nation, but in some measure, the antiquities of all nations; from which no mean lights may be thrown upon many parts of the ancient authors, both sacred authors, both sacred and profane. The learned Lafitau has labored this point with great success, in a work which deserves to be read amongst us much more than I find it is.[131]

In the above quote, the manners of Amerindians are important as a mode of studying the ancient past of all of humanity. It is their place in history (i.e. the "most distant antiquity") that is the most striking and useful. The manners of Amerindians as both antecedent and contemporaneous to "ancient authors" provide a lens for the interpretation of ancient texts. Burke's claim that Amerindians "form . . . a picture of the most distant antiquity" hints at the concept of a progressive historiography, but does not alone confirm it. However, when the statement is combined with the next sentence's reference to Lafitau, one can legitimately interpret Edmund Burke as having a progressive understanding of history in the 1750s.

Burke's reliance on Lafitau's description of Amerindians places him within a larger tradition of an explicit historical understanding of human society. As Anthony Padgen has argued, Lafitau was a comparative ethnologist, who understood human difference as the result of a culture's development in time. Padgen writes:

> What Lafitau and the Jesuit historian Jose de Acosta before him, created was not a general evolutionary history of mankind, although it was a contribution to such a history, but a comparative ethnology which argued that cultural difference could be explained neither as the consequence of differing psychological dispositions, nor as the merely contingent arrangements of different social groups, but as the indication of the positions which the various human societies had reached on a historical time-scale.[132]

Lafitau's understanding of humanity conformed to Burke's own belief in an empiricist vision of human psychology as represented by Burke's analysis of passions and stimuli in *A Philosophical*

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Press, 2010), 53.

[129] Ibid., 52.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:208.

[132] Padgen, *Lords of All The World*, 4.

*Enquiry*. Like Burke, Lafitau "was largely anti-rationalist and anti-Cartesian," but whereas Burke drew upon Lockean roots, Lafitau drew upon Aristotelian roots of human psychology that were premised on the idea that all human social behavior was based on "habituation."[133] Lafitau was himself at the end of a longer tradition that sought to explain the behavior of Amerindians within an Aristotelian framework. Iberian thinkers such as de las Casas, Acosta, and Victoria were part of a two-century long debate and meditation on the place of Amerindians. In *Lords of All the World*, Padgen describes the unfolding of this debate:

> They began with an explanation, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, which made of the American Indian a 'natural man' incapable of rational and hence moral choice. They ended up with a theory that all human cultural behaviour, and nearly all beliefs, are the outcome of social conditioning, what Aristotle—who also offered a plausible account of how such 'imprinting' operated—called ethismos or habituation.[134]

Burke's use of Lafitau places him within this long tradition of thought whose inheritance was the idea that "cultural behavior" was the result of the social context. As such, through the use of Lafitau's work, Burke expressed the belief that the variations between civilizations were due to variations in influences, circumstances, habits, and education.

In much of eighteenth century thought, the social character of Amerindians—their manners and mores—was interpreted as lacking in civility, refinement, and moderation. For example, in Burke's *An Account of European Settlements in America*, he claims that the passions of Amerindians are ferocious and extreme. The clearest example of Amerindian ferocity occurs during wartime, when the pent up passions of stoic Amerindians erupt.[135] In this text, the ferocity of warfare becomes the primary lens through which to interpret the nature of Amerindians and their cultures. Burke writes:

> I do not dwell upon these circumstances of cruelty, which so degrade human nature, out of choice; but, as all who mention the customs of this people have insisted upon their behavior in this respect very particularly, and as it seems necessary to give a true idea of their character, I did not choose to omit it. It serves too, in the strongest light, to what an inconceivable degree of barbarity the passions of men let loose will carry them. It will point out to us the advantages of a religion that teaches a compassion to our enemies, which is neither known nor practiced in other religions; and it will make us more sensible, than some appear to be, of the value of commerce, the art of a civilized life, and the lights of literature; which, if they have abated the force of some of the natural virtues by the luxury which attend them, have taken out likewise sting of our natural vices, and softened the ferocity of the human race without enervating their courage.[136]

Burke's analysis of Amerindian warfare could be interpreted as a paean to European civilization where Amerindian society is without compassion towards enemies, and the passions of men are

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[133] They began with an explanation, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, which made of the American Indian a "natural man" incapable of rational and hence moral choice. They ended up with a theory that all human cultural behaviour, and nearly all beliefs, are the outcome of social conditioning, what Aristotle--who also offered a plausible account of how such 'imprinting' operated--called ethismos or habituation." Ibid., 3.

[134] He states, "This is the reason that, when the passions of the Americans are roused, being shut up, as it were, and converging into a narrow point, they become more furious; they are dark, sullen, treacherous and unappeasable."

[134] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:242.

[136] Ibid.

let loose in a violent way, while European society provides benefits and checks on passions. For Burke, European society is better than Amerindian society because it lessens the vices, while not losing the virtues. In many ways, this interpretation is sensible because there is an obvious valuation of commerce, literature, Christianity, and sense of improvement in European modernity. However, Burke's discussion of the "art of civilized life" not only should be interpreted in light of his progressive historiography, but also in light of a larger debate about the legitimacy of the trope of the noble savage.

Burke's commitment to valuing "commerce, the art of civilized life, and the lights of literature" makes more sense as an attack on the long tradition of noble savage writings that claim that Amerindians represent natural man—man untouched by civilization—and that this natural man is morally superior in some ways to his European counterpart.

Sankar Muthu, in *Enlightenment Against Empire*, provides a general view of the noble savage trope and its meaning in sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century thought. He writes:

> The lack of 'art or order' among beings who lived simply according to nature is a trope that emerges in nearly every idealized conception of Amerindian life, although the specific manner in which such 'natural' lifestyles are presented and explained differ from thinker to thinker. A key philosophical assumption of such portrayals is that a human life *could* be simply natural (or very nearly so), free from the 'artificial', regular social practices and constructed institutions that shape human expectations and form the horizon of possibilities—free, that is, from what would not most often be described as 'culture'.[137]

While idealizing Amerindians as somehow morally superior and closer to nature and natural law, the noble savage trope assumed that there existed human beings who were completely natural, rather than cultural, beings. The nobility and the moral value of Amerindians was then deeply tied to them being natural, instinctual, and untouched by the artifices of civilized life.

Noble savage narratives were only obliquely concerned with Amerindians, and were often primarily intended as challenging prevailing European beliefs. Thus, the noble savage device was often utilized in arguments seeking to temper European chauvinism and/or to criticize European inequality.[138] Thinkers as diverse as Montaigne, Lohatan, and Rousseau would utilize the noble savage to criticize the assumptions of their contemporaries and European institutions. However, the noble savage trope would come under attack from thinkers like Hume and Robertson, who saw it as impossible fiction. For example, Ferguson would write, "We speak of art as distinguished from nature, but art is itself natural to man,"[139] while Hume criticized the noble savage trope as illusory and fantastic.[140] As a reader of Scottish Enlightenment texts, Edmund Burke was familiar with the emphasis that Scottish thinkers placed on human beings as cultural agents. It is within this debate about the legitimacy of the noble savage that Burke's analysis of Amerindian warfare should be placed.

When Burke states that the ferocity of Amerindian passions "will make us more sensible,

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[137] Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 14.

[138] "First and foremost, the concept of the noble savage was a critical device that could serve the interests of thinkers who sought to challenge a variety of orthodox doctrines. Two central claims run through most noble savage writings: first, that one should be wary of judging others simply by one's own, possibly parochial, standards and, second, that a sympathetic analysis of the 'natural' peoples of the New World could place into particular sharp relief the deep injustices of 'artificial' European societies." Ibid., 20.

[139] Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 70.

[140] Ibid.

than some appear to be, of the value of commerce, the art of a civilized life, and the lights of literature,' he is denying the legitimacy of the noble savage trope and contending with those who are denigrating the material products, the manners, and the products of European civilization. In particular, the focus on the "art of civilized life," is best interpreted within the dichotomy at the heart of the noble savage trope between natural man and artificial man. Burke offers a robust rejection of the noble savage as superior to European man when he claims that European institutions check the vices while not diminishing the virtues of Europeans.

Edmund Burke's rejection of the noble savage trope is not only seen in the discussion of war, but also in his overall interpretation of how Amerindian societies are themselves constructs. In writings that deploy the noble savage trope, the manners of Amerindians are thought of as the result of instincts and obedience to natural law; social institutions and education are not factors in this regard. Explaining the behavior of Amerindians through references to nature was a central tenet in the discourse on noble savagery. Sankar Muthu explains:

> It is important in his account, as it is so often in narratives of natural humanity and noble savagery, to defend the idea that the virtues of such lives result not from forms of education, institutions, or self-conscious and dynamic social practices, or indeed from any other form of what was understood to constitute artificiality, but rather from the uncorrupted instincts (or, for Lahontan and others, the laws) that Nature itself implanted in humans. [141]

Burke explicitly denies that Amerindians are products of nature when he discusses the idea that their characters have been shaped by "education," rather than nature. In describing the ways in which Amerindians are trained to contain their emotions, he writes, "From their infancy they are formed with care to endure scoffs, taunts, blows, and every sort of insult patiently, or at least with a composed countenance. This is one of the great objects of their *education*."[142] According to Burke, the stoicism of Amerindians is not natural, but rather cultivated and a product of human society.[143] Thus, Amerindians in their most basic and notable characteristics and manners, are the products of culture rather than nature.

In opposition to the trope of natural man and the noble savage, Burke and other thinkers conceived of human beings as "cultural agents." According to Muthu, this means that "humans are partly shaped by and situated within cultural contexts, yet are also able to consciously and freely transform themselves and their surroundings."[144] This view describes Lafitau's, Burke's, as well as Scottish Enlightenment thinkers' understanding of societies as shaped by manners and the development of social institutions. The emphasis that Burke places on education, on institutions, and on the passions of Amerindians displays how Burke conceptualizes Amerindians as "cultural agents" who shape themselves and are shaped by their surroundings.

Burke's critique of the trope of noble savagery forms a part of his criticisms of the French Revolution. I argue that his various arguments against the French Revolution are tied to his understanding of Amerindians as "cultural agents" on one hand, and as exemplars of savage violence on the other. I maintain that Amerindians played a triple role in Burke's thoughts on revolution: first, they were the paradigm of savage violence; second, they were the exemplar of

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[141] Ibid., 41.

[142] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:213.

[143] "But human nature is such, that, as virtues may with proper management be engrafted upon almost all sorts of vicious passions, so vices naturally grow out of the best dispositions, and are the consequence of those regulations that produce and strengthen them." 1:213.

[144] Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 67.

"cultural agents;" and third, they were a representation of a contested colonial history (one with limited anti-imperial dimensions).

## SAVAGERY IN BURKE'S REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS

In Edmund Burke's writing on the French Revolution, Amerindians are portrayed as one of many embodiments of savage violence. In his response to revolution, descriptions of savagery are drawn from classical Greek understandings, including references to Scythians, Amazonians, and Furies. However, in many references to the state of nature, uncivil man, and savage manners, Amerindians remain a referent. Furthermore, unlike Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, many of Burke's writings on the French Revolution, including *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* and *Letters on the Regicide Peace*, do not explicitly name America as an example of the state of nature.

One clear linking of savagery and Amerindians in Burke's writings on the French Revolution occurs in *Reflections on the Revolution of France.* In a text that constantly evokes the idea of the French Revolution as savage, Burke explicitly uses the Iroquois, a North American confederacy of Amerindian nations, as a lens to interpret the meaning and significance of the revolution. The passage where he equates the French revolutionaries with the Iroquois occurs in the narrative concerning the transportation of the French monarchs from Versailles to Paris. In response to Richard Price's insistence that the march was triumphant, Burke counters:

> This 'leading in triumph,' a thing in its best form unmanly and irreligious, which fills our preacher with such unhallowed transports, must shock, I believe, the moral tastes of every well-born mind. Several English were the stupefied and indignant spectators of that triumph. It was (unless we have been strangely deceived) a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga after some of their murders called victories and leading into hovels hung round with scalps their captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized martial nation—if a civilized nation, or any men who had a sense of generosity, were capable of a personal triumph over the fallen and afflicted.[145]

In claiming that the marchers resemble "a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga," Burke knowingly ties savagery to the Iroquois Confederacy. Onondaga, New York was the seat of the Iroquois Confederacy and Britain's chief ally in North America during the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution.

The description of the march from Versailles relies on imagery that Burke utilizes throughout *An Account of the European Settlements in America.* In 1757, he describes the return of Amerindian warriors to their village: "The conquerors enter the town in triumph," and describes scalps "adorn[ing] their houses."[146] The image of a martial march and a home full of scalps are built upon previously written images of Amerindian savagery.[147]

In *Reflections on the Revolution of France*, the evoking of the Iroquois Confederacy serves a larger rhetorical purpose, as Burke attempts to elicit sympathy for the French monarchy by providing an unsympathetic view of the French revolutionaries. The mention of the Iroquois

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[145] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 59.

[146] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:243.

[147] He writes, "The scalps which they value so much are the trophies of their bravery; with these they adorn their houses, which are esteemed in proportion as this sort of spoils is more numerous." Ibid.

would likely call to mind the unpopular alliance between the nation and the British government during the American Revolution. Less than a decade before, those supportive of the American colonists criticized the alliance because it allowed "savages" to murder fellow British subjects. Burke described the alliance in scathing terms. In his "Address to the King," he writes:

> Of the same quality we look upon all attempts to bring down on your subjects an irruption of those fierce and cruel tribes of savages and cannibals, in whom the vestiges of human nature are nearly effaced by ignorance and barbarism. They are not fit allies for your Majesty in a war with your people. They are not fit instruments of an English government. These, and many other acts, we disclaim as having advised or approved when done; and we clear ourselves to your Majesty, before or after the fact, in such an unjustifiable and horrid proceedings.[148]

Associating the Iroquois and British alliance with the French Revolution was a strong rhetorical move, as the failed American war had resulted in the loss of the prosperous thirteen American colonies. By connecting the Iroquois with the French Revolution, Burke brings back a traumatic political experience as well as vindicates his own position (and those of the Rockingham Whigs) concerning the war.

Burke often described the Iroquois/British alliance in a manner that portrayed Amerindians as aggressive perpetrators and American colonists as passive, innocent victims. Thus, in the *Reflections* when Burke evokes the alliance, he intends his readers to sympathize with the victims of "savagery" (i.e. the French monarchs) rather than the revolutionaries, who are described as the perpetrators of this savagery.[149]

At the heart of Edmund Burke's evoking of savage violence in revolutionary contexts is his description of Amerindians in *An Account*. Specifically, his depiction of savage violence relies on his earlier analysis of the dangers of contained passion, and the profound ferocity of resentful, cunning, and implacable Amerindians. In describing the Amerindians' commitment to revenge, Burke writes:

> But to the enemies of his country, or to those who have privately offended, the American is implacable. He conceals his sentiments, he appears reconciled, until by some treachery or surprise he has an opportunity of executing an horrible revenge. No length of time is sufficient to allay his resentment: no distance of place great enough to protect the object; he crosses the steepest mountains, he pierces the most impracticable forests, and traverses the most hideous bogs and deserts for several hundred miles, bearing the inclemency of the seasons, the fatigue of the expedition, the extremes of hunger and thirst, with patience and cheerfulness, in hopes of surprising his enemy, on whom he exercises the most shocking barbarities, even to the eating of his flesh.[150]

Burke relies on the concept of resentment in revenge for a wrong to describe Amerindian

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[148] Edmund Burke, "Address to the King," *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press), 170.

[149] Luke Gibbons, "'Subtilized into Savages': Edmund Burke, Progress, and Primitivism," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (Winter 2010): 87. Along with referencing the British/Iroquois alliance, *The Reflections on the Revolution in France* also draws upon another source of civil and imperial history. Luke Gibbons has demonstrated how the narrative of the capture and transportation of the king and queen draws upon the capture and death of Jane McCrea during the American Revolution. The capture, subsequent death, and scalping of McCrea by two Iroquois warriors became a much documented and artistically rendered scene in pro-independence writing. Gibbons demonstrates how this narrative of sexually ravishment and threat to European womanhood informs Burke's narrative of Marie Antoinette's capture by revolutionaries.

[150] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:212.

warfare. I interpret both his discussion of pent up passions and his above discussion of the connection between resentment and revenge as the primary influences on his understanding of not only the violence of Amerindians and the French revolutionaries, but also rebelling slaves. If one compares Burke's understanding of the pent up resentment and a thirst for revenge of the Amerindian to his understanding of the calamitous potential for slave revolt in the Caribbean and the fantasies of slave revolt that he attributed to slaves during the American Revolution, one can discern a similar portrait of savagery as the one described in the above quote.[151] In the same way that the African slave and Amerindian are prone to savage violence, Burke represents French revolutionaries as also expressing a savage violence that is traceable to resentment and perceived offense (in the denial of social and political freedom).

Savage violence represents only one mode in which Burke utilized the figure of the Amerindian. The other mode involves his rejection of the state of nature, natural man, and the trope of the noble savage. One example occurs in "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs." According to this appeal, the true state of nature is not a state of savagery, but rather civil society—where man's nature as a builder of artificial institutions flourishes. This state can only occur when a natural aristocracy guides the populace and the nation. Thus Burke argues:

> The state of civil society which necessarily generates this aristocracy is a state of Nature,—and much more truly so than a savage and incoherent mode of life. For man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated and most predominates. Art is man's nature. We are as much, at least, in a state of Nature in formed manhood as immature and helpless infancy. Men, qualified in the manner I have just described, form in Nature, as she operates in the common modification of society, the leading, guiding, and governing part. It is the soul to the body, without which the man does not exist. To give, therefore, no more importance, in the social order, to such descriptions of men than that of so many units is a horrible usurpation.[152]

Edmund Burke's rejection of a natural state associated with Amerindians, "a savage and incoherent mode of life," echoes Ferguson's statement that "art is itself is natural to man."[153] According to Burke, the "savage and incoherent mode of life" of Amerindians, one that could be found in the noble savage trope, as well as the primitivism of many theorists, does not represent the true image of man because only civil man can cultivate man's ability for artifice: "art." Civil man creates government, the institutions and materials of civil society, and social hierarchy. The "savage and incoherent mode of life" does not produce art which includes letters, commerce, agriculture, philosophy, law, and other products of eighteenth century European society.

In this analysis, man is closest to his nature when he is a member of a society ruled by natural aristocrats. Because most men are incapable of ruling themselves, natural aristocracy

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[151] This will be discussed in later chapters; however, in response to a proclamation to free slaves during the American Revolution, he opposed it by "appeal[ling] to all who knew the southern colonies, and the West Indies, what murders, rapes, and enormities of all kinds, were in the contemplation of all negroes who meditated an insurrection." Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, Claredon Press, 1981), 359. Likewise, when discussing potential slave rebellions in the West Indies, Burke claims that domestic servants "have it more in their power to strike a sudden and fatal blow." Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:132.

[152] Burke, "Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume IV* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 176.

[153] Wolfgang Pross, "Naturalism, Anthropology, and Culture," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243.

governs them, and as such is the soul and animating spirit of society. In this account of human nature, men can only fulfill their telos as reasonable beings in a society ruled by natural aristocracy. According to Burke, the French Revolution demonstrates what occurs when a natural aristocracy becomes separate from its society: the society devolves into savagery and loses its reason, and the "immature" man rules. However, I argue that Burke's statement should not be seen as legitimating the belief that Amerindians actually live a "savage and incoherent" mode of life. His description of Amerindians in *An Account* rejects the idea of a natural man without society, one who has not been shaped by habit and reason.

At the same time, it does not appear that he is referencing his own discussions of the destruction of Amerindian cultures and sovereignty during the 1770s and 1780s. It is more likely that by targeting a "savage and incoherent" mode of life, he is targeting the basis of various understandings of natural man that his opponents believed: man in a state of nature.

In his response to the French Revolution, Burke employed a number of arguments that appear to make Amerindians a key part of his analysis of the revolution. First, he contrasts European manners to the "savage" and "ferocious" manners of Amerindians and the French Revolution. This is done to undermine the argument that natural rights are legitimate in European countries. He also challenges the trope of the noble savage, as a proper understanding of human nature. In the above quote, the interpretation of man as a "cultural agent" leads to the larger claim that man's true nature is to create and sustain human artifices. In particular, the hierarchy associated with aristocracy and the unequal distribution of wealth and political power.

**BURKE AND AMERINDIAN DISPOSSESSION**

Edmund Burke's arguments during the American Revolution involve discussions and criticism of using Indians as allies, as well as examinations of the relationship between Amerindian sovereignty, colonists' land claims, and the destructive policies of the Crown. Burke believed that Amerindians should not be used as allies, and lamented the Proclamation Line of 1764, which denied land grants to colonists over the Appalachian Mountains. The Royal Proclamation of 1764 prevented further expansion of the American colonists and followed the conflict between a number of Amerindian nations—including Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Huron—that has been known as Pontiac's War. In the summer of 1763, a confederacy of Amerindian villages and nations attacked and captured various forts in the Ohio River Valley and what is now Michigan. The cause of the war was the disrespect of Amerindian traditions and leaders who met with the British after the Treaty of Paris (1763), as well as the refortification of various forts.[154] In arguing for the impracticality of the policy, Burke ignored (or minimized) the moral dimension of dispossession.

Burke made his arguments against the Proclamation Line of 1764 in a speech attempting to bring about conciliation with the colonies. In "A Speech for Conciliation," Burke argues for the reconciliation of the American colonies with Britain based on arguments that the changes in British tax were ill advised and should be abandoned.[155] He argues that Parliament and the King are responsible for the breach with the American colonies due to poor imperial policy, especially a lack of understanding and appreciation for the character of their subjects.[156] With the goal of

[154] Gregory E Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 62-66.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," *The Writings*

conciliation in mind, Burke sought to remind his audience of the influences that had shaped the American character to pursue freedom and bristle at perceived abuses of authority—including Protestantism, love of English liberty, and slave holding—while documenting the policies that had caused American recalcitrance.

One of the policies that came under censure from the colonists and Burke was the policy of limiting land grants in the colonies.[157] The policy of ceasing land grants did not only apply to those lands over the Proclamation line, but its most controversial result was the constraining of the colonies to the Atlantic seaboard.

In "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," Burke claims that westward expansion would occur with or without the supervision of the government and law, and Parliament should acknowledge this fact, or it will lead to chaos. According to Burke, the desire of American colonists for land had already resulted in the conquest of all land between the Atlantic Ocean and Appalachian mountains. Burke writes of the colonists:

> Already they have topped the Appalachian mountains. From thence they behold before them an immense plain, one vast, rich, level meadow; a square of five hundred miles. Over this they would wander, without a possibility of restraint; they would change their manners with the habits of their life; would soon forget a government, by which they were disowned; would become Hordes of English Tartars; and, pouring down upon your unfortified frontiers a fierce and irresistible cavalry, become masters of your Governors and your Counsellors, your collectors and comptrollers, and of all the Slaves that adhered to them.[158]

Burke evokes the image of English Tartars in order to demonstrate the type of wild freedom the Americans would display outside of the control of any governing power. However, the evoking of Tartars also signifies how these lawless Americans would clash with British colonial authorities. It is the recognition that the American colonists, if not supported by law, would oppose it and create a new order. For Burke, the great threat of the American colonists who would become English Tartars is not to each other or Amerindians, but to the governments and societies that let them escape their power. In this narrative, the "English Tartars" would return to threaten and cause colonial society and British colonial administrators as much trouble as the original Tartars caused Europe. Thus, an attempt to prevent rebellion would only lead to a different kind of chaos at the borders of British North America.

However, Burke also provides moral and religious support for the continual conquests of Amerindians and the dispossession of Amerindian land. To this end, he argues that restrictions on land grants contradict God's injunction to man. He writes,

> Such [English Tartars] would, and, in no long time, must be, the effect of attempting to forbid as a crime, and to suppress as an evil, the Command and Blessing of Providence, 'Encrease and Multiply.' Such would be the happy result of an endeavour to keep as a lair of wild beasts, that earth, which God, by an express Charter, has given to the children of men.[159]

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*and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume II* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 122-131.

[157] Ibid., 132. "As the growing population in the Colonies is evidently one cause of their resistance, it was last session mentioned in both Houses, by men of weight, and received not without applause, that in order to check this evil, it would be proper for the crown to make no further grants of land."

[158] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," 132.

[159] Ibid.

Upon this view, American colonists are simply following the injunction of God to populate and cultivate the earth given to them. Burke sees the space beyond the Appalachian Mountains, the lands of Amerindians, as "a lair of wild beasts," and as such, in need of European cultivation in order to redeem it. Burke employs his own version of a *res nullius* argument that because the Amerindians had not mixed their labor with the soil, it was free for the appropriation by American colonists. This was a common argument amongst defenders of colonial appropriations of indigenous lands. Furthermore, although Burke might consider Amerindians to be included in "the children of men" and included in this charter in an abstract sense, they had not fulfilled God's command to cultivate and populate the lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

British and French thinkers utilized variations of this argument, known as *res nullius*, from Roman law in the absence of arguments legitimizing the claims of colonists that relied explicitly on notions of natural slavery and the paganisms of Amerindians as fundamental grounds for settlement and conquest. As Anthony Padgen argues:

> The British, and to a somewhat lesser degree the French, were driven to legitimize their settlements in terms of one or another variant on the Roman Law argument known as res nullius. This maintained that all 'empty things', which included unoccupied lands, remained the common property of all mankind until they were put to some, generally agricultural, use. The first person to use the land in this way became its owner.[160]

Although there was general agreement regarding this logic, there was not universal agreement: a small and vocal minority of colonists and colonial authorities believed that the *res nullius* argument was specious.[161] They recognized that Amerindians had property in their ancestral lands, which allowed for the selling of land from Amerindians to colonists. Those who championed the idea of Amerindian ownership mainly did so to argue that Amerindians definitely had the right to the lands of America, which gave validity to the myriad land purchases that the colonists had engaged from the first settlement. If the settlements of America were to be understood as legitimate, it would rely on the history of land deals (however fraudulent) between Amerindian and European.

Edmund Burke's interpretation of the British settlement of North America provides profound insight into how he conceptualized the connections between property, government, and colonial expansion. In his "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," he argues that the confinement of the North American colonies to land east of the Proclamation Line of 1764 ignores a number of established facts. First, that the British had historically encouraged colonies and settlement in the Americas. Second, that this encouragement was always accompanied by the presence of British law including common laws surrounding property. And lastly, that the colonization of British North America had as its end the facilitation of the growth of government, commerce, and population. In this way, Burke links the establishment of civil government, the appropriation of land, and the establishment of property. Burke writes of the British authorities:

> Hitherto we have invited our people by every kind of bounty, to fixed establishments. We have invited the husbandman, to look to authority for his title. We have taught him piously to believe in the mysterious virtue of wax and parchment. We have thrown each

[160] Padgen, *Lords of All the World*, 76.

[161] Ibid., 168. Padgen writes, "There were some moments when it was recognised that appropriation and cultivation were not the only sources of an ancestral and natural relation with the earth; but we have to deal with a history in which such relations stood little chance of competing with the deep and complex jurisprudence alleged by expanding agriculturalists."

> tract of land, as it was peopled, into districts; that the ruling power should never be wholly out of sight. We have settled all we could; and we have carefully attended every settlement with government.[162]

For Burke, the support for building settlements as well as the linking of government, law, and appropriated land has a historical record going back to the earliest days of the British presence in North America. Government and settlement go together; breaking this connection appears to be tantamount to breaking an established tradition, of destroying the links between settled property and the government of people.

At the same time, Burke believed that the British had run afoul of a basic reality in North America: the settlement of North America within the prescribed bounds had reached its limit. From Burke's perspective "we have settled all we could," means both that the British have always encouraged as much settlement as possible, and that the American colonies have reached the present borders established by Parliament. Although the denial of land grants represents a change in colonial policy, this change in no way reflects any change in the ways in which American colonists perceived the relationship between Amerindian land and expansion. They had expanded for a century and a half without much constraint. This contradiction between the rapid change in policy and the continuity of American belief explains Burke's belief that colonists' enthusiasm for land will continue, and the colonists will settle the land beyond the Appalachians with or without British approval.

For Burke, the policy of constraining American colonists was bound to fail because it ran afoul of the character and temper of American colonists. Burke's conceptualization of American colonists as passionately dedicated to freedom provides the foundation for much of the argument in "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775." The idea that British policy will not succeed when it is fundamentally incompatible with the temper, character, and history of the imperial relationship between the American colonies and Britain, extends not only to questions about representation, taxes, and slavery, but also questions about expansion. One of Burke's most famous statements on the American crisis can be found a single page after his discussion of the inevitability of colonial expansion. Of the desire for freedom and the American character, he writes:

> The temper and character which prevail in our Colonies, are, I am afraid, unalterable by any human art. We cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people, and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation, in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates. The language in which they would hear you tell them this tale, would detect the imposition; your speech would betray you. An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth, to argue another Englishman into slavery.[163]

The character of Americans as a "fierce" people dedicated to liberty means that policies that appear tyrannical, deviate from the historical autonomy of the colonists, or deviate from the historical practices of American colonists, would ultimately provoke American colonists to reclaim their traditional liberties. According to Burke, the American crisis is itself the result of Parliament's commitment to introducing novel policies that enflame American passion. Just as Parliament did not recognize that American slaves were as committed to their slavery as their masters were committed to their freedom, Parliament did not recognize that the colonists would never give up their historical ability to expand at will.[164] In this way, the Royal Proclamation of

[162] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," 132.
[163] Ibid., 133.
[164] Ibid.

1764, and the proposed refusal to give out land grants—a reaction to the co-ordinate actions of various Amerindian nations who captured key forts in the Ohio Valley and Michigan—are cast by Burke as just another metropolitan law destined to fail and incite rebellion.

In his "Address to the Colonists," Burke reiterates that Amerindians are fierce, cannibalistic savages lacking in the requisite amount of human nature, and argues that his party recognizes that the chief aim of the English government should be to help the American colonists civilize Amerindians. He writes:

> We rather wished to have joined with you in bringing gradually that unhappy part of mankind into civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline than to have confirmed their evil habits, and increased their natural ferocity by fleshing them in the slaughter of you, whom our wiser and better ancestors had sent into the wilderness, with the express view of introducing, along with our holy religion its humane and charitable manners.[165]

According to Burke, the first colonists were sent to America in order to bring civilization to the native people. From his perspective, America was a wilderness to which colonists journeyed to the benefit of those "savage," "fierce," and "cruel" peoples already there. The words that Burke uses to describe the civilizing process of the Amerindians— "civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline"— are almost the exact words that he uses when describing bringing Africans to civilization in his "Sketch of A Negro Code."[166] In the case of both Africa and North America, Burke presupposes that the people are savage and uncivilized, and have a need for Christianity and European manners.

Implicit in the idea of civilizing Amerindians is the idea that the social character of Amerindians and their manners could and ought to be improved by the application of European practices. Thus, the civilizational hierarchy that places Europeans as the most civilized and Amerindians as the least civilized accompanies the belief that Europeans should intervene into the social lives of Amerindians for their benefit.[167]

## SUBJECTSHIP, SOVEREIGNTY, AND PROTECTION

I have focused intensely on the idea of the extension of subjectship, the moral imagination, and membership to populations ruled by the British Empire. In Chapter One, I argued that Burke considered Indians British subjects in order to afford protection from the East India Company. In a later chapter, I will argue that African slaves were conceptualized as future "subjects" of the Crown and therefore entitled to certain limited rights and protections. However, in this chapter, I contend that in contrast to his vision of Indians as subjects, Edmund Burke does not conceptualize Amerindians as British subjects, but rather as threats to British subjects.

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[165] Edmund Burke, "Address to the King," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press), 189.

[166] There, he describes the principles of bringing Africans to civilization as "religion, order, morality and virtue." Edmund Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press), 265.

[167] J.G.A. Pocock argues that the Aristotelian notion of savagery relied on the idea that human nature was shaped by environment, and thereby capable of being transformed through habit and changes in practices. Therefore, when Europeans encountered "savage" Amerindian, the belief that Europeans could transform the nature of Amerindians became a prominent defense of conquest, religious conversion, and a wide range of inegalitarian practices. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 165.

I agree with Gregory Evans Dowd in his interpretation of the Royal Proclamation of 1764 as a denial of subjectship to Amerindians. In *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire*, Dowd denies that British thinkers in this period extended the concept of subjectship to Amerindians. He argues that the high status of "subjectship" was denied to those considered savage. Dowd writes:

> The word subject, by 1760, presented Britons with a dilemma. To be a British subject was, even then, to have a claim to a lofty status. After two seventeenth century English revolutions and after the securing of the Protestant succession in the early eighteenth century, the word subject had become invested with new meanings, having less to do with 'subjection' to a monarch than with the Protestant monarch's responsibilities to subjects whom history had invested with liberties.[168]

For Dowd, even the Royal Proclamation of 1764, which has been interpreted as ushering in a new concern for Amerindian sovereignty after Pontiac's War, displays this lack of subjectship. In the proclamation, Amerindians would be treated as separate people who were under the protection of the king, but were not his subjects. In this sense, it is a vow of protection, not the conceptualization of subjectship as membership.

The difference between subject and protected population is clear in Dowd's analysis. Unlike the French "habitants," who are explicitly claimed as subjects of the king, Amerindians would not be given civil status equal to British subjects. Instead, Amerindians would be treated as separate nations (although not equal to European nations), and would not have access to the laws, civil institutions, rights, or liberties of those considered subjects. After Pontiac's War, metropolitan authorities were committed to isolating Amerindians by denying them rights and liberties within civil society, while also not acknowledging the legitimacy of Amerindian sovereignty.

According to Dowd, the Royal Proclamation of 1764 rendered Amerindian sovereignty impossible because it included the idea of protection by the king and within the king's power (i.e. the king would be the sovereign of Amerindian nations within his North American domains). In this way, Amerindian nations would be dependent on the Crown, but without recourse to the rights and liberties of subjects such as *habitants*. As Dowd states, the Royal Proclamation of 1764 introduced a novel idea of domestic nations "which remains a key feature of American Indian law, that Indian nations and tribes existed as separate entities within the British dominion. Though distinct nations, the tribes were under the king's protection; he was sovereign."[169] This idea of sovereignty over separate nations would remain enshrined in laws even after the American independence. American Indian law would allow the U.S. government to forcibly place Amerindians on Indian reservations, while claiming to respect their nationhood.[170]

Within two years of Edmund Burke's Speech on Conciliation, where he expressed his *terra nullius* argument, he would also conceptualize the Amerindians of North America as nationless and without peoplehood. In his 1778 "Speech on the Use of Indians," Burke would describe Amerindians in a conceptual framework that asserted that Amerindians had been reduced to a state of political dissolution. He writes:

> We were entangled in their affairs, we became involved in the System of America, as we are in the system of Europe—until at length [we] grew upon that people we have overspread the Country and they faded away—with their vices and ours [in margin 'a

[168] Dowd, War Under Heaven, 175.
[169] Ibid., 179.
[170] Ibid.

> fatal union the manners of savages were the Luxury of Civilized.'] until there is but one single Nation in America—and that is The English—The Indians are no longer a people in any proper acceptation of the Word—but several gangs of Banditti scattered along a wild of a great civilized empire [In margin: no matter whether justifiable or no formerly]—a Banditti of the most cruel and atrocious kind such as infest many such empires.[171]

One interpretation of the above statement would attribute it to the nations that existed within the "borders" of thirteen colonies, those that were east of the Appalachian Mountains. Nations such as the Iroquois, Cherokee, the Narragansett, and other seaboard nations would all be considered within this conceptual framework. Another interpretation would not see the idea of a lack of nationhood as limited to the Eastern seaboard, and might extend this idea of one nation (the English) beyond the Appalachian Mountains. This interpretation, although more tenuous, might explain why Burke is willing to interpret the land beyond the Appalachian Mountains as a "lair of wild beasts."[172] However, whether Burke means to limit the idea of loss of nation to those east of the Appalachian Mountains, or to extend it all the way to the Mississippi River, portraying Amerindians as bandits renders them less sympathetic than if they were conceptualized as nations.

Burke sees the various Amerindian nations as no longer existing—as fading away with the preponderance of the English settlers. In this way, he sees the breakdown of nation and of people, two different ideas that are connected to sovereignty. The idea that there existed only one nation in North American (the English), denies an idea of nationhood to those Amerindians living surrounded by or adjacent to the British colonies. At the same time, nationhood is thought of as that which belongs to a cohesive unit of individuals conceived of as a people. When Burke rejects the idea of multiple nations existing in North America, he also is rejecting national sovereignty and Amerindian claims to territory. In his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, Burke connects the notion of peoplehood to the fiction of a "corporation," a body that has legal standing.[173] By denying Amerindians peoplehood, he denies them legal standing, including national sovereignty and land rights.

The image of a "great civilized empire" being harassed by a band of banditti renders the Amerindians as out of step with history. The idea that Amerindians are mere banditti instead of nations—the denial of their peoplehood—is tied to a denial of sovereignty over the land. A lack of peoplehood appears to foreclose any real argument for a national territory, thus rendering claims challenging Amerindian dispossession incoherent.

Luke Gibbons interprets Burke's denial of nationhood to Amerindians as his theorization of the decline in their population and power. Gibbons writes:

> As Burke saw it, the reason Indians could no longer be considered as nations was due to their decline from an earlier period in which they were much more powerful, and enjoyed greater parity with the settlers on account of their unrivalled knowledge of the wilderness.[174]

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[171] Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, Claredon Press, 1981), 365.

[172] Edmund Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume II* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 132.

[173] Burke, "Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," 169. He writes, "In a state of *rude* there is no such thing as a people. A number of men in themselves have no collective capacity. The idea of a people is the idea of a corporation. It is wholly artificial, and made, like all other legal fictions, by common agreement."

[174] Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 188.

Although perhaps having a certain empirical truth, Gibbons's treatment of Burke's historicizing begs the larger question of the morality of the original and continual conquest of Amerindians. Burke's conceptualization of the lack of Amerindian nationhood in the "Speech on the Use of Indians" is underlined by his assertion that the destruction of Amerindian life, sovereignty, and property are no longer open moral questions. Burke leaves aside the morality of conquest in the Americas in light of his perception of contemporary circumstances. Thus, in the margins, the words "whether justifiable or no formerly" refers to the ways in which the English became the only North America nation outside of moral concerns: it does not matter.

I argue that by the late 1770s, Edmund Burke conceptualizes the legitimacy of English claims to occupied lands and open lands in light of the principle of prescription. For Burke, the past conquests of the British in North America have been rendered legitimate due to the passage of time. Conceptually, he finds himself in the same position as those Spanish thinkers of the seventeenth century who reflected on earlier debates about the legitimacy of the Spanish conquests in America. As Anthony Padgen notes in "Conquest and Just War," debates about the legitimacy of the Spanish crown having dominion and sovereignty over parts of America reach a point whereby the passage of time became one of the key arguments for continual dominion, even if they original claim was itself specious. Of this he writes, "For Solórzano it was no longer a matter of concern whether the papacy possessed universal dominium or not. What now mattered was that those at the time had clearly believed that it did."[175] The passage of time had rendered the historical debate about the legitimacy of the Spanish crown's claims moot, and only "of antiquarian interest."[176] Burke's reflection on the conquest of North America bears a striking similarity to the description of conquest and legitimacy that Solórzano offered upon reflection on the Spanish conquests of the Americas. The idea that a "great civilized" empire has replaced the nations of America has as its marginal note the acknowledgement that it may have not be justified: "whether justifiable or no formerly." The justice of the great empire is no longer at issue, and can only be marginal to the reality of English dominance of North America. As such, between the prescription that Burke believed was the foundation of property in Ireland, France, and also arguably in the American colonies, and the reality of the triumph of the colonist over Amerindian nations, his vision of Amerindian dispossession displaces the morality of past imperial wrongs, and opens the door for the further colonization of Amerindian lands. [177]

However, if prescription legitimizes the past conquests of the British in North America, *res nullius* arguments and the lack of nationhood legitimize the continuing dispossession of Amerindian land. Thus, one finds in Burke a legitimization of past conquests that has a historical dimension, and the legitimization of present and future conquests that is based on the denial of Amerindian sovereignty. In this way, the grounds for contesting Amerindian dispossession are effectively denied.

## HUMANE CONQUESTS

[175] Anthony Padgen, "Conquest and Just War," in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 57.

[176] Ibid, 59.

[177] In terms of contested property, in the context of Ireland, Burke argued that Protestants should cease to discuss their claims to Irish land in terms of prior conquest, and instead recognize that their basis for holding off Irish Catholic confiscations was the notion of prescription or continual use. He writes that prescription is "the soundest, the most general, and the most recognized title between man and man that is known in municipal or in publick jurisprudence." F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II*. (Oxford: Claredon Press), 406.

In Edmund Burke's corpus, conquest is a complex phenomenon. It is initially horrific, violent, and destructive; however, over time it can lead to governments and societies that are productive, integrated, and benefit those who were once conquered.[178] For Burke, that which comes after the initial conquest is most important. This is clearly discernible in his analysis of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

In *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, Burke examines the Spanish conquest of America by comparing opposing types of conquest and subsequent colonial governance. Christopher Columbus exemplifies the first manner of conquest, while Hernán Cortés exemplifies the second. According to Burke, Columbus displayed the key characteristics important for a governor and conqueror: humanity, respect, self-control, and policies that cultivated obedience and attachment amongst natives. The following is Burke's interpretation of Columbus in the Caribbean:

> And as for his virtues, his disinterested behaviour, his immovable fidelity to the ungrateful crown he served, the just policy of his dealing with the Indians, his caution against giving them any offence, and his *tender behavior to them when conquered*, which merited him the glorious title of their father, together with his zeal to have them instructed in the truths of religion, raise him to the elevated rank of those few men who ought to be considered as examples to mankind, and ornaments to human nature.[179]

In this description, we have tender conquest that leads to both attachment and the emergence of Columbus as a paternal figure.[180] This benevolent conquest is contrasted with the actions of Cortés and latter conquerors. Burke argues that the inhumanity and lack of virtue of those who succeeded Columbus squandered the opportunity of Spain to take greater advantage of the wealth of the Americas. He states:

> the new governors, hungry and rapacious, and scarce considering the Indians as human creatures, murdered vast numbers of them; and, exhausted them by an intolerable slavery, in hopes of a sudden gain, the depopulated the country in such a manner, as to abate very much the advantages which Spain might have derived from so extensive a conquest.[181]

The contrast between the good governor and the rapacious governor is an early articulation of the appropriate relationship between the conquest of non-European peoples and good imperial policy. This articulation lies at the heart of Burke's considerations of the East India Company and Warren Hastings; the British rule in India should resemble the policies of Columbus, not governments of those like Cortés and others who followed Columbus. Burke's analysis of Columbus represents an important aspect of his understanding of empire: that conquest must be humane in order to be advantageous and seen as legitimate. Conquest should follow the dictates of good government, in that it should combine the power of the sublime (including violence),

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[178] In his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," he argues that the English conquest of India was different than those that proceeded it, due to the failure of the British to take India as their own, socialize with Indians, and to rule for the benefit of those subject to the Company's power. Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 463.

[179] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:59. (italics mine)

[180] Ibid., 1:92. He writes, "And as for his virtues, his disinterested behaviour, his immovable fidelity to the ungrateful crown he served, the just policy of his dealing with the Indians, his caution against giving them any offence, and his tender behavior to them when conquered, which merited him the glorious title of their father, together with his zeal to have them instructed in the truths of religion, raise him to the elevated rank of those few men who ought to be considered as examples to mankind, and ornaments to human nature."

[181] Ibid., 1:162.

with the softness of the beautiful (i.e. social intercourse).[182] Likewise, Burke believed that social and political structures adopted after conquests should benefit the conquered.

Burke's analysis of the differences between Columbus and Cortés is similar to the "economy of violence" that Sheldon Wolin attributes to Niccolò Machiavelli. In *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Wolin argues that Machiavelli offered "an economy of violence" as the best way to rule a recently conquered population.[183] Wolin interprets Machiavelli as arguing for "a science of the controlled application of force," whereby violence should be exercised in ways that limit the damage done to the institutions and wealth of conquered populations. This science of force (in which violence is used economically and rationally) is meant to prevent any lasting enmity and need for further force. Machiavelli contrasted his "science of the controlled application of force" with conquests that had little concern with the institutions and property of local peoples; unscientific forms of conquests were often led by men of explosive passions whose acts led to needless destruction and perpetual violence and turmoil. In this way, Machiavelli's analysis of an "economy of violence" had a moral component; it was necessary that those who adopted "the science of the controlled application of force" were "undefiled by pride, ambition, or motives of petty revenge."[184]

For our purposes, recognizing the similar analyses of Edmund Burke and Niccolò Machiavelli on conquest highlights a shared belief in the moral obligations of imperial violence. For Burke and Machiavelli, violence should also be exercised without the passions (such as pride, revenge, and ambition) that would lead to inhumane behavior and unnecessary cruelty. If violence is exercised it must be conducive to the establishment of one's control and help facilitate the functioning of a stable society.

An example of this economy of violence can be seen in Burke's advocacy for the subduing of Nova Scotia. In a telling section of *An Account*, Burke appears to argue for the killing of five hundred Amerindians in the area surrounding Nova Scotia. In response to the constant harassment of local Amerindians, and the inability of a local garrison to prevent the attacks, Burke suggest that a more effective solution would be the employment of wood rangers and Amerindian allies to subdue the local population. Thus, he writes:

> A company of wood rangers kept constantly to scour the country near our settlements, and a small body of Indians who might be brought at an easy rate from the friendly tribes who inhabit our other settlements, and encouraged by a reward for what scalps they should bring home, sent to infest the enemy amongst their own habitations, would have protected our colony, and long ago exterminated the Indians, or reduced them to a useful subjection, since unfortunately we have not the secret of gaining their affections. The easy plan I have mentioned would not have had half the expence attending it, that the maintenance of a numerous and almost useless garrison has had.[185]

As a statement of the need to protect local populations through extermination and subjection, this appears to be in line with other parts of *An Account* on the treatment of Amerindians. It has the hallmarks of the attempt to pursue a given policy first through "affection," and later through

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[182] For Burke, the encouragement of rapacious governors and conquerors is a political choice. The Spanish could have made a different, more advantageous, choice in the 15th century--one that did not constantly displace original conquerors and bring in new conquerors and governors to take advantage of the people--and for Burke, the British can make a more advantageous and less destructive choice in 1783 and beyond.

[183] Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western* Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 197-200.

[184] Ibid., 200.

[185] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:278.

violence.

I interpret this passage as highlighting Edmund Burke's acceptance of conquest as a means of acquisition. The brutality of his plan to exterminate through Amerindian proxies does not fall outside of his later acknowledgement that politics involves choosing between "compromises between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil."[186] Although the balancing of evils is evoked in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as an understanding of the necessary limits that must be placed on claims of natural rights, it was followed by a more general explanation of politics. Thus Burke wrote, "Political reason is a computing principle: added, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing, morally and not metaphysically or mathematically, true moral denominations.[187] I interpret this statement as applicable to his general outlook on slavery in *An Account* as well as plantation slavery and the slave trade from 1757 until his death. Burke repeatedly shows that political decisions must balance profoundly disturbing moral evils.

Edmund Burke's plan to exterminate (or bring under subjection) five hundred Amerindians opposed to the settlement of Nova Scotia accords well with one aspect of his political thought. It brings to light the importance that Burke places in protecting British subjects from savage violence. One way to downplay the significance of this passage is to attribute it to William Burke, a friend of Edmund Burke and co-author of *An Account*. Given that *An Account* was co-authored, perhaps it was mainly William Burke who was advocating for the extermination of these five hundred Amerindian people harassing Nova Scotia. Implicit in this larger claim would be that Edmund Burke would not call for the extermination of a group of people in order to promote a greater good, even if that good is the protection of British subjects and the growth of British settlements. One could argue that Edmund Burke's commitment to justice and reform that he displays in India make it unlikely for him to advocate for the execution of such a plan.

Unfortunately, this is not supported by his writings on the Americas. In *An Account*, Edmund Burke remains committed to other horrific imperial practices. On slavery, he stated that "one cannot hear without horror of a trade which must depend for its support upon the murder of several thousand innocent men," while supporting the continuation of the slave trade due to the necessity of labor. [188] In a similar manner, Amerindians in Nova Scotia were hindering the colonization of North America and had to be dealt with in the most economical and effective way possible. I argue that Burke's call for the extermination and/or subjection of the people resisting the settlements in Nova Scotia is best interpreted in light of his own understanding of the necessity of balancing unsavory means to get the best possible outcome. Although this diminishes Edmund Burke as an anti-imperial thinker (especially when it comes to the Americas), it does not diminish him as a political thinker. At work is a sharp intelligence concerned with solving colonial problems; just as his proposed reform of plantation slavery was an astute attempt to prevent the dissolution of the plantation system due to rebellion, his solution to Amerindians hemming in and destroying the potential of Nova Scotian settlements is agile and innovative.

The extermination or subjection of Amerindians fits squarely within Edmund Burke's ideas of the relationship between colonists and Amerindians, and the dictates of good policy. The alternatives for Burke—continuing to have an outmatch garrison or to abandon Nova Scotia entirely—appear to be the worst options. The former would mean the continuation of an

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[186] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 52.
[187] Ibid., 54.
[188] Ibid., 2:126.

unsustainable and dangerous policy; the latter would mean the uprooting of British colonists and loss of their property. This is a clear example of the ways the "lesser of two evils" plays out in Burke's political thought. Although he disagreed with the initial founding of colonies in Nova Scotia, he is unwilling to abandon them after they have been established.[189]

The example of Nova Scotia is not an anomaly. Throughout *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, Burke writes a partisan history of the conflicts between Amerindians and American colonists. He often gives little attention to the conflicts between Amerindians and American colonists, and conceptualizes many of the key colonial wars as historically insignificant. For example, the Pequot War and King Philips's War (conflicts that cemented British colonists' control of New England) are conceptualized as skirmishes and indistinguishable from each other. They are also described in a mere two sentences. Burke states:

> The events in the history of New England, their disputes with their governors, the variations in their charters, and their wars with the Indians, afford very little useful or agreeable matter. In their wars there was very little conduct shewn; and though they prevailed in the end, in a manner to the extirpation of that race of people, yet the Indians had always great advantages; and the measures of the English to oppose them, were generally injudiciously taken.[190]

Burke chooses not to spell out the heart of the conflict—culture, land, and religion—but rather leaves its causes unexplained. The fact that English colonists were interested not only in the lands of Amerindians, but also in breaking the power of Indian confederacies, does not fit into his narrative. He admits that the English responded to Amerindians "injudicious[ly]" and without "conduct," but these are hardly charged words for a man who in previous chapters describes scenes of torture in minute detail and is more generally known for hyperbolic prose.

## A MORE SYMPATHETIC BURKE

Whereas this chapter has highlighted the consistency of Edmund Burke's negative views of Amerindians throughout his life, other scholars see improvement in his conceptualization of Amerindians. Most notably, Luke Gibbons argues that Burke's 1757 understanding of Amerindians in *An Account of the European Settlements in America* changes during the American conflict. According to Gibbons, the original idea of Amerindian savagery is complemented by the idea that Amerindians have been corrupted by the vices of those colonists who have conquered them.

Gibbons focuses on the marginal notes to Burke's 1777 speech "Address to the Colonists." The aim of this speech was to show American colonists that the Rockingham Whigs condemned Parliament's alliance with half of the Iroquois Confederacy. In the margins, Burke had written of Amerindian ferocity: "their vices<ours>."[191] According to Gibbons, by adding "our" vices next to "their," Burke recognizes the negative impact of Europeans on Amerindians. This is a dramatic change for a man who distinguished sharply between European civilization and Amerindian savagery twenty years earlier.

Placed alongside the admission that colonization has depopulated Amerindian populations close to the North American colonies in his 1778 speech "On the Use of Indians," it appears that Burke recognizes the devastation of colonial conquest and is sympathetically

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[189] Ibid., 2:125.
[190] Ibid., 2:162.
[191] Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 207.

disposed to Amerindian populations.[192] This is most likely the evidence that Jennifer Pitts depends upon in *A Turn to Empire* when she writes:

> Burke's writings, of course, evince considerable exclusions and blind spots. Some of these, like his early dismissive assumptions about the savagery of Native Americans, were tempered over the course of his life.[193]

Pitts may be referring to the same utterances that Gibbons draws upon from "On the Use of Indians." However, as tempting as it is to believe that Burke revised his views of Amerindians from 1757 until his death, neither the chronology nor the fuller content of his utterances on Amerindians supports this assertion.

Although I agree with Gibbons that Burke most likely attributed some of the ferocity of Amerindians to the influence and policies of avaricious colonists, such an influence is but a variation of Burke's initial assessment of Amerindians as savage and ferocious. Burke's view that Amerindians have become even more savage and ferocious after European colonialism complements his belief that colonists and Parliament had failed in bringing Amerindians to civilization and Christianity. In this way, the post-conquest savagery of Amerindians assumes that they were always in need of civilization and that the British had failed to provide them with benefits of civilization, and instead had promoted further deterioration in their societal development. In other words, although Burke would later link colonialism to the destruction of Amerindian nations and the deterioration of their manners, he never fully abandons his initial image of Amerindians as savage and ferocious. His initial conceptualizations of Amerindian savagery and ferocity undergird his latter denials of Amerindian sovereignty and peoplehood.

It must be noted that Sankar Muthu sees eighteenth century criticism of the noble savage as providing a space for the development of a certain anti-imperialist sentiment. In particular, Muthu believes that the idea of natural man is "unlikely to produce the moral understanding and commiseration necessary for a thoroughgoing criticism of their subject status under European imperial power."[194] Although Burke rejected the trope of the noble savage, his conceptualization of Amerindians as cultural agents did not lead to criticisms of their status under British imperial power or a robust anti-imperial stance. In fact, his commiseration with the destruction of Amerindian nations coexisted with his attachment to the continuation of such destruction. He could bemoan the ways in which conquest was carried out, while recognizing the overall legitimacy of English conquests of North America, and he could through an understanding of the need to protect subjects suggest that five hundred Amerindians opposed to the British establishment of Nova Scotia be "exterminated" by Amerindians allied with the British.[195]

## CONCLUSION

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[192] Gibbons writes, "The observes that while Europeans formed ''little struggling Settlements [on] the [banks] of brooks and the mouths of rivers,'' the Indians constituted ''innumerable Nations of which now no trace remains—great Empires—now shrunk to nothing . . . The Indians are no longer a people in any proper acceptation of the Word—but several gangs of Banditti, scattered along a wild of a great civilized empire'' (365). These sentiments carry unmistakable echoes of the tragic passage from Tacitus's lament for the Roman despoliation of Britain that Burke himself quotes in the Vindication:''Vastumubique silentium, secreti colles; fumantia procul tecta; nemo exploratoribus obvius [Everywhere a vast silence, lonely hills; smoking roofs, no one is met by scouts], is what Tacitus called facies Victoriae [the face of victory].''That these sentiments were close to his own heart is clear from their recurrence in his powerful evocation of the laying waste of India under the slash and burn campaigns of Warren Hastings and the East India Company." Ibid., 203.

[193] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 62.

[194] Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 30.

[195] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:278.

I have argued that Edmund Burke's representation of Amerindians disturbs notions of anti-imperialism in the Americas. Burke's partisan history of the conquest of North America, his evoking of savage violence in the American Revolution, his denial of Amerindian sovereignty and nationhood, and his support for the continual expansion of the British in North America (before the end of the American Revolution) display his ambivalent anti-imperialism. They display the depth of Burke's exclusion of Amerindians from an anti-imperial vision. The notion that Burke grew more sympathetic over time misses the profound consistency of his conceptualization of the nature and status of Amerindians, and does not adequately account for his representations of Amerindians in his later writings. However, the irony is that if Amerindian sovereignty became less important for British administrators in the late eighteenth century, representations of Amerindians retain their centrality in the discourses of revolution and history.

Edmund Burke's writings on Amerindians— including his explicit acceptance of Amerindians as cultural beings and rejection of the trope of the noble savage—does not lead to an anti-imperial stance on the dispossession and the need to civilize "savages." In fact, from 1757 until his death, Burke's conceptualizing of Amerindians as cultural agents was accompanied by a dismissal of Amerindian sovereignty and the consistent equation of Amerindians with "savage violence." Instead of producing a type of sympathy for Amerindians, the cultural understanding of Amerindian life was used to promote a great antipathy for Amerindians, especially since discussions of Amerindians were always tied to their violent threat to British colonists and being an obstacle to colonial expansion.

The ambivalence of Burke's anti-imperialism can be discerned in his defense of Indian culture in Asia, and in his support for the continual destruction of Amerindian sovereignty and land rights in North America. In Chapter One, I argued that the civilizational status of Amerindians—as savage—subtly informed Burke's understanding of Indian civilization and the need to protect it from the abusive policies of the East India Company. I interpret Edmund Burke's non-defense of Amerindian populations in the same way. It is Amerindians' lack of civilization, in particular their lack of the higher qualities associated with European and civilized man, and their dwindling population, that renders them ultimately unimportant in analyzing the need to reform the British Empire.

Edmund Burke's ambivalent anti-imperialism does not exclude Amerindians from his sympathy, but rather from a notion of subjectship, membership, and inclusion in the British moral imagination that would represent them as a threatened and unjustly harmed population whose oppression requires substantial reform of imperial policy. His later recognition that Amerindians had been adversely affected by colonialism widens the moral imagination of his audience, but not very far. Through placing Amerindians at the beginning of history, conceptualizing them in terms of savage violence, and portraying them as threats to European lives and British settlements, Burke confirms their exclusion from civilization and displays the appropriateness of their conquest.

## CHAPTER 3

## EDMUND BURKE AND THE AESTHETICS OF SLAVERY: REVERENCE, SUBLIMITY, AND RACIAL AUTHORITY IN *AN ACCOUNT OF THE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS IN AMERICA* AND *A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL*

1757 saw the publication of Edmund Burke's second and third books, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* and *An Account of the European Settlements in America*. These two texts are essential for my examination of slavery and empire, and for their relation in Burke's thought. *An Account of the European Settlements in America* explicitly deals with colonialism in America, including an analysis of chattel slavery and Amerindian dispossession, while *A Philosophical Enquiry* provides the framework for much of Burke's political theory, including his understandings of the French Revolution, the rule of the East India Company in India, and the American Revolution. As such, both of these texts are essential for any interpretation of Burke's political thought on empire.

This chapter examines the relation between Edmund Burke's aesthetics and his analysis of chattel slavery on multiple levels. I argue that his interpretation of chattel slavery was deeply rooted in his aesthetic theory as represented by *A Philosophical Enquiry of the Sublime and Beautiful*. I also contend that his analysis of West Indian slavery demonstrates another example of his rejection of "geographic morality" (in wich the standard justice varies due to locale), discussed in the first chapter.

Although scholars such as Linda Zerilli, Luke Gibbons, Ian Hamspshere-Monk, Edmund White, and Siraj Ahmed have long recognized the relevance of *A Philosophical Enquiry* to Burke's understanding of revolution, empire, and his defense of the ancien régime, none have used the text to illuminate his views on slavery. On the other hand, scholars investigating Burke's engagement with empire, including Jennifer Pitts and Luke Gibbons, have drawn attention to an orthodox account of Burke as an anti-slavery thinker. This interpretation, although correct in its outlines, does not fully appreciate the deep ambivalence that Burke displayed toward plantation slavery, the slave trade, abolition, and emancipation. Luke Gibbons writes that before the debates on the slave trade in Parliament, "Edmund Burke—and it might be added, his countryman Richard Brinsley Sheridan—were among the foremost opponents of slavery at this early period."[196] For these scholars, the celebration of Burke's anti-slavery and abolitionist qualifications lends credence to the idea that he was a champion of those people under British dominion; the idea of anti-slavery lends to a larger idea of anti-imperialism. Disagreeing with this interpretation of Burke as an anti-slavery advocate are Daniel O'Neill and Margaret Kohn, who see in Burke's 1757 *An Account of the European Settlements in America* a deep support for chattel slavery.[197] They write, "At least in 1757… Burke did not 'hate slavery.'"[198]

I argue that aspects of the orthodox interpretation of Edmund Burke and slavery are legitimate. The general agreement on Burke's anti-slavery thought is founded on a plausible interpretation of his writings and speeches from 1757 onwards. For example, in *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, Burke draws attention to the "misery" of slaves and proposes reforms that would transform the West Indian plantation

[196] Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 167.
[197] Kohn and O'Neill, "A Tale of Two Indias," 192-231.
[198] Ibid., 200.

into a more humane system. Likewise, his "Sketch of A Negro Code," sent to Henry Dundas in 1792, outlines a gradual emancipation scheme for slaves in the West Indies which would reform and eventually abolish the slave trade. However, Burke's analysis of plantation slavery is at once critical of the institution and committed to its continuation. Burke again displays his criticism of the specific practices of a colonial regime, while not objecting to it in principle, and while offering general support for its continuation.

I contend that Burke's 1757 writings on slavery and aesthetics show his commitment to order, stability, and gradual reform, while also demonstrating his belief in universal justice, the dictates of good government, and the universal aspects of human nature as both passionate and rational. Burke's analysis of plantation slavery is best interpreted in light of other aspects of his anti-imperialism, where his general support of the British Empire and certain historical institutions appear to be at odds with his criticisms of these institutions.

The ambivalence of Burke's thoughts on slavery is evident even at this earlier date, and would only become more pronounced as anti-slavery discourses and politics proliferated during and after the American Revolution. His later responses to colonial slavery and the slave trade in light of the debates on abolition and slave emancipation in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, which will be addressed in a later chapter, would elaborate on these earlier positions. Of the greatest import is grasping how Burke conceptualizes African humanity, the necessity of plantation societies, the relationship of justice and morality to the trade and plantation slavery, and the problems of freedom and power on the plantation system.

As noted in the last chapter, Edmund Burke and his friend William Burke jointly authored *An Account of the European Settlements in the Americas*. It was written at the beginning of the Seven Years' War and meant to capitalize on the interests of British audiences in the colonies in the Americas.[199] Its topical nature and the motivations that drove its construction—including Edmund Burke having utilized it as a job reference—do not detract from the importance of the beliefs that Edmund Burke and William Burke expressed in the text. Scholars have found it important to try to distinguish between William Burke and Edmund Burke in this co-authored text. However, as F.P. Lock has written, "Many of Burke's later ideas are foreshadowed in the *Account.*"[200] Likewise, Lock interprets Edmund Burke as the author of the section, *Manners in America,* due to the fact that "the description of the 'Manners and character' of the Americans in part II corresponds to what Burke found most interesting in Robertson's *History*," an ascription I agree with.[201] Likewise, I contend that along with the section on Amerindian manners, the description of slavery in the Caribbean articulated in *An Account* conforms to Burke's expressed beliefs during the American Revolution and during his debates on the slave trade. As such, I attribute the sections on slavery in the Caribbean to Edmund Burke, not only because they conform to his writings on the French Revolution and slavery, but to his writings on aesthetics as well.

In *An Account*, Burke states that although the West Indian colonies have created great advantages and prosperity for Britain, they must be reformed. For Burke, the recognition of

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[199] As F.P. Lock writes, "*An Account of the European Settlements in America* was therefore a topical book, written to capitalize upon the increased pubic interest in the colonies that followed the outbreak of the war." F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II*. (Oxford: Claredon Press), 125.

[200] Ibid.,127.

[201] Ibid.,136.

wealth does not detract from the need to ensure the continuation of wealth and the stability of the West Indian plantations. Thus, he writes:

> Though we have drawn such great advantages from our possessions in the West Indies, and are, even in our present way of acting, likely to continue to draw still more; and though we have not wholly neglected the culture of that useful province; yet some will think there are some things left undone, some things in which our neighbors have let us a laudable example, and some other which the inconvenience we have felt from the want of them demonstrate to be necessary to ourselves.[202]

The above statement shows Burke's willingness to look at contemporary institutions and at historical institutions as means for gradual improvement. He intends to enumerate and explain the necessary reforms that will allow the British to keep these colonies in their hands and producing up to their current capacity. Burke proposes a series of reforms, including the need for the British Crown to fund colonial governors and the military establishments in the colonies. However, alongside reforms that the colonists would welcome, he also argues in favor of the mitigation of slavery, which he acknowledges will not be welcomed by colonists.[203]

According to Burke, the overreliance on slave labor left the colonies in danger of revolt from inside and outside.[204] This could be remedied by policies that promote emigration, and thus produce a greater balance between whites and blacks.[205] Whereas the reforms of the West Indian society concerned with governors and military establishment point to an anti-imperial strain (or at least a good government strain) in Edmund Burke's early work, the reforms to plantation slavery recommended in *An Account* are specifically anti-slavery.

In *An Account*, Burke recognizes the status of slaves and the suffering they endure. He writes of West Indian slavery:

> The negroes in our colonies endure a slavery more compleat, and attended with far worse circumstances, than what any people in their condition suffer in any other part of the world, or have suffered in any other period of time. Proofs of this are not wanting. The prodigious waste which we experience in this unhappy part of our species, is a full and melancholy evidence of this truth.[206]

For Burke, none of the forms of slavery that British audiences could imagine, including Greek, Roman, and Biblical slavery, rival the conditions of slavery in the British colonies in the West Indies. His evidence is drawn from the mortality rate of slaves in the West Indies. As Burke points out, Barbados must replace five thousand slaves annually from the death created by work, climate, and other circumstances. The most prevalent feature of West Indian slavery (in comparison with other slavery) is the amount of labor that slaves must perform.[207] According to

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[202] Ibid., 109.

[203] "Since I have indulged myself so long in speculation, which appears to me very material to the welfare of these colonies, I shall venture to say something further concerning another part of the inhabitants, though it may perhaps meet no warm reception form those who are the most nearly concerned." Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:124.

[204] Ibid., 2:118.

[205] Such reforms would be unwelcomed because the reliance on slave labor has blinded planters to "the hazards to which they expose the sum total of their affairs." The fear is that "all the English in our colonies there will consists of little more than a few planters and merchants; and the rest will be a despicable, though a dangerous, because a numerous and disaffected herd of African slaves." Ibid., 2:118.

[206] Ibid., 2:126.

[207] He writes, "This prodigious failure, which is at least in the same proportion in all our islands, shews demonstrably that some uncommon and unsupportable hardship lies upon the negroes which wears them down in such a surprising manner; and this, I imagine, is principally the excessive labour which they undergo." Ibid., 2:125.

Burke, African slaves work every day of the week, first "severely" for their masters, and then other days cultivating food for their own sustenance.[208]

The logic of pushing slaves this hard defies commonsense understanding of management and economics. For Burke, moderate labor makes greater economic sense, as the cost of purchasing new slaves far outweighs the costs of working slaves less strenuously. He computes,

> After all deductions, by behaving like good men, good masters, and good christians, the inhabitants of this one island would save forty thousand pounds a year; which if, instead of being saved, it were lost by such a proceeding, it ought to be considered as a necessary loss, and borne accordingly.[209]

The economic argument concludes with the idea that even if this strategy does not end in direct cost saving, it would still be a success because the behavior of the colonists would be much improved and the lives of human beings would be protected. The emphasis on the transformation of the behavior of slave masters from bad to "good men, good masters, and good Christians" would make the reform of slavery into the reform of those colonialists who rely on slave labor.

Although Edmund Burke displays a deep awareness of the problems of slavery and the trade, he also displays commitment to the continuation of both. Burke responds that the trade itself is morally suspect and only justified due to the requirements of settler colonialism and the status of slaves in Africa.

> But surely, one cannot hear without horror of a trade which must depend for its support upon the murder of several thousand innocent men; and indeed nothing could excuse the slave trade at all, but the necessity we are under of peopling our colonies, and the consideration that the slaves we buy were in the same condition in Africa, either hereditary or taken in war.[210]

The murder of several thousand innocent men refers to the extremely high mortality rate amongst slaves in the West Indies, not to the mortality rate during the passage from Africa to the Caribbean. According to Burke, such a high human cost is ultimately justified because of the need for labor in the colonies, and the belief that slaves were already in bondage before arriving in the Americas.

The first claim that the slave trade is justified because the West Indies needs to be populated, and that the labor of Africans was indispensable, appears throughout *An Account*. In the text, the discussion of the British Caribbean begins with the acknowledgment of the "advantages" derived from the West Indian colonies, and the reforms intended for the West Indies are meant to produce even greater advantages for the British. However, in order for this to occur, the West Indies must be stable, productive, and populated.[211] Burke believe that the colonies should be peopled not only by African slaves, but also Europeans of different social standing, which would lead to a greater balance between black and white, and create more demand for European products.[212] Although there is a definite emphasis in encouraging more

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[208] "But in our plantations the blacks work severely for five days, without any relaxation or intermission, for the benefit of their master, and the other two days they are obliged to labour for their own subsistence during the rest of the week." Ibid.

[209] Ibid., 2:127.

[210] Ibid., 2:126.

[211] "Though we have drawn such great advantages from our possessions in the West Indies, and are, even in our present way of acting, likely to continue to draw still more." Ibid., 2:110.

[212] "Indubitably the security, as well as the solid wealth of every nation, consists principally in the number of low and middling men of a free condition, and that beautiful gradation from the highest to the lowest, where the transitions all the way are almost imperceptible. To produce this ought to be the aim and mark of every well-

European colonists to inhabit the British West Indies, there is also a clear understanding that until a European working class could be encouraged to migrate, African slaves would need to continue to work on West Indian plantations.

If the necessity of "populating the colonies" represents the first rationale for continuing the slave trade, the second rationale is that those brought to the Americas were already slaves. The belief that captives sent across the Atlantic were slaves by "heredity and war" was common in the eighteenth century, before the onslaught of abolitionist evidence documenting its speciousness. The belief that Africans shipped to the English colonies were already civil slaves lessened the moral culpability of both the British slave traders and the British nation that depended on the products of slave labor. In fact, Edmund Burke would continue to claim that Africans were already previously enslaved until the late 1770s. In 1776, during an inquiry into the Royal African Company, he claimed that slavery was justified because the "inhabitants of Africa traded one species of slavery for another."[213]

In interpreting *An Account*, it is clear that by the time of its publication in 1757, Burke recognized the fatality of enslavement in the West Indies and the "prodigious waste" of human beings. [214] However, it is also equally clear that Burke's recognition of slavery's fatality does not lead to a call for the dismantling of the plantation system or the end of the slave trade, but rather for the reform and even expansion of the plantation system.[215] I argue that Burke's early analysis of the slave trade remains a key aspect of his later 1780s and 1790s arguments that the continuation of the slave trade is necessary for the continuation of colonial slavery, while both are necessary because "the cause of humanity would be far more benefited by the continuance of the trade and servitude, regulated and reformed, than by the total destruction of both or either."[216] The latter argument about the benefits of the continuation of both the slave trade and plantation slavery resemble his 1757 contention that the slave trade itself is justified because of the "necessity of peopling our colonies."[217] This tension between the recognition of maintaining labor, population, and the colonies themselves, and the "horror" of the trade and the "waste" of a portion of the "human species" only increases over time. However, for a variety of reasons, including the need to compete with the French, Burke never moved away from the necessity of African labor as a rationale for the continuation of plantation slavery and the slave trade.

Burke's position on the slave trade represents a profound tension in his thought. He fully recognized the horror of the slave trade that brought human beings to labor unto death, but at the

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regulated commonwealth, and none has ever flourished upon other principles." Ibid., 2:118.

[213] The full quote reads, "And with respect to Mr. Hartley's notions about slavery, he observed, that he had brought a convincing proof in his hand of the hardship of it, and it certainly was a proper object of enquiry, whether it might not be softened; but Africa, time out of mind, had been in a state of slavery, therefore the inhabitants only changed one species of slavery for another; however, he was sorry to say, that in changing from African to European slavery, they generally changed much for the worse, which certainly was a matter of reproach somewhere, and deserved serious consideration." Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 5*, ed. P.J. Marshall (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1981), 341.

[214] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:126.

[215] Burke believed that the slave trade should continue alongside the amelioration of slavery and expansion of British colonies in the Caribbean. Thus, he writes, "But, in fact, if the waste of these men should become less, the price would fall; then, if a due order were taken, the same demand might be kept, by extending our colonies, which is now produced by the havock made of the people. This is the case on the continent, where, thought the slaves increase, there is an annual call for seven thousand at least." Ibid., 2:129.

[216] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 261.

[217] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:126.

same time he argued for its continuation. I interpret his expression of horror as a sincere expression of his emotional state.[218] There is little reason to suppose that by expressing horror Burke is attempting to avoid censure of others or persecution, not only because *An Account* was published anonymously, but also because there was marginal political or social gain in criticizing slavery and the slave trade. Burke wrote *An Account* in 1757, before the abolition of slavery and the slave trade were placed at the center of an ideological struggle about freedom and national virtue, and before it was considered a sign of virtue to be opposed to plantations slavery and the slave trade.

I also interpret as sincere and rational Burke's expressed belief that the slave trade was justified because of a previous state of African slavery and the necessity of populating the colonies. The emphasis on populating the colonies is a major theme in *An Account of the European Settlements in America*. At the same time, the commitment to populating the colonies cannot be separated from the overall framework of *An Account,* which is to show the advantages of the colonies in America and the need to protect them from French encroachments.

A lack of slave labor would threaten the advantages produced by the agriculture and the trade of West Indian slave economies just as strongly as would an attack by the French. For Burke, it is essential that the colonies be populated with laborers and consumers, and this necessarily includes those who would fight for the British against French invasions. To this end, he argues that there must be an increase in the population of free whites to help with internal and external security.[219]

Edmund Burke's justification of the continuation of the slave trade and his horror at its existence display the complex relationship between emotion and political reason. It is clear that good policy, necessity, and the previous status of slaves is more important than the horror that Burke feels at the murder of thousands of African slaves. This stark reality of human destruction is not denied by Burke, but rather is accepted alongside the greater need for the continuation of the trade and colonial slavery. I argue that Burke's analysis of the slave trade displays his profound commitment to the continuation of two established institutions (the slave trade and plantation slavery). His analysis also demonstrates how his recognition of human suffering could co-exist with his commitment to politics as the balancing evils.[220]

## ANTI-SLAVERY THOUGHT IN *AN ACCOUNT OF THE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS IN AMERICA*

If necessity (the need to populate the colonies and maintain their advantages) dictated that the slave trade and plantation should continue, it also dictated that plantation management be reformed. To this end, Edmund Burke sought to mitigate the excesses of slavery, in particular the overworking of slaves and extreme violence. In *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, Burke advocates an alternative to the extant model of slave management. He proposes that slaves be provided with more leisure and better food.[221] This would extend the lives of

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[218] Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 129.

[219] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:126.

[220] This line of argumentation is similar to F.P. Lock's contention that Burkean scholarship should focus on the "rational, public, official Burke." F. P. Lock, "Burke, Ireland, and India: Reason, Rhetoric, and Empire," *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities*, ed. Sean Patrick Donlan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 156.

[221] "Now suppose, that, by allowing a more moderate labour and some other indulgences, a great number of these deaths might be prevented (and many I think it is probably would so be prevented." Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:126.

slaves, and thereby cut the mortality rate and number of new slaves imported. In fact, a lesser mortality rate and fewer "imports" would not only be beneficial to slaves but also to slave owners in that it would render slaves more valuable and produce greater profits for owners. Burke explains this through an analogy to a wagoner. He writes, "If he works his horse moderately, and feeds him well, he will draw more profit from him."[222] According to Burke, plantation owners are ignoring all practical wisdom by treating slaves in ways they would not even treat beasts of burden. By ignoring that wisdom, they are displaying both their shortsightedness, and the shortcomings of the management on West Indian plantations.

Burke bases many of his reforms on the French slave code, the *Code Noir*. Proposed by Colbert and ratified by Louis the XIV, the *Code Noir* was the ancien regime's response to the flourishing of slavery in the Caribbean. It attempted to limit planters' cruel treatment of African slaves and provide a uniform law for French slave societies. With this in mind, the *Code Noir* sought to keep families together, limit the amount of physical abuse, and guarantee proper housing and food for slaves.[223]

In *An Account*, Burke singles out the Code Noir as the ideal legislation for regulating and supporting plantation slavery, exemplifying how law can mediate between masters and slaves. He argues that in French colonies, slaves

> are not left as they are with us, wholly, body and soul, to the discretion of the planter. Their masters are obliged to have them instructed in the principles of religion. There are methods taken at once to protect the slaves from the cruelty of their owners, and to preserve the colony from the ill effects that might arise from treating them with a lenity not confident with their condition. In short, the *Code Noir*, and other ordinances relative to these poor creatures, shew a very just and sensible mixture of humanity and steadiness.[224]

As opposed to the various English slave codes, the regulations of the *Code Noir* are seen by Burke as providing protection from the avarice and cruelty of masters. Using almost the same words in which he proposed reforms in *An Account* (that they provide a "humanity exercised, which is consistent with steadiness", Burke describes the *Code Noir* as displaying "a sensible mixture of humanity and steadiness."[225] Both the *Code Noir* and Burke's proposed reforms combine steadiness, wisdom, and willingness to do violence with compassion, kindness, and liberality. The parts of the *Code Noir* that mandate that slaves should be taught Christianity especially impress Burke. He believed that the extension of Christianity to slaves would result in a more stable plantation by mitigating the harsh treatment of masters while making slaves less likely to revolt. Due to Christianity, slaves would be ""instructed in the principles of religion and virtue, and especially in the humility, submission, and honesty, which become their condition," and accept their position as human chattel.

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[222] Ibid., 2:127.

[223] Portions of it were written in response to the abuses that Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre documented in his *Histoire generales des Antilles habitees par les francois*. As such, the *Code Noir* emerges as a document concerned with curbing the abuse of slaves on plantations while ensuring the continuation of plantation slavery. As Robin Blackburn writes, "By anticipating the main ways slavery impinged on wider society, French absolutism hoped to contain and direct the institution." Robin Blackburn, The *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1846* (London: Verso, 2011), 291.

[224] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:47.

[225] Ibid.

## REVERENCE, PROXIMITY, AND PLANTATION AUTHORITY

Although Edmund Burke's attempt to humanize slavery mirrors earlier attempts by Colbert and Louis XIV, his proposals for preventing slave rebellion cannot be traced to the *Code Noir*. The portions of *An Account* that deal with preventing slave insurrection rely on ideas unique to Burke's understanding of the aesthetic dimensions of authority. I argue that Burke's attempts to prevent slave rebellion are grounded in his understanding of reverence, terror, and pleasure in relation to authority. I also argue that Burke's universalist understanding of aesthetics and human nature allow him not only to conceptualize the plantation as a space of human artifice, but Africans as fundamentally human and thus capable of being influenced by aesthetic construction of authority.

In *An Account*, Burke argues that British plantations in the Caribbean are unstable and susceptible to rebellion because prevailing practices have undermined the authority of overseers, managers, and owners. In particular, he argues that the quantity and proximity of house slaves threatens the safety of whites because it transforms the moral sentiments of slaves. He states:

> These [the house slaves] are so many hands taken from planting, to be of no manner of use to the public; but they are infinitely the most dangerous of the slaves for being at all times about our people, they come to abate of that *great reverence*, which the field-negroes have for the whites, without losing any thing of the *resentment* of their condition, which is common to both. And besides, in any insurrection, they have it more in their power to strike a sudden and fatal blow.[226]

By employing large numbers of slaves in the domestic sphere, West Indian planters increase the number of individuals who are able to reject their authority and do harm. However, the proximity and familiarity of domestic slaves with the lives, personalities, and human fragility of whites (i.e. managers, overseers, masters, and mistresses) results in a waning of reverence. Without reverence for authority, resentment becomes the strongest emotion in the lives of slaves. In this way, proximity leads to increased likelihood of retribution against whites and the violent pursuit of freedom.

At the center of Burke's analysis of the erosion of reverence on the plantation is his understanding of the connections between sublimity, power, and authority. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, the experience of the sublime is associated with power; "I know nothing sublime," Burke writes, "which is not some modification of power."[227] Christianity provides the clearest example of the link between power and the sublime, as well as power and terror.[228] Burke writes, "The power which arises from institutions in kings and commanders has the same connection with terror. Indeed, in considering God's power 'we are in a manner annihilated before him.'"[229] For Burke, the power of the Christian deity creates a terror so great that it annihilates the individual. However, the Christian god is not alone in the production of terror; all religions, even those that are considered pagan, promote fear in their followers.[230] According to Burke, the

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[226] Ibid., 2:132.

[227] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 62.

[228] Ibid., 54.

[229] Ibid.

[230] "True religion has, and must have, so large a mixture of salutary fear; and that false religions have generally nothing else but fear to support them. Before the christian [sic] religion has, as it were, humanized the idea of the divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God." Ibid., 64.

etymology of words such as awe, reverence, and respect show the ways in which terror at another's power forms a constitutive aspect of the sublime.[231] From this perspective, power produces fear; however, fear also helps constitute an aspect of authority, in its tacit or explicit recognition of authority.

The links between terror, the sublime, and authority are explicated in Burke's analysis of the embodiment of natural virtues in the family. In an analysis of how the virtues of the sublime and beautiful can be embodied, he states:

> The authority of the father, so useful to our well-being, and so justly venerable upon all accounts, hinders us from having that entire love for him that we have for our mothers, where the parental authority is almost melted down into the mother's fondness and indulgences. But we generally have great love for our grandfathers, in whom this authority is removed a degree from us, and where the weakness of age mellows it into something of a feminine partiality.[232]

According to Burke, the father embodies the sublime virtues (wisdom, bravery, steadfastness) while being venerable and powerful. The authority of the father is premised on fear; in contrast, the mother lacks authority because she provides love rather than provoking fear in her children. Thus, authority is linked to the sublime, while the absence of authority is linked to the beautiful. The key is to understand members of the family not as separate individuals, but as integral parts of a whole. Fondness from mothers and the fearsomeness from fathers combine to provide a family scene featuring both the sublime and the beautiful. This is in accord with the idea that the sublime and beautiful virtues, as masculine and feminine, complement each other. In this sense, the family unit replicates that which is found in larger society.

The erosion of reverence by domestic slaves represents the lessening of fear, the undermining of authority, and the destruction of ideas supporting slavery.[233] Reverence (like awe, veneration, and respect) embodies the recognition of legitimate inequality. As a reaction to the sublime, reverence presupposes inequality between the fearful subject and the powerful source of the fear. The fearful subject acknowledges the status, worth, and power of another through the emotional responses of reverence, awe, or respect. In Burke's analysis, the erosion of reverence corresponds to the disintegration of the belief in inequality. It opens up the space for egalitarian ideas and actions by bringing the master closer to the level of the slave. Simultaneously, this destruction of inequality is accompanied by the continual resentment and anger of being enslaved, controlled, and abused by another.

The breakdown of authority due to the loss of reverence, as well as the introduction of novel ways of viewing inequality, are central to Burke's analysis of the French Revolution. In a section of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* explicating how the philosophy and actions of the French Revolution have undermined the authority of institutions, Burke relates the transfer of the king and queen from Versailles to Paris. Burke claims that their treatment at the hands of the protesters and marchers demonstrates that chivalry was dead. He writes:

> But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the *sentiments which beautify and soften private society,* are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the

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[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid., 101.

[233] It also represents an inversion of the nature of authority, whereby the masculine (sublime) is meant to be the leading principle, and the feminine (beautiful) is meant to be the subordinate principle.

> decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.[234]

The rejection of chivalry is not only the rejection of rank, but also the rejection of the host of ideas that legitimize privilege and rank. Simultaneously, the destruction of chivalry was caused by the "new conquering empire of light and reason," which included new ideas about the nature of human beings that in turn became the basis of philosophy of the rights of man.

For Edmund Burke, chivalry was a set of complex beliefs about the proper relationship between superiors and inferiors. It served as a common framework for interactions between individuals, as well as an interpretative lens for conceptualizing the hierarchical nature of society. Its emergence during the Middle Ages would lead to the emergence of modern commerce and manners. According to Burke, chivalry not only made power gentle, but also led to the creation of bonds of love and attachment between members of society. In his analysis, chivalry helped raise modern Europe to heights superior to all civilizations, ancient or modern.[235]

Chivalry wrapped hierarchy in a web of "super-added ideas" and sentiments that encouraged obedience to one's betters. Burke analyzes the destruction of chivalry as the simultaneous destruction of those beliefs that developed alongside the social hierarchy of modern Europe. The manners of chivalry, the super-added ideas, and the attendant emotions work to connect individuals throughout the social structure.[236] When these connections are unraveled, authority itself falls apart.

In his response to the French Revolution, Burke believed the destruction of chivalry and the adoption of the rights of man would leave individuals without emotional attachments to social and political institutions. Social and political cohesion are aided by the "pleasing illusions" evoked as well as the sentiments felt upon encountering others of a different rank. When these illusions and sentiments are destroyed and public affection disappears, individuals cannot relate to institutions on psychological and emotional levels, a loss that in turn produces social disintegration. Of this Burke writes:

> Nothing is left which engages the affections of the part of the commonwealth. On the principles of this mechanic philosophy, our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons; so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment. But that sort of reason, which banishes the affections, is incapable of filling their place. These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law.[237]

The human embodiment of institutions creates emotional responses that foster loyalty,

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[234] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 67.

[235] He writes, "It [chivalry] is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world." Ibid.

[236] Super-added ideas are the product of the moral imagination. As a creative force, the moral imagination works by attaching historical and cultural experiences to objects and concepts. For example, the super-added ideas attached to monarchy render kings and queens more than mere people. Monarchy is shrouded with ideas of authority that derive from hereditary right, a special relationship with god, eminence, and spectacular genealogies. When the king or queen is beheld —in abstract or in person—these common ideas work to elevate them above others.

[237] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 76.

obedience, love, and admiration. Without chivalry, authorities cannot draw on the vast array of emotions to command obedience and connect individuals to institutions of power.[238]

The repercussions of institutions not being able to draw on appropriate emotional attachments are great. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke argues that without emotional attachment, law becomes degraded and violent. In the absence of affection, veneration, awe, and reverence, the law only draws upon fear of punishment. Thus, without the super-added ideas associated with chivalry, the "laws are to be supported only by their own terrors."[239] From the perspective of Burke's aesthetics, this would mean that the law becomes the embodiment of sublime power, but one without a complementary beautiful counterbalance.

It is at this juncture that Burke's analysis of the French Revolution illuminates his analysis of plantation slavery. Just as the political thought of the French Revolution had destroyed the legitimacy of chivalry, the erosion of reverence on the plantation destroys the connective tissue between slaves and plantation authorities. In their proximity, slaves begin to reject the super-added ideas that have supported the authority of masters, overseers, and managers. In particular, by rejecting reverence, slaves render illegitimate both the violence of the plantation and all plantation authority. For example, before the erosion of reverence, the master might have been perceived as person worthy of respect, as well as someone with the capability to dispose of the lives of slaves as he pleases. After the erosion of reverence, masters and other whites are revealed to be ordinary individuals, unworthy of respect, whose rule is accomplished solely through illegitimate violence, just as the revolution claimed that the monarchs of France, the aristocracy, and clergy were the usurpers of the popular sovereignty.

The proximity of slaves to the ruling authorities of the plantation is a threat to the psychological/aesthetic structure of the plantation. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, it is clear that sublime authority (religious and political authority) relies on obscurity and being hidden for its power. Constructed obscurity heightens the sublime effects of objects in literature, arts, religion, and politics. For example, in literature, Milton makes Satan sublime by rendering him shadowy. While in politics, Burke argues, "Despotic governments conceal their rulers as much as possible from public eye."[240] In the latter example, concealing things from the public eye makes an authority more sublime and fearful, while exposing government to public scrutiny dampens the impact of awe and terror. In the same year in which Burke links despotic governments to purposeful obscurity, he argues that the despotic government of the plantation system should also be purposefully obscure. Thus, when domestic slaves are constantly around "our people,"

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[238] The absence of personal attachment to institutions is theorized as a form of alienation. According to Burke, the British have avoided this alienation by remaining committed to chivalry and the institutions of monarchy, Parliament, and the Anglican Church. He proudly states that the English have the appropriate sentimental attachment to the higher powers of heaven and earth. He states, "We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and respect to nobility." The list of emotional responses displays how Burke perceives the connections between authority and sentiment. The responses are a mixture of sublime and beautiful sentiments: fear, awe, reverence, and respect are all forms of recognizing sublime authorities, while affection is a form of recognizing beautiful authorities. One reason why Parliament is looked upon with affection is that its very publicity, its actions and rationales, are always exposed, and thus do not render it sublime.

[239] Ibid., 68.

[240] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 62.

and "come to abate of that *great reverence*, which the field-negroes have for the whites,"[241] domestic slaves' perceptions of their masters brings to light the seat of plantation government that should remain obscure. On the plantation, the proper distance between those who wield and those who should obey is conceptualized as the distance between house and field. As Burke points out, the lack of intimate contact between field slaves and other whites fosters notions of privacy and obscurity that are supportive of reverence. In contrast, the relationship between house slaves and whites is characterized by publicity, familiarity, and illumination.

I argue that for Burke, the destruction of reverence represents the unraveling of plantation society, as it would later represent the unraveling of the ancien régime in France. On the plantation, it leads to the threat of revolt; in France, it led to a challenge to monarchy, aristocracy, and clergy as the legitimate executors of power. The same aesthetic categories that undergird Burke's understanding of authority in *A Philosophical Enquiry* and *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are being applied to plantation slavery. In fact, it is the universal nature of his project, one in which all humans will be influenced by passions almost uniformly, that can account for the reforms that he attempts to undertake on the West Indian plantation.

The argument for interpreting the reform of plantation slavery in *An Account* is representative of Burke's application of his own theories of aesthetics to plantation slavery and is strengthened by the idiosyncratic nature of the reforms. Although the preoccupation with preventing slave rebellion fills whole sections of eighteenth century writings on slavery, and represents the basis of all slave codes, the threat of house slaves is not a major concern for Burke's contemporaries. For example, Bryan Edwards does not attribute rebellion to the structure of the plantation system, but rather to the national character of the slaves. In speaking of the Akan peoples, or the "Koromantyn," Edwards says, "They encounter danger and death without seeming to shrink," and "that such people, when sold into slavery, should manifest the most enterprising attempts to take vengeance on their enslavers, is not to be wondered at."[242]

This view of slave rebellions as the result of the specific character of the slaves avoids reference to plantation authority. Bryan Edward's solution to the resistance of this linguistic/cultural group (the Akan) is to make sure that they are spread out across a plantation and/or that there are not many on any given plantation.[243] It does assume the simple psychological insight that one could want vengeance for being enslaved; yet, beyond this idea, it does not assume that there is a complex relationship between the perception of plantation system and the possibility of rebellion. Instead, the desire for freedom is natural or social, which must be handled by control of movement and population. It is not the result of changes in moral psychology, or moral imagination of slaves.

However, there is the possibility that Burke's analysis of the erosion of reverence on the plantation in *An Account* represents a commonsensical understanding of preventing rebellion. An argument for this interpretation might take his recommendation that a law "be contrived to restrain the number of menial servants" to be based on the idea that any group of slaves is potentially dangerous.[244] As the slave codes of the time maintain, large gatherings of slaves were

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[241] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:132.

[242] Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: Mundell & Son, 1798), 152-157.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:132.

always suspect.[245]

However an attempt to limit house slaves appears commonsensical, it is more nuanced than a general warning against assembling slaves. This is because the belief that slaves were dangerous was built into the slave laws and general understanding of the plantation system. In *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, it is not the threat of rebellion due to numbers and coordination that makes the analysis of potential rebellion idiosyncratic; rather, it is the belief that reverence could be diminished by proximity, and that this makes domestic slaves "infinitely the most dangerous of the slaves."[246] An interpretation of the plantation reform that sees proximity as a threat to authority fits within the web of Edmund Burke's belief at the time, as exemplified *by A Philosophical Enquiry* (1757) and the much later *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Thus, I argue that it is best not only to attribute this analysis of plantation slavery in *An Account* to Edmund Burke, but to treat this earlier instantiation of the connections between authority, proximity, and awe as valuable for interpreting other facets of Edmund Burke's political thought.

## THE AESTHETICS OF THE RACIAL PLANTATION

Although it is general orthodoxy to argue that Burke supported the continuation of plantation slavery in 1757, the role of race as a basis for authority has remained overlooked in many interpretations of *An Account*. Following his discussion of limiting domestic slaves, Burke recommends that whiteness be one of the moral, aesthetic, and psychic foundations of plantation authority. To this end, he sought changes to the customary employment of blacks as slave drivers, and sought to make all plantation authority white. He writes:

> Sure a sumptuary law might be contrived to refrain the number of the menial slaves, as there might and ought to be one strictly enjoining all who keep five servants, to have one white man and one white woman amongst them, without any power of being indulged in a contrary practice; as it ought to be a rule never to be broken through to have not only the oversees, but even all drivers, white men.[247]

The rationale for an all-white power structure can be deduced from Burke's belief that institutions are supported by a host of super-added ideas and a moral psychology that needs constant maintenance. Burke assumes that the associative power of the moral imagination would help slaves develop the view that whites are rightfully powerful and superior.

One could interpret the above passage as calling for more whites on the plantation and even greater surveillance of black slaves. The value of such an interpretation is that it conforms to Burke's general anxiety about the imbalance between whites and blacks in the West Indies.[248] Fifteen pages earlier than his analysis of reverence on the plantation, Burke writes:

> There are now allowed to be in our West-Indies, at least, two hundred and thirty

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[245] "We similarly forbid Slaves belonging to different masters, to assemble, by day or night, under the pretext of marriage or otherwise, be it in the habitation of their Masters, or elsewhere." *"Code Noir*," in *Slavery*, ed. Stanley Engerman, Seymour Drescher and Robert Paquette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115.

[246] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:132.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Ibid., 2:117.

> thousand negroe slaves; and it is allowed too that upon the highest calculation, the whites there, in all, do not amount to ninety thousand souls. This disproportion shews so clearly at the first glance how much the colonies are endangeared, both from within and without.[249]

Burke's word choice displays a particular conceptualization of the relationship between law and the racial imbalance of the population. He suggests that the law has "allowed" for the disproportion, and that such allowance should not continue. Instead, the legislation should require more white settlers to better secure the colonies.

However, although Burke does advocate for a greater balance between whites and blacks, in the domestic sphere, having one white for every five blacks would produce a negligible difference between whites and blacks. He does not advocate for equality between blacks and whites in the domestic sphere (i.e. a ratio of 1:1), but rather is willing to have great inequality in his proposal of one white for every five blacks (1:5). This suggests that he is not pursuing balance or justice, but shoring up white authority. The idea that a white man or woman could place slaves under surveillance is a more reasonable motive for increasing the amount of white servants. Employing a white male servant to oversee black male domestic slaves, and a white female servant to oversee black female domestic slaves, is intended to ensure that there are key whites alert for signs of rebellion and preventing conspiracies. The reform that for every five slaves there is a white servant creates a management structure where at least one white person is responsible for five slaves, thus ensuring that there is someone whose duty is to watch for rebellion.

The idea of free white servants amongst the domestic slaves, as well as all drivers and overseers being white, cannot be pried from the discussion of reverence that precedes it. I argue that the whole set of reforms relies on this understanding of how to secure reverence amongst slaves. Whereas the "menial slaves" can lose reverence for whites through proximity, field slaves could likewise lose reverence (or not have it affirmed) through having black men in positions of authority (i.e. overseer and drive). In this case, the domestic slaves are the most dangerous because they are closer to the owners; however, if reverence must be maintained as a constituent aspect of authority, then it is as essential for the field slaves as well as house slaves to be reverent towards whites. The emphasis that Burke places on the idea of both overseers and drivers being white as a "rule never to be broken" makes more sense in relationship to "reverence" than to vague ideas about preventing ethnic or racial solidarity. The idea of solidarity in rebellion makes practical sense, but it does not fit Burke's structural analysis of the aesthetic nature of authority on the plantation and in Europe.

For Burke, reverence for whites is the only check on the dissolution of the plantation system: it is a basic principle of slave management. Whereas employing free blacks and slaves in positions of authority could be dangerous in practice, not ensuring reverence for whites through linking whiteness to authority was dangerous to the entire principle of authority on the plantation.

The advocacy for a racialized plantation authority displays Burke's willingness to use race as a method of social and political organization. However, Burke does not subscribe to a polygenetic view of human beings. All human beings are one species that are distinguished by their material conditions. In this way, Burke is not arguing for the

[249] Ibid.

inferiority of African slaves based on an understanding of God making different species, nor does he ever in his writing claim that Africans are the descendants of Ham—a common pro-slavery argument that claimed that God had marked out Africans for enslavement.[250] Instead, Burke's racialized plantation authority is based on an understanding of human beings as distinguished by their historical development and their habits of class. In his progressive historiography, human beings are distinguished by their manners, passions, and the institutions that shape them; while, in his social thought, human beings are distinguished by their place in society (e.g. aristocrat, laborer, clergy, free, enslaved) and its attendant habits.

It is clear by his distinctions between blacks and whites that he does in fact consider skin color a sign of difference; however, complexion has a very distinct meaning in Burke's aesthetics. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, he argues that blackness (including black skin) is sublime. Burke provides the reader with an example of a young (white) man frightened by the sight of a black woman. According to the text, this young man was recovering from a surgery that healed his blindness, a birth defect. Upon regaining his sight, the young man becomes frightened by a number of black objects and a black woman. Burke writes:

> Amongst many remarkable particulars that attended his first perceptions, and judgments on visual objects, Cheselden tells us, that the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him some great uneasiness; and that some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror. The horror in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association.[251]

Because the young man was blind all of his life, the experience of blackness as terrifying is meant to signify that his reaction is natural and not based on association. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, the inverse is also true: whiteness is aligned with comfort and the beautiful. Of the beauty of fair skin, Burke writes, "Beautiful bodies must not be dusky or muddy, but clean and fair."[252] Here, his aligning of blackness with sublimity does signal an aesthetic dichotomy that may reflect the eighteenth century conflation of blackness with monstrosity, and most likely can be traced back to the ways in which chattel slavery influenced aesthetic discourses of modern Europe.[253] However, it is necessary to note that this does not approach the profound ideas of difference that one finds in the nineteenth century, where race becomes solidified in biological, aesthetic, historical, and metaphysical terms.[254]

Burke is not a racist in the sense of arguing that one race is naturally superior then

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[250] For refutation, see Ottobah Cugoano. Ottobah Quobna Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 31.

[251] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 131.

[252] Ibid., 106.

[253] Jennifer Morgan explicates how the idea of monstrosity became associated with African women. She writes, "Other images of monstrous races, such as the headless Euaipanonoma, the one-footed Sciopods, and the Astomi who lived on the aroma of apples, slowly vanished from Europe's imagined America and Africa. Once in Africa, however, the place of motherhood in the complex of savagery and race became central to the figure of the black woman. Unlike other monstrosities, the long-breasted woman-who, when depicted with her child, carried the full weight of productive savagery maintained her place in the lexicon of conquest and exploration." Jennifer L. Morgan, '"Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (Jan., 1997): 176.

[254] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 8-10.

another; nor does he make any arguments that the skin of Africans displays a form of natural inferiority or religious inferiority (i.e. God's curse on Ham and his descendants). Taking his progressive historiography seriously means acknowledging that he believed that civilized societies were in fact superior to savage ones. However, for Burke and in the context of plantation slavery, differences in skin color becomes a characteristic—however caused—that can be manipulated for the construction of society. The difference in skin color between whites and blacks is less a subject for deeper interpretation of human nature (and difference) then material to be manipulated to maintain institutions and society. I argue that Burke utilizes complexion as he would use any other rhetorical or artistic material that concerns the sublime and beautiful: as a means of producing certain passions in an audience. For Edmund Burke, white skin is simply a material by which he can affect the passions of African slaves. Whereas black skin might be naturally sublime, white skin can be rendered sublime through its association with power, violence, and authority.

The application of the moral psychology of *A Philosophical Enquiry* to the plantation system holds great value for scholars studying slavery, anti-slavery thought, and empire. In his application of his aestheticized authority to the plantation society, one discerns not only Burke's commitment to gradual reform, but also his recognition of the similarity between Africans and Europeans. Burke's universalism (i.e. the natural laws that govern European men and women also govern African men and women) appears as a caution to those who would interpret racial difference as the defining category of the eighteenth century. At least in 1757, skin color is not a marker of great difference to Edmund Burke, but rather an attribute to be manipulated in order to create difference and hierarchy. However, the price of this similitude is Burke's attempt to continue the plantation system on a racial basis. Here, we see the ways in which Burke's understanding of continuing inherited institutions is active. In an institution premised on the superiority and authority of whites, continuing the institution means maintaining this racial hierarchy and its attendant ideas.

## CONCLUSION

Edmund Burke's 1757 writings on slavery display many of the ambivalent attitudes towards slavery apparent in his later writings. Although critical of the practices of West Indian slavery, Burke does not at this early date call for the abolition of either the slave trade or colonial slavery. This was not uncommon for writers of the mid-eighteenth century who sought to ameliorate an institution that appeared to be so entrenched in the economic and imperial fortunes of the British nation.[255]

However, examining Burke's writings on slavery in 1757 also provides us with a deeper understanding of his commitment to conserving and strengthening an established institution. His reforms demonstrate his commitment to stabilizing an institution in danger of dissolution due to insurrection. Although Burke sincerely expresses that ameliorating slave conditions would be a great benefit to all, his reforms mitigating the brutality and fatality of slavery are conceptual and practically premised on the maintenance (and expansion) of the plantation system. Burke's fear of dissolution and

[255] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 165-197.

rebellion on the plantation frames his discussion of slavery in *An Account*; for example, his final thoughts on West Indian slavery, after discussions on restricting the amount of domestic slaves and implementing an all-white authority, are concerned with the need for reforms in order to prevent dissolution during the current war with France. Burke's great fear is that rebellion from within, or attack from without, will destroy British plantations and colonies.

The irony of Burke's analysis of plantation slavery is that his understanding of humanity is most clearly articulated in treating Africans as human beings who need to be controlled. Whereas other parts of *An Account* address the high mortality rate of slaves, their benefit to British society, and abstract political and practical concerns that barely address their humanity, his aestheticization of authority provides an understanding of Africans as human; in his ideas of the reform of the domestic sphere on the plantation and his attempts at a racial authority, one sees Burke conceptualizing African slaves as intelligent, passionate, and freedom-desiring human beings. Precisely because they are perceptive, full of passion, and desirous of freedom, the plantation system must be reformed if it is not to dissolve.

In some obvious ways, Edmund Burke extends the new human sciences of his time to plantation slavery; thus applying not only a single moral understanding of human beings, but also advocating for a new norm of justice to the West Indies. Burke's attempt to reform plantation slavery falls within what Jennifer Pitts referred to as the rejection of "geographic morality."[256] In *An Account*, Burke sought to expand the moral imagination of his readers and the British public, through claims that slavery in the British West Indies was the "worst slavery" in human history. At the same time, through arguments about the fatality of slaves and the need for more indulgences, Burke attempted to show that sympathy towards slaves would not destroy the plantation system. Thus, he argues for "a mixture of humanity and steadiness."[257]

For Burke, improvement of slave conditions and treatment involves the application of ideas that we find in his writings on India and Ireland (i.e. the necessity of good government, the intervention of the law in a lawless space, and the application of an understanding of justice that crosses geographical lines). Yet while there are similarities between his writings on slavery and his writings on India and Ireland, there is no exact moral and political equivalence. In particular, the rights reserved to British subjects would not be extended to African slaves. As has frequently been pointed out, Burke believed that circumstances, history, and the character of the people were of utmost importance in settling any political question. That different colonial institutions, rights, and liberties can exist throughout the British Empire was simply a fact of British imperialism in particular, and conforms to Burke's own concept of imperial subjectship and imperial governance.[258]

Edmund Burke's advocated reform of plantation slavery complements his other commitments to reform and support of colonial institutions in India and Ireland. In India,

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[256] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 77.

[257] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:47.

[258] Burke famously stated, "It is our duty, in all soberness, to conform our Government to the character and circumstances of the several people who compose this mighty and strangely diversified mass; I could never conceive that the natives of Hindostan and those of Virginia could be ordered in the same manner, or that the Cutchery Court and the grand Jury of Salem could be regulated in the same manner." Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," 428.

he sought to place the East India Company under the jurisdiction of Parliament, ensure that the government benefit those ruled, and prevent the abuses of power that accompanied the first twenty years of Company rule. In Ireland, he sought the repeal of the Penal Laws that curtailed basic political and social rights to Irish Catholics. In all of these instances, he affirmed the legitimacy of the political institution, while criticizing its practices. This is the nature of Burke's commitment to empire and his anti-imperialism.

# CHAPTER 4
# A REMOTE PROMISE: EDMUND BURKE AND ABOLITIONISM IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION, 1774-1797

The previous chapter focused almost exclusively on West Indian slavery, and Edmund Burke's analysis of plantation slavery in 1757. As the analysis of Burke's 1757 writings on slavery has demonstrated, even at the beginning of his career, Burke had an ambivalent approach to plantation slavery. On one hand, he recognized that the unreformed West Indian plantation was a danger to its own existence—wasteful, avaricious, and contrary to the dictates of good governance. On the other hand, Burke remained committed to the continuation of plantation slavery, and in the name of reform advocated for a racialized authority, the Christianization of slaves, and the continuation of violence and terror necessary for creating order and discipline. Many of the ambivalences found in his writings on slavery in 1757 consistently reappear in his corpus until his death forty years later in 1797.

Of special importance is Burke's extension of protection to African slaves. This extension represents his commitment to developing a humane and stable British empire, organized according to notions of trusteeship. This chapter argues that in Africa and the Americas, Edmund Burke utilizes a civilizing mission and a civilizing hierarchy as a justification for the continuation of imperial institutions. As such, the chapter contrasts Burke's deployment of civilizational hierarchy in thinking about the Americas with his deployment of civilizational hierarchy in discussing India.

A central argument of this chapter is that Burke's tepid public position on the abolition of the slave trade represents an aspect of his ambivalent anti-imperialism. I argue that Burke's ambivalence on the abolition of the slave trade relates to his progressive historiography and his aesthetics of greatness. The chapter begins with an exploration of his contribution to the debate on colonial slavery during the American Revolution. It turns next to an analysis of his emancipation scheme, "Sketch of A Negro Code," and explores the code's implicit concept of subjectship, its civilizing mission, its understanding of African humanity, and similar prescriptions for African slaves and the English poor. It then closes with an interpretation of Burke's lack of public dedication to abolition.

## BURKE, SLAVERY, AND THE AMERICAN CRISIS

After 1757, Edmund Burke's next significant engagement with slavery came during the American Revolution. As scholars of abolitionism have noted, the slave trade and plantation slavery became a domestically contested and an important international issue during the American Revolution.[259] They were the focus of an ideological battle between sympathizers and opponents of the American colonists over who had the requisite virtue to rule America. Those who supported the American colonists argued that British importation of slaves showed that they were willing to enslave and transport people in the name of commerce. Those who opposed the American colonists argued that the plantation systems of the American colonies demonstrated that those colonists had contradictory and hypocritical ideas about human freedom and natural

[259] Christopher L. Brown, "The Politics of Slavery in the Years of Crisis," in *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2006), 105-153.

rights.[260]

During the American Revolution, Burke produced a number of public and private reflections on slavery that were influential in shaping the debate in Parliament. His expressed beliefs on slavery between 1774 and 1783 owe a great deal to the particulars of the American crisis. In actuality, his only writings on slavery that are not shaped by war are expressed during the first debates on the abolition of slavery in 1789. *An Account of the European Settlements in America* was written during the Seven Years' War, Burke's extended analyses of North American slavery occur in the 1770s and early 1780s during the American Revolution, his "Sketch of A Negro Code" that addresses emancipation in the West Indies was written in 1780, and most of his writings on slavery in the Caribbean during the 1790s were written in the shadow of the French Revolution.

The similarities between the views espoused in Edmund and William Burke's *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, and in Edmund Burke's writings on the American Revolution, are substantial. Edmund Burke still maintains that slavery is a legitimate institution protected by law and the public trust of political institutions. There is still attentiveness to moral psychology; however, nuances and emphasis on his analysis of slavery in North America that were not apparent in his 1757 analysis of plantation slavery in the Caribbean begin to emerge. In 1757, Burke claimed that North American plantations had lower mortality rates, higher birth rates, more moderate climates, and better labor practices.[261] This concern with more moderate and humane plantations leads to a different analysis of the psychology of slaves in relationship to their masters.

The three speeches that are essential for understanding Edmund Burke's views of slavery in the 1770s and during the American Revolution are his "Speech on the Conciliation with America" (1775), "Speech on the Use of Indians" (1777), and "An Address to the King" (1777). Burke's reflections on slavery during the American Revolution are centered on the issue of the emancipation of North American slaves and their use in British efforts to subdue the American colonists. During the war, Parliament and the British public debated whether slaves should be used in efforts to prevent the continuation of the rebellion of American colonists. Those who supported the British policy of force saw the recruitment of American slaves to British lines and the subsequent granting of freedom to those who aided the British as a legitimate act of war. Those opposed to the subjugation of Americans saw it as an unjust policy that both robbed British subjects of their property and rights and would be destructive to American society.

Slavery became an even more divisive national and imperial issue when Lord Dunmore extended protection and freedom for any "servant" willing to help the British defeat the colonists.[262] It is within this context that Burke's most significant remarks on slavery in North America emerge. His "Speech on the Conciliation in America" was intended to convince Parliament to abandon practices that would further enflame American colonists. Nestled within this speech is an analysis of the moral psychology of slaves, as well as that of the colonists and the influences that had shaped their reactions to political change. Burke believes that Dunmore's proclamation might run across various impediments. First, that slaves would be attached to their masters. Second, that if slaves wanted their freedom they might be tempted to challenge their masters for enfranchisement. Third, that slaves would be skeptical of the British promise of

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[260] Ibid.

[261] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:132.

[262] Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, and the American Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 75.

enfranchisement given that the British sanctioned the slave trade.[263]

In his "Speech on Conciliation with America," on April 7, 1775, Burke argues that the British would have a hard time subduing the American colonists because of their attachment to freedom, and warns against any scheme that would rely on African slaves to help the British defeat the Americans.[264] According to Burke, whereas slave owners are desperate to be free due to their Protestantism, their historical autonomy, and their jealous guarding of freedom as owner of human chattel, slaves would be desperate to remain servile. He describes any attempt to simultaneously subdue Americans and emancipate slaves as follows:

> Slaves are often much attached to their masters. A general wild offer of liberty, would not always be accepted. History furnishes few instances of it. It is sometimes as hard to persuade slaves to be free, as it is to compel freeman to be slaves; and in this auspicious scheme, we should have both these pleasing tasks on our hands.[265]

The idea of the slave who is attached to his master more than liberty itself positions slaves in America as the inverse of their freedom-loving owners. The moral psychology that Burke attaches to slaves in 1775 is one of attachment to their masters. Slaves are thought to be not only deeply afraid of their masters, but also bonded to them through feelings of affection. Thus in 1775, Burke sees American slaves as having connections with their owners that resemble the connections between members of a family or a shared society. In contrast to his writings on West Indian slavery in *An Account*, there appears to be little of the "*resentment* of their condition" that characterized West Indian slaves' (domestic and field) attitudes toward their owners. For Burke, North American slavery is seen as having accomplished a better balance between humanity and violence, through both the types of crops produced and the more moderate climate. In this way, it has produced less resentment than its West Indian counterpart. The distance between the two conceptualizations of slavery is clearest if one attempts to apply the same vision of attachment that Burke argues for in North America to the West Indies. West Indian slavery is seen as unstable because it lacks humanity and thus is always under threat of rebellion. It is also clear that Burke is unlikely to claim that West Indian domestic and agricultural slave workers are attached to their owners.

I see Edmund Burke's expressions of resentment in the West Indies and attachment in North America not as diametrically opposed, but rather as portraits of slavery that emphasize the dominant mode of interaction with the slave system. For Burke, the overall structure of the plantation created populations that shared common beliefs and sentiments about their enslavements and masters. The greatest change in Burke's analysis of slavery in North America between 1775 and 1777 is a shift in emphasis, from the idea that slaves are attached to their masters to the idea of slaves as resentful and committed to rebellion. This change was precipitated by the reality of the Dunmore Proclamation, which was successful in encouraging slaves to abandon their owners.

Burke could no longer argue that slaves were attached to their masters with the same emphasis that he had two years earlier. By 1777, the question becomes not whether slaves want to be free, but whether it is legitimate, just, and natural for them to help subdue the American colonists. At the same time, Dunmore's Proclamation had transformed the context in which North American slavery existed, as the "general wild offer of liberty" had unleashed a set of ideas and passions that could not be contained. Dunmore's Proclamation forced Burke to think

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[263] Burke, "Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775," 134.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.

through the consequences of slave emancipation in North America, while simultaneously challenging him to think through the relationship between ideas and slave psychology.

The last section of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* deals with the extraordinary power of words to provoke passions. Burke believes that the power of words, including rhetoric and poetry, can transform the passions of men, and thereby also transform their orientation to policies or ideas. Thus, he writes:

> Now, as words affect, not by any original power, but by representation, it might be supposed, that their influence over the passions should be but light; yet it is quite otherwise; for we find by experience that eloquence and poetry are as capable, nay indeed much more capable of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases.[266]

I argued previously that Burke's understanding of the power of words was deeply connected with his appreciation of the centrality of rhetoric in political life. In India, transforming the British public's moral imagination and widening the circle of moral concern was to be accomplished through speeches and writings that rendered Indians sympathetic and the East India Company in need of reform.

Burke argues in *A Philosophical Enquiry* that there are a group of words that affect people, although they do not produce a mental picture. He labels these "*compound abstract words*," like words such as "honour, justice, [and] liberty."[267] These words have a special status in that they produce deep passions, but also are abstract and without real substance. For Burke, Dunmore's "wild offer of liberty" has excited the passions of slaves and has produced a sentiment of rebellion as well as a host of ideas.

In January 1777, two years after Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, Burke was both deeply critical and profoundly disturbed by the idea of slaves aiding the British government. In "An Address to the King," Burke criticizes two alienating policies that were initiated in the King's name, Dunmore's Proclamation, and Parliament's military alliances with Amerindian nations. Of the former, he states:

> We therefore assure your Majesty, that it is with shame and horror we have seen several acts of hostility, which could no other tendency than incurably to alienate the minds of your American subjects. To excite, by proclamation issued by your Majesty's governor, a *universal insurrection of negro slaves* in any of the colonies is a measure full of complicated horrors; absolutely illegal; suitable neither to the practice of war nor to the laws of peace.[268]

In publishing his proclamation, Burke believes that Dunmore encourage a frame of mind that is conducive to slave rebellion. He goes on to state that the contents of this promoted frame of mind are the secret fantasies of slaves overthrowing their masters. Thus he states:

> He appealed to all who knew the southern colonies, and the West Indies, what murders, rapes, and enormities of all kinds, were in the contemplation of all negroes who meditated an insurrection. He lastly asked what means were proposed for governing these negroes, who were 100,000 at least; when they had reduced the province to their obedience, and made themselves masters of the houses, goods, wives and daughters of their murder lords? Another war must be made of them; and another massacre, adding

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[266] Ibid., 158.

[267] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 150.

[268] Edmund Burke, "Address to the King," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6*. (ULAN Press), 170.

> confusion to confusion, and destruction to destruction. He said, that providentially the English white civilized inhabitants had so strengthened themselves, as to keep under his Majesty's negro allies; that not above one thousand or thereabouts were able to escape, and put themselves under the banners of Lord Dunmore, and that the end of these wretches, seduced into an insurrection, in which they were not supported, was truly deplorable.[269]

A successful implementation of these meditations would lead to a calamitous future, one in which the slaves would rape white women, occupy their owners' houses, and set up a government that would be opposed to British interests. Burke evokes the image of the appropriation of the land, property, and the social status of white owners by ex-slaves, and the establishment of an ex-slave province in the midst of Virginia.

By inverting the logic of the plantation system, Burke is able to showcase how emancipation and empowerment of slaves could lead to a freedom that would be diametrically opposed to British interests. It might be tempting to interpret his inversion as a critique of the plantation system, but Burke is not being ironic in his portrayal of slave rebellions. Although profoundly disturbing in its portrayal of self-emancipating excess, the basic idea that the violence reserved for slaves could be turned against whites had been a concern of Burke since 1757. The significance of his evoking of slave rebellion here is that if slaves are successful in gaining their freedom, their emancipation will lead to a host of problems that the British may be unprepared to answer. Thus Burke asks, "What means have been proposed for governing these negroes."[270]

On one level, Burke is simply stating that the Proclamation and freedom for the enslaved is happening in a context in which there is no long-term plan for the government of formerly enslaved Africans. He points to the potential outcome of a successful slave rebellion—that it most likely leads to a replication of the same problem (i.e. how to govern a rebellious population). In this interpretation, the inversion of power dynamics would not be beneficial to the British cause under these new circumstances. In fact, the British are fortunate that this has not occurred because this will lead to further armed conflict between these imagined ex-slaves and the British government.

On another level, Burke's imagining of a post-emancipation dystopia seems like it could have contributed to his most engaged piece of writing on slavery, his 1780 "Sketch of A Negro Code," an emancipation scheme for the West Indies that attempted to incorporate formerly enslaved people into the British Empire. If a central question of "Sketch of A Negro Code" is how slaves can be emancipated without a danger to themselves or former masters, Burke's dystopic vision of North American rebellion provides the horizon that he would like to avoid. I do not argue that Dunmore's Proclamation caused Burke to write "Sketch of A Negro Code," but that Dunmore's Proclamation provides a significant context for its aims and concerns. The willingness of the British to grant a general emancipation to slaves loyal to Britain was a significant innovation. Dunmore's Proclamation made a political issue of emancipation, and although Burke fundamentally disagreed with its aims and executions, it did conform to his understanding that slavery could be modified or reformed based on the needs of empire. Put differently, if the slave trade and colonial slavery became political issues that made slavery malleable to human agency, then Dunmore's Proclamation placed the issue of the emancipation of slaves at the forefront, if only as a representation of how it should not be done. In Burke's

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[269] Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1981), 359.

[270] Ibid.

vision of a successful slave rebellion in the Southern colonies, the world has been turned upside down, because the immediate self-emancipation of slaves leads to the violation of colonial bodies and property.

At the center of Burke's portrayal of Dunmore's Proclamation is his profound fear of black insurrection. Indeed what emerges through his discussion of Dunmore's Proclamation is the figure of the violent black savage, excited by ideas of vengeance. In the place of the loyal and attached slaves of his pre-Proclamation analysis is a representation of the moral psychology of slaves as driven by the passion of resentment and fantasies of retribution. The rhetorical role of this psychology and of Burke's figure of savage violence is best explained this way: the idea of savage violence is deeply connected to an understanding of the relationship between words and the promise of freedom, a shifting moral psychology of slaves that sees them as human and yet also capable of "savage" resistance or violence.

As Seymour Drescher argues, one of the key rhetorical devices of colonial sympathizers was to contrast the savagery and savage violence of Parliament's allies with the shared British kinship of the settlers:

> Both in Parliament and out-of-doors, American sympathizers invoked kinship in opposing any policy that might encourage "savage" violence (i.e., by Indians or by Africans) against the descendants of freeborn Englishmen.[271]

Burke would utilize the idea of savagery not only in his defense of American colonists, but also most famously in his defense of the ancien régime during the French Revolution. This representation of African and Amerindian savagery becomes an integral aspect of Burke's political thought on revolution, where it stands for the primitive or anti-civilizational attacks of the revolutionaries.

The framing of the violent, savage, and rebellious slave of his writings on the American Revolution is compatible with his earlier analysis of plantation slavery in the West Indies in *An Account of the European Settlements in America*. Whereas in *An Account*, rebellion is caused by defects in the structure of plantation authority—specifically the erosion of reverence—in North America, it is due to the insane, impolitic, and rash proclamation of general liberty for those loyal to the Crown. Both the (potentially) rebellious house slaves and the potentially rebellious North American slave are products of their contexts.

Burke's understanding of the ways in which contexts provoke changes in the moral psychology and dangers to society are clear in both *An Account of the European Settlements in America* and his speeches on the American Revolution. Burke remains committed to plantation slavery throughout the American Revolution, due to the potential for the emancipation of slaves to create havoc for their owners, their property, women, and goods.

## SUBJECTSHIP AND EDMUND BURKE'S EMANCIPATION SCHEME

In 1780, Edmund Burke wrote his most sustained piece of legislation and thinking on colonial slavery. This document would become "Sketch of A Negro Code" and along with an introduction written in 1792, would articulate Burke's vision for gradual abolition of the slave trade and plantation slavery and the emancipation of slaves into colonial society. The code has four sections: the first section regulated slave ships participating in the trade; the second section dictated the "mode of carrying on the trade upon the Coast of Africa;" the third addressed the

[271] Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

appropriate means of transporting slaves across the Atlantic; while the last attempted to reform the plantation.[272]

The "Sketch of A Negro Code" is Burke's most developed articulation of his vision for the abolition of the slave trade, the abolition of colonial slavery, and the emancipation of slaves. As such it should be interpreted not only as an engagement with slavery, but also as an engagement with the British Empire. This is because the "Sketch of A Negro Code" articulates a particular conception of empire with African slaves as future subjects of Britain.

By 1780, Burke recognized that West Indian slavery was a destructive and often fatal institution, and that the slave trade leads to massive death, rape, starvation, illness, and all manner of other abuses. All of this is clearly discernible in this "Sketch of A Negro Code," especially in the sections that deal with regulating the slave ports of Africa and the slave vessels that transported slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. The idea of the slave trade itself as fatal does not appear in Burke's writings before 1780. However, the writings of Anthony Benezet, Granville Sharp, and others during the American crises revealed to Burke that slaves were maltreated in African ports and on slave ships in ways that needed to be addressed.[273]

"Sketch of A Negro Code" is an exemplar of what Christopher L. Brown describes in *Moral Capital* as attempting to think through "an empire without slaves." It is an emancipation scheme that was intended to articulate how enslaved peoples could be emancipated within the British Empire. In *Moral Capital*, Brown describes subjectship as the long tradition of a sovereign providing protection for individuals in return for obedience. He writes:

> In the eighteenth century, the meaning of subjectship retained the quasi-medieval connotations of a personal bond between individual and lord. Subjectship could be natural or acquired, that is, a consequence of birth within the sovereign's domain or of absorption through naturalization or conquest. In either case, subjectship was understood as natural, perpetual, and immutable, a civic analogue of the relationship between parent and child. The relationship entailed obligations: the monarch owed the subject protection, while the subject owed allegiance. The relationship also conveyed membership: although subjects could and did hold different ranks, in theory, each could rightfully claim certain privileges, not the least of which was the right to hold real property and the right to equal consideration under the law.[274]

According to Brown, subjectship could be produced not only through birth, but also through naturalization and conquests. As such, it was applicable to those who found themselves in British domains due to birth or through being conquered (or by treaty). As a relationship, it not only signified an exchange of protection for obedience, but also meant that the subject became a member of a larger entity, nation, or in our case, empire.

The protection of subjects in the post-Seven Years' War era often meant protection from colonists and agents of colonial companies, not necessarily from European imperial competitors. As Brown argues, imperial thinkers "aimed to keep colonists from antagonizing the established residents in the acquired territories,"[275] meaning that authorities of the Crown and Parliament sought to prevent rebellion and bloodshed by promoting policies that would not lead to social

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[272] Edmund Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press).

[273] Anthony Benezet, "A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies," in *The Complete Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet, 1754-1783* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 84-111.

[274] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 221.

[275] Ibid., 226.

strife. Brown writes:

> As policies aimed at lessening antagonism between settlers and entrepeneurs and conquered populations was a new order of subjugation. In this new order, Whitehall did not permit British entrepreneurs to enjoy free rein in the new territories. Ministers preferred managed subjugation to naked exploitation, if only to secure the submission of His Majesty's new subjects.[276]

I agree with Brown that Burke attempted to mitigate the more exploitative and destructive aspects of colonial regimes, institutions, and governmental policies. His commitment to reforming the plantation is displayed by his ideas for plantation reform in *An Account of the European Settlements in America.* The "Sketch of A Negro Code" is a later attempt to transform "naked exploitation" into "managed subjugation."[277]

In its paternalistic analogizing of ruler and subject to parent and child, subjectship supported a fundamental unequal distribution of power. The asymmetrical positions of ruler and subject led to unequal distribution of wealth, social prestige, and political rights. However, this lack of equality was not characterized by total denial of social and political goods, but rather by the recognition of certain rights and protections. Although the aim of "Sketch of A Negro Code" is to procure obedience, these new rights also aimed at reconstructing the slave subject. The right to own property, to inherit, and the right to marry are explicitly theorized as reconstructing slave selfhood and character.[278]

At its core, the "Sketch of A Negro Code" aims to emancipate African slaves into the larger British Empire. As Brown argues, the attempt to imagine and realize the emancipation of slaves in in the 1770s and early 1780s posed conceptual and practical problems to imperial thinkers.[279] Brown states that these puzzles would ultimately lead to new intellectual horizons and territories, including a wider application of the concept of imperial subjectship. He writes:

> If the enslaved would no longer be slaves, who exactly, in civic terms, would they be? Abolishing slavery would seem to present one of two prospects: an incorporation, in some form, of liberated slaves into colonial society or, alternatively, relocation of hundreds of thousands of freed slaves to the frontiers of British Empire, or outside the realm. A genuine challenge to slavery thus entailed far more than a challenge to slave labor. It necessitated, as well, an engagement with fundamental questions regarding property, imperial governance, and social organization. At bottom, those who would abolish slavery required an alternative concept of empire.[280]

According to Brown, in order to deal with the challenge of dealing with a diversity of populations who were not originally of British stock or European backgrounds, British theorists after the Seven Years' War utilized an "elastic concept of subjectship" in order to bring economic, military, and social stability to the empire. This concept of subjectship was implicit in Burke's "Sketch of A Negro Code" and was also implicit in his advocacy for the reform of the East India Company in the 1780s.

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[276] Ibid.

[277] Ibid.

[278] Regulation thirty-two of part four of the "Sketch of A Negro Code" states that no masters can take the acquisitions of Negro slaves. This includes "any land, house, cattle, goods or money." Similarly, slaves are able to pass whatever property they acquire in their lifetime can be passed to their children. Edmund Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press), 287.

[279] Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 212.

[280] Ibid.

The argument for an "elastic concept of subjectship" is premised on the idea that various divergent thinkers hit upon a unique solution to the problem of incorporating various new populations, resulting in an "empire without slaves."[281] Burke does not explicitly claim that African slaves are subjects. In fact, he often claims the exact opposite, as when he suggests during the American Revolution that slaves are called upon to murder his majesty's subjects.[282] However, Burke does claim that Indians under the rule of the East India Company, colonists under British rule in America, and Irish Catholics under the Penal Laws are all subjects.[283] Although Burke does not claim slaves to be current subjects—an important distinction when it comes to membership in the British Empire—he does imagine them as potential future subjects, which therefore provides certain limited protections, liberties, and rights.

An obvious difficulty in interpreting Burke's emancipation scheme through the lens of rights, liberties, and subjectship is the absence of any definitive statement of what the political and social rights of ex-slaves (and their descendants) will be after the legislation has abolished the slave trade and colonial slavery. The full extent of those rights and liberties is left indeterminate for later legislators and legislation; however, Burke does see his emancipation schemes as necessarily providing certain rights and liberties, because they will be one of the chief mechanisms by which the gradual abolition of colonial slavery will be accomplished.

"Sketch of A Negro Code" represents the attempt to think through the possibilities of African slaves as potential future British subjects, while explicitly denying them the label of subjects. It appears that Burke's initial solution to the abuses of slaves on slave vessels and plantations is to first conceptualize slaves as legal subjects of Parliament (and its laws), not as subjects of the king. Although it is clear that the "Sketch of A Negro Code" is meant to provide slaves with certain protections against harm, it is equally clear that these rights are neither the rights of "public citizens" nor "private citizens." As Richard Bellamy writes, eighteenth century European "citizenship" encompassed types of citizens: "the public citizen who acts as a collective agent—'the people' or the 'nation'—and the private, 'legal' citizen, who is the subject of law and the possessor of 'natural' rights to liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness."[284] As I argue below, in Burke's emancipation scheme, slaves are conceived of as at least the future bearers of legal citizenship. This means that after emancipation they will be provided with certain legal rights before the law without being granted full status as free people or subjects of the crown.

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[281] Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution" *William And Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999): 273-306.

[282] In his "Address to the British Colonists," Burke likens Dunmore's proclamation to attempted murder. He writes, "We likewise saw with shame the African slaves, who had been sold to you on public faith, and under the sanction of acts of parliament, to be *your servants*, and *your guards*, employed *to cut the throats of their masters*. Edmund Burke, "Address to the British Colonists," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Volume 6* (ULAN Press),189.

[283] In rejecting the validity of the Penal Laws, Burke recognizes the Irish as subjects of the British Crown and deplores the ways in which other subjects (the Anglo Irish) deny them basic legal and social writes. He writes, "However, still recites the oath, and that Catholics ought to be considered as good and loyal subjects of his Majesty, his crown and government. Then follows a universal exclusion of those GOOD and LOYAL subjects from every (even the lowest) office of trust and profit—from any vote at election—from any privilege in a town corporate … from serving on grand juries—from a vote at a vestry—from having a gun in his house—from being a barrister, attorney, or solicitor." Edmund Burke, "Letter to A Peer of Ireland, on the Penal Laws," in *The Portable Edmund Burke*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1999), 327.

[284] Richard Bellamy, "Citizenship" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klesco (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 593.

One of the defining features of Burke's emancipation scheme is that it attempts to extend the rule of law and metropolitan power to the slave marts of Africa and the plantations of the Caribbean. For example, the code mandates the prosecution of those who kidnap, harm, and murder African captives. If a panel of local authorities (i.e. the Governor, naval commander, and council) convicts a man for kidnapping, maiming, or murdering captives, then the perpetrator would be sent to a British jail. As the code states:

> It is hereby provided and enacted, that if any European shall be convicted of any of the said offences, he shall be sent to Europe, together with the evidence against him; and on the warrant of the said Commissioners the Keeper of any of His Majesty's Jails in London, Bristol, Liverpool, or Glasgow, shall receive him, until he be delivered according to due course of law, as if the said offences had been committed within the cities and towns aforesaid.[285]

Likewise, if any members of the British government or the African Company break the law, they would be dismissed and returned to Britain. In this way, Burke conceives of the slave mart as equivalent to a British port, a site where the "rule of law" applies, and where British power can curtail the actions of those in its jurisdiction. As such, unlawful activity will be punished as if the crimes were committed within British cities.

Another extension of British law involves the regulations aimed at protecting slaves during the Middle Passage. The second part of the code is composed of seven regulations meant to ensure that slaves will be well fed, well provisioned, and clothed.[286] However, the clearest example of the extension of law and protection occurs in a reference to West Indian plantations. In the section dealing with the plantations, Burke explicitly equates African slaves to British subjects. He states that injury to "member or life" will be treated as if it occurred to one of the King's subjects. He writes:

> And be it enacted, that, in all cases of injury to member or life, the offences against a Negro shall be deemed and taken to all intents and purposes as if the same were perpetrated against any of His Majesty's Subjects; and the Protector of Negroes, on complaint, or if he shall receive credible information thereof, shall cause an indictment to be presented for the same; and in case of suspicion of any murder of a Negro, an inquest by the Coroner, or Officer acting as such, shall, if practicable, be held into the same.[287]

One way of interpreting Burke's claim that an injury to slaves on West Indian plantations should be treated "as if it were perpetrated against any of His Majesty's Subjects" is that Burke is including African slaves explicitly in subjecthood. However, this interpretation ignores the

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[285] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 272.

[286] Ibid, 270. "That the said ship or other vessel shall lay in, in proportion to the ship's company of the said vessel, and the number of Negroes registered, a full and sufficient store of sound provision, so as to be secure against all probable delays and accidents; namely, salted beef, pork, salt-fish, butter, cheese, biscuit, flour, rice, oatmeal, and white peas; but no horse-beans, or other inferiour provisions; and the said ship shall be properly provided with water-casks or jars, in proportion to the intended number of the said Negroes; and the said ship shall be also provided with a proper and sufficient stock of coals or fire-wood." "And every ship, entered as aforesaid, shall take out a coarse shirt, and a pair of trowsers, or petticoat, for each Negro intended to be taken aboard; as also a mat, or coarse mattress, or hammock, for the use of the said Negroes."

[287] Ibid., 288. "But it is hereby provided and enacted, that if any European shall be convicted of any of the said offences, he shall be sent to Europe, together with the evidence against him; and on the warrant of the said Commissioners the Keeper of any of His Majesty's Jails in London, Bristol, Liverpool, or Glasgow, shall receive him, until he be delivered according to due course of law, as if the said offences had been committed within the cities and towns aforesaid."

intentional ways in which Burke denies slaves explicit placement in the category of "His Majesty's Subjects." Burke could have easily identified slaves as subjects by adding the word "other" between "any" and "of" in the phrase "against any of His Majesty's Subjects." In this way, slaves would be included within the category of subjects alongside all other of the king's subjects.

However, Burke's denial of slaves to subjectship does not mean that Burke did not utilize the category of subjectship in order to benefit African slaves. His use of British subjects as a paradigm for crimes committed against slaves is similar to his use of Germany as a middle term for the historical progress of India. As in India, the middle term is meant to generate a better conceptualization of that which is foreign, just as in his "Speech on Fox's East India Bill" Germany became a "cloudy medium" for perceiving India.[288] In conceptualizing how the prosecution of crimes against slaves should be treated, Burke utilizes a recognizable and sympathetic equivalent: British subjects. Utilizing British subjects as a middle term should be read as another attempt to extend the moral imagination of the British public as well as political elite. However, as a part of a piece of legislation, it would also be interpreted as the guide for those executing the law.

Within a context in which captives had no protections from any legal body or government, Burke's middle term would represent an improvement in the treating of slaves even if they were not "his Majesty's subjects." However, in the "Sketch of A Negro Code," by the slaves being neither the king's subjects, nor full legal subjects, they would continue to exist in an ambiguous position: they would remain both inside and outside of the national community. At the extreme, when it comes to murder and bodily harm, they would be treated as if they belong within the community, but in all other circumstances they would be denied the legal rights that not only define freedom, but also constitute the community. Yet, the "Sketch of A Negro Code" as an emancipation scheme aims at placing slaves (by the time of emancipation) within the community. Thus, it conceptualizes the process of emancipation as predicated on the subjection and subordination of slaves in order for them to become "legal" or "political" citizens. The next section examines first the ways in which the code conceptualizes slaves and Africans as in need of civilization; then, the process of subjugation needed in order to emancipate slaves into a state of legal citizenship without making them equals.

## CIVILIZING AFRICANS

Uday Mehta argues that Edmund Burke saw through civilizational hierarchies central to the justification of empire.[289] As I argued in Chapter One, Burke employed and accepted a progressive concept of history through the influence of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. In "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," he rejects a civilizing mission in India due to its already high level of civilization, but in his "Sketch of A Negro Code" three years earlier, he identifies Africans with the savage stage of history. Kohn and O'Neill argue that "Sketch of A Negro Code" has an explicit civilizational hierarchy and that civilizing is evident in the code's regulations for the improvement of Africa and the reconstitution of African slaves in the Americas. They write:

> We can reasonably conclude that, at least when it came to the Americas and the West Indies, Burke certainly did think in terms of civilizational hierarchies and cultural

[288] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.
[289] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 155.

> impoverishment that justified the British Empire's territorial expansion and commercial avarice (to put it in Mehta's terms).[290]

It is evident that Burke has a civilizing mission in Africa and sees Africa as existing in a state of savagery. Various regulations are aimed at using the slave marts as sites for raising the civilizational level of Africans. The code outlines a set of interventionist policies that would transform the lives of African communities and individuals. These interventions are all premised on an implicit civilizational hierarchy that conceptualizes Africans as savages.

The application of the concept of savage signifies a lack of civilizational achievement in writing, commerce, money, agriculture, and other "indicators" of civilization.[291] As such, civilizing Africans is conceptualized as using these social tools to transform their societies from states of savagery into higher states of civilization.

From the publication of *An Account* in 1757 until the late 1770s, Burke maintained that Africans brought to the Americas had already been in a state of slavery. For example, in 1776 during an inquiry into the Royal African Company, he stated:

> And with respect to Mr. Hartley's notions about slavery, he observed, that he had brought a convincing proof in his hand of the hardship of it, and it certainly was a proper object of enquiry, whether it might not be softened; but Africa, time out of mind, had been in a state of slavery, therefore the inhabitants only changed one species of slavery for another; however, he was sorry to say, that in changing from African to European slavery, they generally changed much for the worse, which certainly was a matter of reproach somewhere, and deserved serious consideration.[292]

The idea that Africa itself was a place of slavery represents an interesting gloss on African civilization, and seems to suggest that Burke believed that Africa was in a state of civilizational slavery, as Asia was in a state of despotism, and Europe was in a state of freedom.[293] Interpreting this statement in light of Burke's expressed beliefs in progressive historiography is relatively simple given that his praise of William Robertson's *History of America* was written just four days after his own "Speech on African Slave Trade." In that letter, Burke expressed admiration for Robertson's ability to represent the different stages of human development through philosophical analysis of manners. He writes:

> [T]he great map of mankind is unfolded at once, and there is no state of gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement, which we have not at the same moment under our view: the very different civility of Europe and of China; the barbarians of Persia and of Abyssinia; the erratic manners of Tartary and of Arabia; the savage state of North America and New Zealand.[294]

Although Burke writes that he was unable to respond to Robertson's gift of *A History of America*, due to pressing business at the "close of the session" (i.e. the debates on the African slave trade), he expressed his long-standing support for the belief that interpreting human nature is equivalent to interpreting the stages of human development.

One could argue that there is a contradiction between Burke's claim that Africa "had been in a state of slavery," and his assertion four days later that Abyssinians are barbarians. However,

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[290] Kohn and O'Neill, "A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America," 197.

[291] Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 165.

[292] Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, 341.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Kohn and O'Neill, "A Tale of Two Indias," 202.

this apparent contradiction can be resolved through understanding how Burke and many of his contemporaries conceived of the relationship between freedom and civilization. Burke often equates modern European civilization with freedom and equates barbaric and savage societies with slavery. For example, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Burke contrasts the status of France under the ancien régime with the "anarchic despotism of Turkey," and by extension shows Europe to be fundamentally in a state of freedom.[295] Likewise, in his last published work, "Letters on the Regicide Peace," Burke argued that modern Europe was a zone of personal freedom, even in countries with absolute monarchies.[296]

In a like manner, in his "Speech on Mr. Fox"s East India Bill," Burke claims that India was civilized, and accompanied this claim with a contrast to barbarians and savages. He writes, Indians are not "an abject and barbarous populace; much less of gangs of savages" but rather "people of ages civilized and cultivated,—cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods."[297] Of equal importance, for Burke, India was not a space of oriental despotism (like Turkey), but was one where "property [is] secured to them by the laws of their country as any property is secured in this country."[298] In denying that India had been in a state of despotism, Burke renders India a space of freedom. According to J.G.A. Pocock, "Despotism was classically defined by the absence of liberty, property and law, reducing the ruler to tyranny, his subjects to servility and both to degeneracy and effeminacy.""[299] For Burke, outside of Europe, India, and China, the peoples were likely in a state of despotism, and therefore in some state of unfreedom. In this way, Africa could be both in a state of slavery, while Abyssinia could be considered barbaric. The idea of a state of slavery, as a site of unfreedom, could be said to encompass all barbarism and savagery, but not civilization.

Burke does intend that the slave trade and reforms to the slave trade will result in the introduction of civilization amongst Africans. In the introduction of the second section of "Sketch of A Negro Code," Burke writes:

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[295] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 112. The full quote reads, "To hear some men speak of the late monarchy of France, you would imagine that they were talking of Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword of Tahmas Kouli Khan, or at least describing the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey, where the finest countries in the most genial climates in the world are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war, where arts are unknown, where manufactures languish, where science is extinguished, where agriculture decays, where the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer. Was this the case of France?"

[296] Edmund Burke, "*Letters on the Regicide Peace*," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 180. Burke writes that in Europe a man's "wants, his wishes, even his taste have been consulted. This comprehensive scheme virtually produced a degree of personal liberty in forms the most adverse to it. That liberty was found, under monarchies stiled absolute, in a degree unknown to the ancient commonwealths. From hence the powers of all our modern states meet in all their movements with some obstruction."

[297] He writes, "This multitude of men does not consist of an abject and barbarous populace; much less of gangs of savages, like the Guaranies and Chiquitos, who wander on the waste borders of the River of Amazons or the Plate; but a people of ages civilized and cultivated,-- cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods. There have been (and still the skeletons remain) princes once of great dignity, authority, and opulence. There are to be found the chiefs of tribes and nations. There is to be found an ancient and venerable priesthood, the depository of their laws, learning, and history, the guides of the people whilst living and their consolation in death." Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

[298] Edmund Burke, "Speeches in General—First Day," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol 4 (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 207.

[299] As J.G.A. Pocock writes, "Despotism was classically defined by the absence of liberty, property and law, reducing the ruler to tyranny, his subjects to servility and both to degeneracy and effeminacy." Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 108.

> And whereas in providing for the second object of this Act, that is to say, for the trade on *the Coast of Africa*, it is first prudent not only to provide against the manifold abuses, to which a trade of that nature is liable, but that the same may be accompanied, as far as it is possible, with such advantages to the Natives as may tend to the civilizing them, and enabling them to enrich themselves by means more desirable, and to carry on hereafter a trade more advantageous and honourable to all parties.[300]

The "Sketch of A Negro Code" attempts to accomplish the civilizing of Africans through the introduction of European practical and theoretical knowledges. It seeks to transform the material realities of Africans by changing the ways in which they produce necessities and trade goods. Trades such as carpentry, metalwork, and medicine are meant to introduce new types of skills and labor knowledge.[301] Burke recommends that various tradesmen and artisans take on African apprentices because "knowledge of *letters, arts and handicraft trades*, [are] the chief means of such civilization and improvement."[302] Likewise, the code imagines that the introduction of written languages and Christianity would transform the intellectual and spiritual lives of African peoples.

Through manufacturing, trade, and cultural contact, Burke envisions the slave marts as a site for transforming the labor, minds, and souls of Africans. As such, the civilizing mission advocated in the "Sketch of A Negro Code" is both moral and progressive. Moral in that it attempts to transform the moral psychology and moral imagination of Africans, and progressive in that seeks to be a catalyst for progress amongst savages.

## SOCIALIZATION AND THE PREREQUISITES OF FREEDOM

Whereas the reconstruction of Africans in the slave marts was conceived of as the raising of African society through knowledge, commerce, and Christianity, the reconstruction of African slaves in the West Indies is proposed to be done through the extension of social goods that will dispose the minds of slaves to receive freedom.[303] The freedoms that Burke extends to slaves in the "Sketch of A Negro Code" are meant to help constitute slaves as civil beings. Christopher L. Brown describes the extension of these rights and liberties in terms of the principle of self-possession. He argues that the code extends property and marriage rights as a means of providing slaves with selfhood (i.e. property in themselves):

> Emancipationists sought to protect slaves' earnings and ensure to them control over its use. Burke's code, for example, would allow the slave to bequeath property to descendants and prohibits its seizure or appropriation by slave-holders. Such provisions would initiate, even where bondage remained, transfer of proprietorship away from the slaveholder and toward the self. In this transition to self-possession, the reformers considered fundamental an inviolable right to family relations … Burke's code contained several provisions designed to recognize, encourage, and protect slave marriages.[304]

If free men are characterized by their ability to move without impediment, alienate their labor, enter into contracts, marry and manage one's children, and own property, then slaves were the

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[300] Edmund Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 265.

[301] Ibid., 267.

[302] Ibid.., 265.

[303] Ibid., 260.

[304] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 235.

perfect opposite of free men.[305] The slave does not own his or her labor, does not have property in him or herself, cannot move without impediment, and has very little say in intimate and familial relationships.

To Burke, being subject to another's will and lacking self-possession are interpreted as either the incapacity to will or the incapacity to will constructively. The will of rebellious slaves, maroons, and those who are thrust out of servitude are interpreted as dangerous, irrational, and outside of the bounds of established morality and manners. Here the extension of rights in the "Sketch of A Negro Code" would force slaves to be reconstituted as self-possessed and self-willing individuals (rather than property-less and will-less).

The "Sketch of A Negro Code" attempts not only to extend property rights, but also to socialize slaves through various habits that construct society. If property and the right to marry are "preparatives" for freedom, the habits supporting them will render ex-slaves socially integrated into society and less dangerous to social order. Burke singles out various habits and character traits that he associates with social behavior, in particular the traits and practices he believes lead to successful and safe accumulation of property. The code states, "And whereas habits of industry and sobriety, and the means of acquiring and preserving property, are proper and reasonable preparatives to freedom, and will secure against an abuse of the same."[306] If free labor is characterized by the absence of workplace violence, then the motivations for working hard and accumulating wealth must be implanted in workers themselves. The habits of "industry" and "sobriety" are meant to be part of the self-motivation of laboring populations that makes free laborers more productive than slave laborers.[307] Furthermore, these same habits are meant to prevent confiscation, theft, and other antisocial forms of property appropriation. In particular, "industry" and "sobriety" will prevent the slaves from destroying or threatening the institution of private property.[308] Burke's "Sketch of A Negro Code" represents an attempt to extend the socialization that occurs within British society to those slaves who will be included into British society in some form.

The congruence between his attempts to civilize slaves and dispose them towards freedom and his views of the English poor displays the consistency of Burke's thought on the habits laborers need in order to sustain themselves and society. He applies the same framework for the slaves that—after several generations—would be free, as he does for laborers in England. In "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," he writes of the English wage laborers, "Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion, should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright fraud."[309] Burke places both the English laborers and the distantly emancipated African slaves within the framework of classical political economy. He believes in an unbreakable and fair

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[305] Achille Mbembe writes, "Because the slave's life is like a "thing," possessed by another person, the slave existence appears as a perfect figure of a shadow." Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11.

[306] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 286.

[307] One of the ways that Burke imagines instilling industry is by providing monetary incentives for work. In one regulation, he advocates the idea that married slave men can over the course of years earn an extra day off for themselves and their wives.

[308] This fear is one of the main fears that Burke has about all emancipations. The French Revolution as an emancipation of the lower social strata concerned Burke in its antagonistic relationship to the property of the Church. Likewise, his ideas of emancipation during the American conflict highlight his discomfort that slaves will burst from bondage and destroy private property (and take European lives).

[309] Edmund Burke, "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," in *The Portable Edmund Burke*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 197.

contract between laborer and employer. He writes:

> There is an implied contract, much stronger than any instrument or article of agreement between the labourer in any occupation and his employer—that the labour, so far as that labour is concerned, shall be sufficient to pay to the employer a profit on his capital, and a compensation for his risk.[310]

For both the remotely emancipated slaves and the English poor, contract labor would be an invaluable right, not to be interfered with by government or other parties. The habits and discipline that the code outlines to transform African slaves into free men and women are also the habits and disciplines that would transform and maintain the English poor.

However, it is not only the value of property and the habits surrounding it that demonstrate Burke's consistency on the subject of laborers; in the "Sketch of A Negro Code," Burke theorizes the importance of family for integration into society. Regulations twenty-one through twenty-eight in the fourth section concern the construction and protection of slave families. These regulations fit with much of Burke's political thought, in which the family and its sentiments are treated as essential for the functioning of civil and political society. As Ian Hampshere-Monk notes, "Burke believed the individual was integrated into society through a series of primary associations, local attachments, family connections."[311] Hampshere-Monk is correct in that the family often appears as the first institution in a long chain of institutions that connect individuals to their locales and nations. For example, in *Reflections,* Burke writes, "We begin our public affectations in our families . . . We pass on to our neighborhoods, and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting places."[312] In the context of the French Revolution, Burke argues that the redistricting of France along more rational lines showed an ignorance of human attachment, whereby people felt connected not only to their loved ones, but also to their surroundings.

The family is also primary due to the ways in which social intercourse is naturally tried to sympathy.

> I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only them, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so) they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons: we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them.[313]

The relation of beauty to society, including family and friends, is one that ultimately beautifies politics in the ancien régime of Europe. Thus, when Burke claims that chivalry "incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society," he extends the idea of the family as a natural unit, and social intercourse as opening up into society. Because family life opens out to civil society, the constitutions of slave families are meant to connect slaves (and future freemen) to institutions within society. However, it also means that slaves, and slave families, will continue to be rooted in the West Indies. A key question that early abolitionists faced was whether ex-slaves would remain in colonies they had been brought to, be transported to new colonies, or be transported back to Africa after emancipation. For Burke, ex-slaves would

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[310] Ibid.

[311] Ian Hampshere-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers From Hobbes to Marx* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 293.

[312] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 173. In the context of the French Revolution, this was an argument against the manner by which the revolutionaries thought to redraw the lines on maps and the jurisdiction and names of municipalities that had long and ancient histories on a more rational basis.

[313] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 39.

remain in the Caribbean, and the protection of slave families would help them integrate into a post-emancipation society through labor and attachment to place.

However, the constitution of slave families in Burke's "Sketch of A Negro Code" is violent and coercive. One way slaves can marry is if they have cohabitated for more than a year.[314] However, slaves can also be married upon mandate of colonial authorities. The "Inspector of the Negroes," a colonial administrator empowered by the Attorney General to execute the laws of the code, has the power and authority to force slaves to marry.[315] The code states that upon request of the inspector, the master can give an unmarried "healthy" male a wife.[316] This is a profoundly coercive act that exemplifies how Burke conceptualized the regulations of the code as requiring compulsion rather than consent.[317]

Just as they have no choice in leaving their homelands, male and female slaves have little choice in their marriages. The female slave is required to marry solely upon the will of the Inspector, while the male slave is given two choices. He can pick the woman who has been chosen for him, or can pick another slave woman. Regulation twenty-three of section four reads:

> And be it enacted, that if any Negro shall refuse a competent marriage tendered to him, and shall not demand another specifically, such as it may be in his Master's power to provide, the Master or Overseer shall be authorized to constrain him by an increase of work, or a lessening of allowance.[318]

The coercion of both male and female slaves reveals a continuity of coercion and brutality between unreformed slavery and gradual emancipation; it also provides an example of the continuity between the extension of rights and continued rightlessness. This in itself is not problematic for Burke, as it is superior to many of the alternatives, including the unreformed plantation, slave rebellions, and the immediate emancipation of slaves. The use of a coercive force in order to bring about a greater order, especially for a population that was already suffering under coercion, would be a necessary evil. At the same time, the use of the same coercive mechanism appears to be necessary due to the character of the people. If the slave is lacking in humanity, then it must be instilled, and if coercion is necessary, this should not detract from its use.

Although the "Sketch of A Negro Code" prevents the selling of children and spouses to different owners (preventing the dissolution of slave kinship), it displaces the violence onto the constitution of the family.[319] If physical violence is lacking in the law's response to the slave

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[314] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 284. The code states, "Be it enacted, that all Negro men and women, above eighteen years of age for the man, and sixteen for the woman, who have cohabited together for twelve months or upwards, or shall cohabit for the same time, and have a child or children, shall be deemed to all intents and purposes to be married; and either of the parties is authorized to *require* of the Ministers of the district, to be married in the face of the Church."

[315] The state's regulation of sexuality displays a deep paternalism. The colonial bureaucracy presents itself as a surrogate father for both slave women and slave men. In arranging marriages, the "Inspectors of the Negroes" treats both sides of the forced marriage as under their control, as moneyed and aristocratic fathers treated their daughters from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, choice had become an important part of marriage pairings in Europe, a significant shift from the two centuries that preceded it. In fact, across social strati from the very rich to the working poor, choice became the predominant form of contract during marriage.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid., 260.

[318] Ibid,. 284.

refusals, the seemingly more "humane" increase of workload or less food shows greater sophistication in imagining what would produce slave compliance.

In the coercive constitution of the slave family and the habits of slaves, one sees the ways in which Burke sought to produce subjects who would eventually be capable of legal citizenship. At the same time, it makes clear that for Burke slaves were not "His Majesty's subjects," but only potential subjects who would gain legal citizenship upon emancipation.

## THE DEBATES ON THE SLAVE TRADE

There is general agreement that Edmund Burke was theoretically and philosophically committed to reforming and abolishing both the slave trade and West Indian slavery.[320] However, from 1789 until 1792—the period of Burke's contribution to the Parliamentary debates on the abolition of the trade—Burke expressed various beliefs that would contribute to an ambiguous legacy on abolitionism. Between 1789-1792, Burke spoke twice during debates on the abolition of the slave trade (in May 1789 and April 1791) and wrote a five page introductory letter to the "Sketch of A Negro Code" (April 1792). However, in the three years between Burke's participation in the first Parliamentary debate on slavery and his letter to Henry Dundas containing the "Sketch of A Negro Code," the political landscape of British and European politics had rapidly changed. In 1789, Burke was not only the leading voice in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, but later in the year would become engrossed in the French Revolution. From 1789 until 1791, his opposition to the French Revolution strained his relationship with his political allies, ending with a break with former Whig allies, including Charles Fox.[321] Within this context, by 1791, Burke had not only become a leading voice against the Revolution, but also had helped create a hysteria surrounding reforms of any kind.[322]

Throughout the debates on the abolition of the slave trade, Burke favored remote abolition (i.e. abolition at a date in the far future) instead of the immediate abolition of the slave trade. For Burke, the immediate abolition of the trade was premised on one of the things about which he was skeptical: public enthusiasm. In the introduction to "Sketch of A Negro Code," while reflecting on the rise of the abolitionist movement in Britain, Burke unequivocally states his distrust of rash political action. He interprets the goal of immediate abolition in light of the public's desire for simple solutions for complex problems. He writes:

> What has been lately done, has been done *by a popular spirit*, which seldom calls for, and indeed very *rarely relishes, a system made up of a great variety of parts*, *and which is to operate its effect in a great length of time.* The people like short methods; the consequences of which they sometimes have reason to repent of. Abolition is but a single act. To prove the nature of the trade, and to expose it properly, required, indeed, a vast collection of materials, which have been laboriously collected, and compiled with great judgment. It required also much perseverance and address to excite the spirit, which has been excited without doors, and which has carried it through.[323] [italics added]

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[320] Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 148; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 232; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 398; Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 167; Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (AltaMira Press: Walnut Creek, 2000), 36.

[321] "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs" (1791) represents a scathing attack on his former Whig allies.

[322] Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 2011), 148.

[323] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 259.

According to Burke, the public has no stomach for the gradual satisfaction of its desires, nor does it have much appreciation for the complex relationship of the slave trade to colonial slavery, imperial wealth, and stability. Instead, the enthusiasm for immediate abolition has all the vices of other public enthusiasms and popular causes, such as Parliamentary reform and Irish Catholic oppression. At the same time, Burke distrusted the virtue of a Parliament and a public who might later regret immediately abolishing the trade and allowing Britain's competitors the financial gain of replacing the country's dominance of the trade.[324]

Although Burke opposed the immediate abolition of the slave trade, he shared little with those who supported the slave trade and plantation slavery. Pro-slavery voices such as Colonel Tarleton of Bristol and Alderman Newham of London deployed a range of arguments intended to convince representatives and the public that the abolition of the slave trade was a threat to the security of the colonies and the commerce of the nation. In the first debate on the abolition of the slave trade in Parliament, on May 12, 1789, advocates for the slave trade attempted to rebut William Wilberforce's speech in favor of abolition. These partisans of the slave trade argued that Parliament could not take the property of Englishmen without their consent or recompense;[325] that the deaths of slaves had been exaggerated;[326] that the abolition of the slave trade would ruin commerce; that the abolition of the slave trade would lead to the destruction of port cities and would swell London with more blacks; that abolition was a breach of faith on Parliament's part; and that debate itself had led to insurrection in Dominica.[327]

Burke did not subscribe to the main arguments of those opposed to the abolition of the slave trade. Instead, he maintained two beliefs exemplified by his "Sketch of A Negro Code:" that the slave trade and colonial slavery should be abolished together in the remote future, and that abolishing the slave trade without abolishing colonial slavery would not spell the end of either.[328] These beliefs placed him out of step with many of the abolitionists working for the immediate abolition of the trade, but also placed him in a position distinct from pro-slave trade advocates who maintained that the transportation of African slaves was beyond moral reproach and/or that Parliament had no business regulating or ending the trade.

However, if Burke's support for some abolition was widely recognized by his contemporaries, his lack of passion and dedication for the cause of abolition also was noted. During the April 2, 1791 debate in the House, James Martin, a committee member of the Society

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[324] As F.P. Lock writes, "While Burke consistently championed abolition in principle, he also recognized that immediate abolition would adversely affect the economy of the British West Indies. In his view, this was too high a price to pay for the moral benefit of abolition." F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II*. (Oxford: Claredon Press), 413.

[325] Tarleton argues, "It was, that upon no occasion, short of absolute necessity, ought private property be seized by public acts, without granting a compensation." T.C. Hansard, *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to Year 1803: XVIII* (London, 1816), 46.

[326] Tarleton also argues, "With regard to the number of deaths, which happened on the passage, he had access to examine, and could distinctly states, to the committee, that they never had exceeded in the Liverpool ships, on an average, five out of a hundred, whereas, in regiments sent out to the West Indies or America, the average was about ten and half in the hundred." Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

[328] He writes, "I conceived, that the true origin of the trade was not in the place it was begun at, but at the place of its final destination. I therefore was, and I still am, of opinion, that the whole work ought to be taken up together; and that a gradual abolition of Slavery in the West Indies ought to go hand in hand with any thing, which should be done with regard to its supply from the Coast of Africa." Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 259.

for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (which also included Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson), challenged Burke to do more for the abolitionist cause. He said:

> We had, for many years, and God knows, with too much reason, been hearing violent accusations of delinquents from India. Surely, the accusers of such delinquents would be eager, upon this occasion, to show that they had been actuated by the pure principles of humanity, without party spirit or other unworldly motives. Particularly, he should much confide in those Gentlemen, who, as Managers of the prosecution against Mr. Hastings, had exhibited such astonishing eloquence, as, perhaps, was never excelled, or even equaled. The same powers of eloquence, exerted in a cause at least as worthy, must bear down all obstacles of resistance, and defeat every opposition that narrow and mistaken self-interest could raise against the measure.[329]

Martin asks why those who have pursued Hastings and the East India Company so vigorously during the past eight years are virtually silent on the question of the abolition of slavery. The thrust of his statement is that Burke was not being consistent to the principles that he expressed in Parliament during the trial of Warren Hastings and the debate on Fox's East Indian Bill, when he excoriated the East India Company's rule.

In his criticism of Warren Hastings and the abuses of the East India Company, Burke presented himself as the man of sentiment, moved not only to oppose the power of the oppressors, but also to help those who had been wronged. His attack on the East India Company relied on shocking scenes of atrocities, tracing specific abuses to their perpetrators, and seeking to sway those in the audience through sentiment and rational argument. All of this is missing in Burke's brief speeches in Parliament on the slave trade. He remains strangely silent here, issuing no condemnations of guilty parties, no eloquent descriptions of abuses, no tracing of the causes of the trade, or of the ill effects that it has on Britain and its citizens.

Martin's public attack on Burke seems to be motivated by frustration, a desire to shame Burke into action, and potentially to provoke some response that would benefit abolitionism. It is also the perspective of a committed partisan of the abolition of the trade on the necessary moral link between the abolition of the slave trade and anti-imperial criticisms of India.

Martin appears to have made little political and moral distinction between the East India Company's rule in India and the slave trade; however, for Burke, the differences between the two institutions were crucial. In the 1790s, the abolition of the slave trade did not absorb Burke as either a political thinker or as a political actor. It was a minor issue in comparison with the "great constitutional issues of the day," to which he promised to confine himself after the French Revolution.

Martin's perspective on the relationship between the abolition of the slave trade and the reform of the East India Company was that abolition "is a cause at least as worthy" as confronting Warren Hastings and the agents of the East India Company. For Burke, the cause of the East India Company was different because the abuses of the East India Company corrupted British social and political life, and the sufferers of the abuses of the Company were civilized. Abolition or reform of slave practices might indeed be a worthy cause, but it was not as worthy as the reform of the East India Company. For Burke, the key political questions were ones of great magnitude, and the slave trade and colonial slavery were not of the greatest magnitude, partly because they involved fewer people. The Penal Laws of Ireland affected around four million people, the rule of the East India Company affected thirty million people, the French

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[329] W. Woodfall, *The Debate on the Motion for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade in the House of Commons, on Monday and Tuesday, April 18th and 19th, 1791* (London: W. Woodfall, 1791), 51.

Revolution involved the fate of thirty million people in France; however, colonial slavery and the slave trade concerned just hundreds of thousands of people on each island.

However, as was established in the chapter on India, the need for reform is not only determined by magnitude, but also the quality of the people. Burke's description of Indians "as a people of ages civilized and cultivated,—cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods"[330] does not apply to those Africans who "time out of mind, had been in a state of slavery."[331] Thus, Burke's historiography subtly informs not only his defense of India against the East India Company, but also his acceptance of the slave trade and chattel slavery.

The distance between Burke's anti-imperial challenge to the East India Company and his challenge to the slave traders and plantation owners is exemplified by his differential application of subjectship to the two populations. According to Burke, British rule over India has led to Indians being subjects of the British monarch; however, the transportation of captives from Africa to the Americas—aboard British vessels and intended for labor in British colonies—does not lead to these Africans being considered to be subjects. The difference in the application of subjectship is due to Burke's understanding of Africa as a zone of barbarism; it is easier to extend the idea of subjectship to those deemed civilized than barbaric and savage. As Dowd points out in *War Under Heaven*, "To be a British subject was, even then, [1760s] to have a claim to a lofty status."[332] Whereas the *habitants* of Canada, the Irish Catholics in Ireland, and Indians were all sufficiently civilized to be included in this lofty category, for Burke, such an application to African slaves might appear as a type of political or moral "leveling," one that does not necessarily raise Africans up, but rather drags British subjects down.

However, it must be restated that Burke rejects a "geographic morality," as we saw in his arguments for the impeachment of Warren Hastings. In response to Hastings's claims that his destruction of Indian social and political institutions, and that fraudulent confiscations of property were warranted because India had always been ruled despotically, Burke argues that India was civilized and that Hastings had subverted his responsibility as governor. Burke argues:

> [He] has told your Lordships of his defence, that actions in Asia do not bear the same moral qualities as the same actions would bear in Europe. My Lords, we positively deny that principle ... These gentlemen have formed a plan of Geographical morality, by which the duties of men in public and in private situations are not to be governed by their relations to the Great Governor of the Universe, or by their relations to men, but by climates ... parallels not of life but of latitudes. As if, when you have crossed the equinoctal line, all the virtues die ... This Geographical morality we do protest against.

Hastings's geographic morality was related to "the duties of men in public and in private situations." Through not governing in a way that benefited those who were ruled, by confiscating their property, subverting established laws, and acting in ways in Asia that would not be acceptable in Europe, Hastings applied a different moral standard to his rule of India to benefit his own power and avarice.

I do not interpret Burke as having the same type of "geographical morality" as Warren Hastings. His articulation of reform for the slave trade and colonial slavery are attempts to curb the power of masters and sailors; likewise, the aims of his "Sketch of A Negro Code" are to

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[330] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

[331] Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1981), 341.

[332] Gregory E Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 175.

transform slaves into legal citizens, a reform that mirrors his 1783 bill to reform the East India Company; put alongside Burke's long-standing commitment to alleviate the horrors of the plantation, it would be overreach to argue that Burke fell into the same "geographical morality" as Hastings. However, Burke's morality differs less in terms of the locale of the exercise of power, than in his understanding of the character and civilizational level of the people. Whereas for Hastings "oriental despotism" accounts for his different moral actions, for Burke, his progressive historiography allows for a different moral response to slavery and the slave trade. Because there is no strict "moral equivalence" between Africans and Europeans, he continued to support the slave trade and colonial slavery based on the civilizational status of Africans. Such support would be highly unlikely if those enslaved were Europeans. The conclusion of the dissertation examines the thought of Ottobah Cugoano, who argues against this implicit European double standard. He argues that to steal an African is as "heinous a transgression of the law of God" as enslaving someone on the "coast of Great Britain."[333]

## CONCLUSION

Edmund Burke's ambivalent anti-imperialism is apparent in his analysis of colonial slavery and his continued support for the slave trade. His support for the continuation of the trade and colonial slavery is demonstrably different than his support for the East India Company. For example, he publically committed himself to a piece of legislation that would have had an immediate impact on the lives of Indians: "Fox's East India Bill." However, he produced no public piece of legislation on colonial slavery, and his "Sketch of A Negro Code" was sent privately to Henry Dundas twelve years after it was written. In response to the abuses of the East India Company, Burke started a campaign that lasted two decades and ended only years before his death, while in responses to the recognized abuses of the slave trade and colonial slavery, although he had analyzed and contemplated its horrors from 1757 until the 1790s, he did not commit himself to the emancipation of African slaves or the end of the slave trade. These positions are not the result of emotional, irrational, or subconscious beliefs, but are rather sincere, rational, and conscious, based on his understanding of history, his understanding of the quality of the people at issue, and the economic (and strategic) benefits of imperial institutions.[334]

Whereas some readers may agree with Martin that abolition of the trade was a "cause at least as worthy" as that of prosecution of Warren Hastings, and that Burke had a moral obligation to challenge slavery as forcefully as he challenged the East India Company, Burke would have us understand that colonialism in India and slavery in the West Indies are fundamentally different moral and political problematics and cannot be equated. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke responds to the abstract criteria of the rights of men thusly:

> The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good, in compromises between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil. Political reason is a computing principle: added, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing, morally and not metaphysically or mathematically, true moral denominations.[335]

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[333] Ottobah Quobna Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 62.

[334] Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 129.

[335] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 52.

For Burke, political reason dictated dedication to the impeachment of Warren Hastings, alongside a commitment to the continuation of the slave trade. As early as 1757, he wrote "one cannot hear without horror of a trade which must depend for its support upon the murder of several thousand innocent men."[336]

Jennifer Pitts writes that any understanding of Burke's political thought must necessarily include "an understanding of the limits of Burke's apprehension of injustice, as well as the limits and failings of his own political solutions."[337] For her, these limits include his support of the ancien régime and his "exclusion of the bulk of the population from political power." However, I suggest that Burke's response to abolitionism also represents a limit if only because it affords slavery a legitimacy for the sake of stability-- and preventing "great inconveniences in the sudden change of practices of such long standing."[338]

The limits of Burke's anti-imperialism as it relates to chattel slavery and Amerindian dispossession does not negate his meditations on and challenges to the workings of empire elsewhere. In keeping with John Dunn's analysis of how the canon of Western political thought cannot be reduced to *ad hominem* attacks and that canonical thinkers represent "great cognitive resources" even when their ideas are connected to historical injustices, I recognize that Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism and its frameworks were valuable for thinking politically in the eighteenth century. As Dunn writes, the "suspicion" that the canon represents an "index of parochial complacency,"

> is reinforced … by the existence of an intimate historical connection between many of the components of this canon and the history of western imperial power or patriarchal exploitation. But in this last version the suspicion rests on a very crude *non sequitur.* To recognize that an instance of human understanding has cognitive limits (that it is imperfect), and to recognize, correspondingly, that it may well be less than wholly trustworthy, is no ground for supposing it devoid of cognitive force.[339]

The limits of Burke's anti-imperialism do not detract from the force of his critiques of the situations in India and Ireland. One does not need to condemn Burke for his clear limitations on colonial slavery and the slave trade. If one maintains, as I do, that his anti-imperialism has "cognitive force," an interesting project remains: examining thinkers with different sets of limits and imperfections on the same subject in a search for greater insight.[340]

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[336] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:126.

[337] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, 62.

[338] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 259.

[339] John Dunn, "The History of Political Theory" in *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 226.

# CHAPTER 5

## SAVAGE VIOLENCE AND EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION IN EDMUND BURKE'S WRITINGS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Throughout this project I have focused almost exclusively on the spaces of the British Empire, in particular the Empire in the Americas, Africa, and India. In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Edmund Burke's progressive historiography and his aesthetics produced an ambivalent anti-imperialism. Like other eighteenth century anti-imperial thinkers, Burke was highly critical of the practices of empire, while supportive of British imperial control of India, Ireland, and colonies in the Americas. However, within his anti-imperialism, I contend that his historiography and aesthetics lead to scathing, passionate, and sustained public criticism of certain exploitative and destructive institutions in the British Empire, while other destructive institutions are either publically defended or ignored. In this way, Burke's anti-imperialism depends, among other things, on the civilizational status of the subjects of imperial abuse.

This chapter represents a shift away from the British Empire to consider Burke's political thought on continental Europe. In particular, I examine Burke's response to the French Revolution, including his articulation of Europe as "commonwealth" threatened by the spread of revolutionary ideas and armies. I argue that Burke's writings on the French Revolution rely on figures of savage violence to both express his beliefs about the revolution, as well as to challenge the validity of revolutionary action and thought. In a similar vein, I contend that his evoking of savage violence displays aspects of his ambivalent anti-imperialism, especially in relationship to his analysis of the East India Company.

My argument has as its point of departure the commonplace that empire greatly affected the political, humanistic, and social thought of Europe on topics not directly related to empire. I whole-heartedly agree with Sunil Agnani that Burke's thought on the French Revolution was informed by colonial contexts and events, including the abuses of the East India Company in India.[341] However, I contend that the contexts that influenced Burke's thought on the French Revolution go beyond India to include slavery in the West Indies and conflicts between Amerindians and American colonists in North America. Agnani writes that just as Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* had a significant imperial context, "so too with Burke: even in a work ostensibly about political turmoil in the heart of Europe, there are signs everywhere of how the space of empire shapes the very terms of the description, and the fear."[342] For Agnani, this is most obvious in how what he labels the French Revolution (i.e. Jacobinism) and what he labels the abuse of the East Indian Company (i.e. Indianism) are conceptualized in similar theoretical terms.[343] One of the more pertinent colonial contexts derives from the trope of savage violence, and the representation of figures of colonial savagery: Amerindians and African slaves. I argue that the presence of figures of savage violence forms a substantial aspect of Burke's rhetorical and theoretical response to the French Revolution.

This chapter has three sections. The first situates Burke's political thought on the French Revolution; the second traces figures of savage violence in his revolutionary writings; and the

[341] Sunil Agnani, "Jacobinism in India, Indianism in English Parliament: Fearing the Enlightenment and Colonial Modernity with Edmund Burke," *Cultural Critique* 68 (2008): 131.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Ibid.,134.

final section examines the relationship of his conceptualization of a savage Europe to his anti-imperialism.

## THEORIZING FOUNDATIONS

Burke's Revolution writings—*Reflections on the Revolution*, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, and *Letters on A Regicide Peace*—are useful resources for understanding his political thought, including his thought on empire. Much of his political thought—although evident in many of his other engagements—is brought to a level of clarity during his seven-year polemic on the French Revolution. As Ian Hampshere-Monk argues, "Despite Burke's distaste for theorizing about foundations, the Revolution posed such a challenge to them that he was required to make his assumptions about the basis of a civilized order more explicit than he might otherwise have cared to."[344] The most enduring work in Burke'' corpus is *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Published in 1790, it represented an early response to the French Revolution and challenged many of the fundamental principles of the revolutionaries. Aimed at both the French revolutionaries and their British sympathizers, *Reflections* challenged natural rights as the basis of government, criticized the conception of natural man, denounced the emerging French democracy, supported the claims of the clergy, aristocracy, and monarchy against the Third Estate, and criticized revolutionary manners, the revolutionary army, and the National Assembly.

At the tail end of Burke's response to the French Revolution is his *Letters on the Regicide Peace*. Published in 1796, this set of four letters rejected the idea of a British peace treaty with France, and called for a drastic change in the policy aimed at preventing the spread of the French Revolution. The *Letters* represent Burke at his most eloquent and rabid. J.G.A. Pocock described it as "that wild jeremiad of a mind at the end of its tether."[345] For Edmund Burke, the French Revolution was not only a political and moral revolution, but also an event that produced great personal reflection and angst. In his 1796 "Letter to A Noble Lord," Burke wrote:

> The consequences [of the revolution] are before us,—not in remote history, not in future prognostication: they are about us; they are upon us. They shake the public security; the menace private enjoyment [...] Our business is interrupted, our repose is troubled, our pleasures are saddened, our very studies are poisoned and perverted, and knowledge is rendered worse than ignorance, by the enormous evils of this dreadful innovation.[346]

For Burke, the fabric of quotidian life and its pleasures have been ripped asunder while pleasure, security, confidence in the future, and intellectual life have been "poisoned" by the Revolution. In this way, the state of European and French society mirrors the state of the individual. The French Revolution was an event of world historic character as well as a challenge to Burke's political thought.

## GOVERNMENT, VENGEANCE, AND THE THWARTING OF PASSIONS

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[344] Hampshere-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought*, 264.

[345] J.G.A. Pocock, "The political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 205.

[346] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 537.

As has been previously argued, the American colonies, and in particular conflicts between Amerindians and colonists, play a crucial role in Burke's analysis of the French Revolution. The echo of his criticism of the Iroquois and British alliance during the American Revolution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*—in his description of the transfer of the French monarchs from Paris to Versailles—displays his use of an idiosyncratic and partisan colonial history to criticize the French Revolution. Likewise, as I argued earlier in chapter two, Burke's characterization of the "savagery" of the French Revolution relied upon his earlier analysis of Amerindian manners in *An Account of the European Settlements in America.*[347]

As I discussed in chapter two on Amerindian dispossession, Burke often utilized the figure of the "savage" Amerindian to build rhetorical as well as theoretical depth in his rejection of the French Revolution. I contend that his utilization of the figure of Amerindians also illuminates his understanding of the role of government through vectors of revenge and torture.

In *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, the figure of the Amerindian was portrayed as vengeful. There, Burke described Amerindians as fierce enemies who when slighted will pursue their enemy in spite of all obstacles and will eventually torture the offending party. He writes:

> But to the enemies of his country, or to those who have privately offended, the American is implacable. He conceals his sentiments, he appears reconciled, until by some treachery or surprise he has an opportunity of executing an horrible revenge. No length of time is sufficient to allay his resentment … in hopes of surprising his enemy, on whom he exercises the most shocking barbarities, even to the eating of his flesh. [348]

Here, resentment, the nursing of a wrong, gives rise to savage violence, torture, and retaliation. I argue that this focus on resentment and retaliation underlines Burke's understanding of the explosive passions of the French Revolution, especially as it relates to his description of the French treatment of the monarchs. It is both the nursing of resentment and the treatment of prisoners that underlies Burke's critique of the savagery of the French Revolution.

According to Burke, the revolutionaries capture and torture the king and queen, and this transfer is a "spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga after some of their murders called victories and leading into hovels hung round with scalps their captives."[349] The other part of the martial march into Onondaga is the subsequent torture of enemies, including the eating of their flesh. Thus in *An Account*, Burke writes about how those who will not be adopted into the nation are mercilessly tortured. The description of Amerindian torture begins thusly: "One plucks out his nails by the roots, one by one … Then thy pound his toes and fingers to pieces between two stones; they cut circles about his joints," and ends with "The body is […] put into the kettle and this [...] is succeeded by a feast as barbarous."[350] This three page torture scene prompts Burke to comment on the "lights of

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[347] In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and *Letters on the Regicide Peace*, he often utilized explicit references to Amerindians, who are primarily cast as sublime figures, and evoked the vocabulary of savagery (i.e. ferocity, torture, cannibalism) as a means to promote antipathy for those he disagreed with as well as to promote sympathy for those whom he supported. The evoking of Amerindian savagery or a state of nature was used to signal Amerindian societies as those where passion reigns and where the destructive vices of humanity were played out. Europeans are figured as civilized, and tamed, because the balance between virtue and vice has been maintained, while Amerindians (and French Revolutionaries) are figured as uncivilized, imbalanced, and prone to violence (i.e. dangerous).

[348] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:212.

[349] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 59.

[350] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:240.

civilized life" and to commend Christianity for teaching compassion for one one's enemies. [351]

Burke repeatedly argues that the treatment of prisoners distinguishes the civilized from the savage, including the English from their French Revolutionary counterparts. Thus he writes:

> I almost venture to affirm that not one in a hundred amongst us participates in the 'triumph' of the Revolution Society. If the king and queen of France, and their children, were to fall into our hands by the chance of war, in the most acrimonious of all hostilities (I deprecate such an event, I deprecate such hostility), they would be treated with another sort of triumphal entry into London.[352]

However, the torture that the king and queen suffer is the march itself. Their captors may have not feasted upon them, but this treatment of the monarchs is emblematic of the revolutionaries' passions and desires for revenge. Instead of the cannibalism and the breaking of bones that Burke describes in *An Account*, we have another vision of torture: one of humiliation and of abuse by "the vilest of women" and the grueling journey from Versailles. Thus, Burke writes:

> After they had been made to taste, drop by drop, more than bitterness of death in the slow tortures of a journey of twelve miles, protracted to six hours, they were, under a guard composed of those very same soldiers who had conducted them through the famous triumph, lodged in one of the old palaces of Paris, now converted into a bastille for kings.[353]

The journey itself is a form of torture while the end point is a prison, rather than the "hovels hung round with scalps" of five pages earlier. That Burke is utilizing the capture and torture of Amerindians as a paradigm for conceptualizing the events of October sixth is an accepted interpretation in recent Burke scholarship.[354] However, the connection of the capture and torture narrative to key concepts of the government of the passions and natural rights has been overlooked. In particular, it is the natural right to "self-defense" that Burke rejects in response to the democratic claims of the French Revolution.

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke utilizes John Locke's argument in *Second Treatise on Government* that after the social contract, the right of self-defense is transferred to civil authorities. Burke evokes this argument in his own contention that one role of government is to thwart the passions of men, including passions that result in antisocial consequences. In response to the assertions that men have a natural right "to choose our own government," "to cashier them for misconduct," and "to frame a government for ourselves," Burke argues that these natural rights are incompatible with civil society and therefore incoherent in European contexts.[355] He writes:

> By this each person has at once divested himself of the first fundamental right of uncovenanted man, that is, to judge for himself and to assert his own cause. He abdicates all right to be his own governor. He inclusively, in a great measure, abandons the right of self-defense, the first law of nature. Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up his right of determining what it is in points most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it.[356]

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[351] Ibid.

[352] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 59.

[353] Ibid., 63.

[354] See Linda Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 60-95; and Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 183-208.

[355] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 52.

[356] Ibid.

For Burke, Locke's state of nature leaves everyone with the right to self-defense, and everyone is a judge in the cause of his or her perception of justice and injustice.[357] It is this unilateral judgment that allows individuals to indulge their passions for revenge. In the *Second Treatise on Government,* Locke states, "For every one in that state being both judge and executioner of the law of nature, men being partial to themselves, passion and revenge is very apt to carry them too far, and with too much heat, in their own cases."[358] The right of self-defense, including the right to execute one's judgment of a perceived transgression of the law of nature, becomes one of the areas that display the need for civil government.

In *Reflections on the Revolution* in France, Burke utilizes Locke's denial of a right to self-defense in civil society to challenge the actions of the French Revolutionaries. Not only do the revolutionaries not have the right to self-defense or to judge for themselves, but they also have no right to vengeance or to act upon their resentment of the monarchs. Burke interprets the capture and transportation of the monarchs as the revolutionaries giving in to their vengeance as well as being "carr[ied] too far," in Locke's words, and "executing an horrible revenge," in Burke's words. He utilizes the idea of the transfer of the monarchs from Versailles to Paris as a scene of torture to reiterate the desirability of European civilization, with its social and political artifices. As I argued in chapter three, as early as 1757, Burke had established Amerindian torture and warfare as the prime example of why there was great value in European civilization (i.e. "commerce, the art of a civilized life, and lights of literature").[359]

Burke's understanding of Amerindian torture in *An Account* contributes to his expressed beliefs in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* about the need for civil society and government. While in his treatise, *An Account*, the art of civilized life does not explicitly include government; his thoughts in *Reflections* do make this inclusion. In his discussion of government in *Reflections,* Burke follows the dialogue of the surrendering of liberty and the impossibility of self-defense with civil society. Burke's understanding of government as thwarting the will of those governed is stated thusly:

> Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right these wants should be provided for by this wisdom. Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power out of themselves, and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights.[360]

In Burke's political thought, government provides the wisdom that cannot be provided at the level of the mass and the individual. At the same time, both individuals and whole populations must be controlled. Their wills and "passions" need to be brought into "subjection." This subjection distinguishes Burke's political theory from that of the revolutionaries. He believed that a natural aristocracy was necessary because the majority of men do not have the capacity to

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[357] Pocock writes in his footnotes on this passage, "This is Lockean enough." Ibid., 221.
[358] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 66.
[359] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 1:242.
[360] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 52.

govern themselves. Thus, those in special social positions can govern the passions of subjects in the way that the soul governs the body.[361]

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the explication of the nature of government occurs within the larger rhetorical frame of the savagery of the French Revolution. In fact, it is the rejection of natural rights, the acceptance of a Lockean rejection of "self-defense" in civil society, and the unnatural idea of trying to "enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together" that begins the discussion of the savagery of the French Revolution. As such, I argue that the complex role of Amerindians in *Reflections* is not limited to mere analogizing and description, but goes to the heart of Burke's beliefs about the role of government and the denial of natural rights. His acceptance of the Lockean version of the social contract (although not necessarily his idea of a state of nature) and his description of the savagery of Amerindian societies—especially vengeance, torture, and private judgment—are inseparable from his expressed beliefs on the role of government. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the figure of the savage Amerindian is not only a figure of savage violence, but also a key conceptual figure that legitimates the ancien régime (and European civilization) by providing evidence of the claim that men need civil institutions to thwart their passions.[362]

## *MAROONAGE,* HISTORY, AND THE PATRIARCHAL SUBLIME

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Edmund Burke employs the figure of maroons in order to elucidate the idea of inherited rights. As Mavis C. Campell notes, slaves resisted plantation society in various ways. However,

> the most vexing of the slaves' resistance techniques to the owners was the act of running away to establish their own habitations—Maroon societies. These were autonomous communities existing outside the purlieus of the territorial units of the slave plantations.[363]

Constructed by runaway slaves, maroon communities existed throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and North America and represented a challenge to the plantation system because of their visible rejection of plantation life and work.

During a discussion of natural rights, Burke introduces the idea of an entailed inheritance as a counterbalance to Richard Price's claim that all peoples have the right to cashier their government and other natural rights.[364] In opposition to these claims, Burke argues that legitimate rights are inherited from previous generations, and therefore, like private property, are in conformity with the organic nature of society.[365] He asserts that rights and constitutional

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[361] In "Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs," Burke writes, "The state of civil society which necessarily generates this aristocracy is a state of Nature,—aand much more truly so than a savage and incoherent mode of life. For man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated and most predominates. Art is man's nature. We are as much, at least, in a state of Nature in formed manhood as immature and helpless infancy. Men, qualified in the manner I have just described, form in Nature, as she operates in the common modification of society, the leading, guiding, and governing part. It is the soul to the body, without which the man does not exist. To give, therefore, no more importance, in the social order, to such descriptions of men than that of so many units is a horrible usurpation." Burke, "Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs,, 176.

[362] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,52.

[363] Mavis C. Cambell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 1.

[364] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,14.

[365] He writes, "Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the

structures are philosophically analogous to the preservation and the perpetuation of private property across time.

Burke's principle of inherited rights, institutions, and political systems includes the positive values of the inherited and the worthiness of one's ancestors. The value of inherited rights is directly linked to the emotional attachment that the inheritors have to their ancestors and by extension to their inheritance. Thus, inherited rights become delegitimized when those reflecting on the past interpret their ancestors as ignoble, low, and shameful, and their histories as oppressive, traumatic, and profoundly negative.

The question of the worth of one's ancestors informs Burke's take on *maroonage*. For Burke, the French Revolutionaries have destroyed the natural sentiment that one should have towards the past and inherited rights, when they deny that their ancestors were free, deserving of freedom, and noble. Thus, he contends that the French Revolutionaries have erred when they judge their ancestors as ignoble:

> Respecting your forefathers, you would have been taught to respect yourself. You would not have chosen to consider the French as a people of yesterday, as a nation of low-born servile wretches until the emancipation year of 1789. In order to furnish, at the expense of your honor, an excuse to your apologists here for several enormities of yours, you would not have been content to be represented as a gang of Maroon slaves suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage, and therefore to be pardoned for your abuse of the liberty to which you were not accustomed and ill fitted.[366]

Burke's contrast of European inheritance and African enslavement in the New World explicates the gap between those whose ancestors are worthy and noble, and those who cannot in any way claim noble ancestry. Whereas the French can and should conceive of their forefathers as worthy of freedom, this conception is foreclosed for African slaves. If one is born of enslaved parents, then one's parents are *de facto* not noble, but rather lowly and servile. And if a person is born free and brought enslaved from Africa to the Americas, one's ancestors still cannot be considered noble because, according to Burke's progressive historiography, Africa has "time out of mind … been in a state of slavery."[367] Thus, whether an enslaved person was born free in Africa, or born enslaved in the Americas, Burke's representation of slaves (including "maroon slaves") necessarily involves an ignoble past combined with a current state of degradation.

Burke rejected claims that French Revolutionary actions (including the constitution of the National Assembly) represented the French people's opposition to slavery and despotism. While the revolutionaries understand themselves as overthrowing the political slavery entailed in the king's thwarting of popular will, Burke thinks this self-conception robs the French of pride and self-respect. In his words, the French consider themselves "as a nation of low-born servile wretches until the emancipation year of 1789."[368] This self-conception plays a role in Burke's interpretation of the French Revolution as one that is insolent, servile, and grasping.

Burke's description of the French Revolutionaries as thinking of themselves as maroon

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world and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts, wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old or middle-aged or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression." Ibid., 45.

[366] Ibid, 32.

[367] Nothing in Burke's later writings contradicts the idea that Africa is in a state of slavery, especially when slavery is conceived of as a type of barbarism or savagery that is a lesser type of liberty than that found in European states.

[368] Ibid., 32.

slaves should be interpreted in light of his aestheticization of authority. As discussed in chapter three, sublime authority of and respect for paternal power are connected to the moral imagination and the passions necessary to sustain essential institutions. The past serves as the sublime authority that necessarily demands respect, deference, and obedience from contemporaries.

> The authority of the father, so useful to our well-being, and so justly venerable upon all accounts, hinders us from having that entire love for him that we have for our mothers, where the parental authority is almost melted down into the mother's fondness and indulgences. But we generally have great love for our grandfathers, in whom this authority is removed a degree from us, and where the weakness of age mellows it into something of a feminine partiality.[369]

In the context of the French rejection of their ancestors, the revolutionaries have destroyed the sublime authority of the past, along with the paternal awe and masculine power at the heart of all authority. Burke's aestheticized authority necessitates mixtures of the sublime (masculine and terror) with the beautiful (feminine and comfort). However, in this case, the past is clearly sublime (and masculine) rather than beautiful (and feminine).

Burke has enlarged the reverence of the father into a reverence for one's forefathers. For example, in discussing the ways in which the principle of inherited liberty generates meaning and attachment, Burke writes:

> By this means our liberty becomes a noble freedom. It carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits, its monumental inscriptions, its records, evidences, and titles. We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men: on account of their age and on account of those from whom they are descended.[370]

As Linda Zerilli has argued, the reverence for the past and its connection to inheritance is not only the foundation of the state, but also the foundation of the patriarchal order that accompanies it.[371] Zerilli augments an earlier contention of Pocock's that Burke created a legal fiction and a "persona ficta" when he "identif[ies] the principles of political liberty with the principles of our law of landed property."[372] However, unlike Pocock, Zerilli stresses the connection between the ownership of the private property and men's "property in women."[373] Through illuminating this connection, Zerilli displays how Burke's theory grounds the state in a patriarchal regime, which include a temporal component (i.e. forefathers), but also a political component in that "we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates."[374] According to Zerilli, by missing the connection of property to patriarchy, Pocock ignores

> the material origins of the modern state, property, and family that bind the master trope of the *persona ficta* to that other master trope of paterfamilias; that tie the 'superb legal fiction' of property and liberty to the patriarchal legal fiction of paternity; and that thus connect state, family, and landed property to men's property in women.[375]

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[369] Ibid., 101.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Zerilli, *Signifying Woman*, 30.
[372] Ibid., 79.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.

Zerilli's analysis is correct in its revelation of the patriarchal foundations of the state in Burke's political thought. I would add, however, that slavery also plays a crucial rhetorical and theoretical role in Burke's articulation of the foundations of the state and property. The point is not the obvious one that the state is founded on and with the ownership of women, slaves, and children (i.e. the paterfamilias). Rather, it is that the slave has no patrimony, no father, no property, and no history. Burke's subtle evoking of *maroonage* displays the connections he made between patrimony and property. It is the lack of respect that maroons have for their forefathers—i.e. the respect all children should have for their fathers—and the inability to participate in the economy of inheritance and the historical sublime that characterizes psychological lives of maroon slaves.

When Burke writes that the revolutionaries "would not have been content to be represented as a gang of Maroon slaves," he does not mean that the French are maroon slaves, or that their psychology exactly matches the psychology of slaves; rather he is pointing out that the same mechanisms of thought that produces the abuse of liberty by maroon slaves is driving the psychology of the French Revolution; in this case, however, the issue is not chattel slavery but political slavery. Burke's formulation of revolutionaries as maroons highlights the chasm between chattel slavery and political slavery, while bridging the difference. Although some revolutionaries may be horrified at being compared to maroons, for Burke, the psychology of seeking emancipation (from either chattel slavery or the ancien régime) unites these disparate populations and institutions. Burke's complex formulation of a psychology of aesthetics (which we see in his understanding of the aesthetic dimensions of the West Indian plantation) allows him to develop general principles linking the state of slavery, rejection of the past, and the conceptualization of one's freedom in opposition to current institutions. For Burke, maroons and French Revolutionaries seek validation of their anti-social and anti-institutional actions in an appeal to a long history of enslavement that renders one's ancestors as necessarily unfree. The desire for freedom outside of the prevailing social norms and institutions leads to a violent opposition to institutions that ends with displays of insolence towards one's better and the appropriation of property. In Burke's analysis, the ideas of emancipation and enslavement that animated the French Revolution could be said to animate maroonage; thus his subtle comparison of the two disparate phenomena.

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, maroons are represented as savage. Whereas the rebelling slave is savage due to the pent up resentment that is turned upon the master (represented by the threat of domestic slaves), the maroon appears as savage due to a liberty of movement inappropriate to him or her. The maroon's abuse of "liberty" is akin to the savage liberty of Amerindians, which is an unconstrained liberty at odds with society. The idea of the maroons as savage can also be seen in the argument that precedes Burke's discussion of respecting forefathers. He claims that the revolutionaries act as if they had never been formed into a society (i.e. as if they live in a state of nature). Thus, he writes, "You had all these advantages in your ancient states, but you chose to act as if you had never been molded into civil society and had everything to begin anew."[376] At the heart of Burke's critique of the French Revolution is his critique of natural rights (and natural man) as the foundational image of French political thought.

The French Revolution is savage because it misinterprets human nature and society by accepting a fictitious natural man from whom all thought should be derived. At the same time, the maroon escaping slavery has never been admitted into civil society and, therefore, being

[376] Ibid., 31.

unconstrained by societal norms, "begins anew."[377] In this way, the maroon slave more closely resembles the "savage," rather than those in civil society.

As James Clausen argues in *Fugitive Rousseau: Slavery, Primitivism, and Political Freedom,* maroonage in the eighteenth century represented a profound threat to and rejection of the colonial order. Clausen writes:

> Scholars agree that colonial administrators were obsessed with *marronage* throughout the eighteenth century, sometimes desperate to implement safeguards on masters' brutality so that slaves would not run off to add further numerical and political force to the large bands threatening colonial outposts. In many ways, *marronage* was the antithesis of the colonial-plantocratic order and corroded the institution of slavery.[378]

A maroon was not an emancipated slave incorporated into colonial civil society, or a rebel slave attempting to overthrow plantation society. Rather, the maroon represented a particular type of liberty, and violence, that should not exist alongside of plantation society. The maroons are those who create societies anew; societies that can be both antagonistic to civil society (such as plantation society) and independent of European civil society.

Thus, in Burke's view of *maroonage*, the rhetoric of savage violence is utilized to explicate and represent the French Revolution. The figure of the maroon "slave" only works in this rhetoric because it hints at a larger legitimate system. At the same time, the maroon cannot be reduced either to the "savage" Amerindian or the rebellious slave who plots the inversion of the plantation system (i.e. killing the master and appropriating his property and women).[379] The maroon is not portrayed as profoundly violent as is the Amerindian savage, or as interested in vengeance as is the rebellious slave. Instead, the maroon in *Reflections* embodies a newfound freedom; thus the maroons are those who "broke loose from the house of bondage."[380] Even though maroons are not necessarily those who kill and torture, their freedom is still savage.

The figure of the maroon joins the figure of the savage Amerindian, the prostitute, and other figures of Burke's rhetoric on the French Revolution, but his definition aids in understanding how his theorizing of chattel slavery connects with his perception of European revolutions. On one hand, the revolutionaries have "been subtilized into savages." On the other hand, they have adopted the psychology of African slaves fleeing bondage. Although these two types of savagery are not necessarily stable or compatible (i.e. one has vengeance as the primary motivation, while the other has freedom as its primary motivation), they do display the ways in which Burke draws upon colonial contexts in order to condemn the French Revolution.

Burke's argument for entailed inheritance and respecting one's forefathers fits well with his concerns about the dangers of immediate abolition. As evidenced in his "Sketch of A Negro Code," Burke believed slaves in the Caribbean were ill equipped for freedom, and needed to be civilized and socialized before emancipation in order to not threaten civil society. Maroon slaves may be pardoned for their behavior because they do not know any better: they have no fathers, and cannot have any respect for their forefathers. However, the French cannot be "pardoned"—they have a history of noble ancestors. Thus, because the revolutionaries have a choice in their relationship with history, they are held to a higher standard than ex-slaves.

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[377] Ibid.

[378] Jimmy Klausen, *Fugitive Rousseau: Slavery, Primitivism, and Freedom* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 242.

[379] Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume 3*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, Claredon Press, 1981), 359.

[380] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 32.

## REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, PROPERTY, AND THE NABOB

If the Amerindian represents the "savage" violence and ferocity of the French Revolution, and the maroon represents the revolutionaries' lack of respect for the past, then the "nabob" represents the continual threat of British political and social corruption. The figure of the nabob has an ambiguous place in Edmund Burke's thought. Burke struggled to redefine the content of the nabob in ways that would promote sympathy for victims of British colonialism and lead to reform of the East India Company. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the figure of the nabob represented a type of colonial threat to Britain. As Jack Greene states:

> Already by the late 1760s, the term 'nabob', initially an Indian title of rank, had become, as a contemporary complained, 'a general term of reproach, indiscriminately applied to every individual who has served the East India Company in Asia' and 'implying, that the persons to whom it is applied, have obtained their fortunes by grievously oppressing the natives of Indian'.[381]

The British public was highly critical of East India Company agents who were seen as driving up basic prices and also benefiting from the suffering and oppression of others. The nabob became associated with the corruption of British institutions and the flaws in British imperial governance.

By the late 1770s, when Burke first began his criticisms of the East India Company, he committed himself to enlarging the debates about its abuses. In his book, *Sympathy and India in British Literature*, Andrew Rudd argues that during the 1760s, popular British imagination often perceived nabobs as a local threat and ignored the extensive negative consequences they produced in India.[382] For Burke, this constricted national view, focused primarily on the British elite and British society, was a form of "geographic morality."[383] Therefore, from his earliest attempts to reform the East India Company until his death, Burke sought to widen the sphere of sympathy beyond Britain to include Indians ruined by agents of the East India Company. His attempts to balance the negative consequences of the East India Company in India with those in Britain became a part of a larger rhetorical strategy in debates concerning the British Empire in India. For example, in his 1783 "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," he documented the destruction to Indian property and nobility alongside the effects of returning East India agents on British society.

In his 1783 "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," Burke argues that the wealth generated in India was slowly corrupting the natural aristocracy by making leaders out of those who had systemically oppressed India.[384] He writes, "Arrived in England, the destroyers of nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation at a board of elegance and hospitality [...] they marry into your families; they enter into your senate; they ease your estates by loans."[385] However, this concern with British society is secondary to the havoc that the East India Company had created in India. The description of the return of "nabob" is surrounded by discussions of the effect that the East India Company had on the states of India. In

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[381] Jack P. Greene, *Evaluating Empire and Confronting Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 226.

[382] Andrew Rudd, *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770-1830* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

[383] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 78.

[384] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill,", 463.

[385] Ibid.

the wake of the French Revolution, the presence of a class of usurping men subverting British institutions with ill-gotten wealth took on new urgency.

In *Reflection on the Revolution in France,* there is one reference to nabobs, or returning East India Company agents. Burke argues that if the avaricious and revolutionary policies of the East India Company continue, Parliament would come to resemble the National Assembly: a legislature where unqualified and usurping men make policy for a nation. He writes:

> The power of the House of Commons, direct or indirect, is indeed great; and long may it be able to preserve its greatness, and the spirit belonging to true greatness, at the full; and it will do so, as long as it can keep the breakers of law in India from becoming the makers of law for England.[386]

As one part of the larger constitution, the health of the House of Commons relied on the virtue of its natural aristocracy, whereby the greatest minds, businessmen, and established gentry ruled the nation. For Burke, it was essential that the "breakers of law in India" did not become powerful men in the government of Britain. These men owed their wealth to the abuses of government in another country, and were not fit rulers for any government, whether in Asia, America, or Europe.

Burke never utilizes the term nabob in his writings on India or the French Revolution. However, although the nabob goes unnamed, the figure of the nabob is present in Burke's writings in different ways, including in the phrase he utilizes in *Reflections*: "the breakers of the law." In the wake of the French Revolution, Burke coined a new term, Indianism, that he believed captured the power and the nature of the exploitative regime in India.

After *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke also articulated a closer connection between the threat of Indianism and the threat of Jacobinism. In line with the labeling of the French Revolution as Jacobinism, Burke produced Indianism, a neologism based on social and political reality of East Indian wealth in Britain and the abuses of the East India Company in India. In a 1796 letter, he argues that Indianism would destroy the institutions of Britain, thus allowing the scourge of Jacobinism to spread. He writes:

> Our Government and our laws are beset by two different Enemies, which are sapping its foundation, Indianism and Jacobinism. In some cases they act separately, in some they act in conjuction: but of this I am sure; that the first is worst by far, and the hardest to deal with; and for this amongst other reasons, that it weakens[s] discredits, and ruins that force, which ought to be employed with the Greatest Credit and Energy against the other; and that it furnishes Jacobinism with its strongest arms against all formal government.[387]

As the French Revolution grew more militant and expansionist, Burke believed that Jacobinism could remake Europe through both ideology and arms. This threat could not be combatted when the men responsible for defeating it were replicas of those they were fighting: avaricious and lowborn men with no respect for law. His horror at dealing with "Indianism" and "Jacobinism" stemmed from the idea that Indianism corrupted institutions that should impede Jacobinism. In a time of great crisis, where strength, trust, and integrity were necessary to combat this great ill, Burke saw the influence of the East India Company as ruining the only force that could oppose the spread of the French Revolution.[388]

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[386] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 39.

[387] Agnani, "Jacobinism in India, Indianism in English Parliament," *Cultural Critique* 68 (2008): 131.

[388] The nabob and Indianism were not synonymous; the first referred to "the breakers of the laws in India," while the second referred to the whole system of abuse, property accumulation, and the shielding of criminals from justice.

For Burke, the nabob has a different status than the figures of savage violence: The nabob represents a civil threat. He is a European who threatens to weaken, lead astray, and undermine the government and traditional social order, rather than a purveyor of physical violence. It is also clear that while nabobs are a threat to Britain, the figures of savage violence are threats to the West Indian colonies, Canada, and the recently independent American colonies. The distance between the nabob and the figures of Amerindians and maroons can be mapped onto the distinction between civilization and savagery. It is because the nabob is a civil being with rights and liberties, including property, that he represents a threat to the foundations of civil and social life; as a member of society, he can infiltrate the social sphere and corrupt the institutions from within. At the same time, it is because Amerindians and maroons are savages outside of civil society that they represent a threat to life and safety.

The distance between Burke's figure of the "breaker of laws in India" and of "a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages," can be discerned in the language he uses to discuss these two problems. The figures of savage violence that populate Burke's writings on the French Revolution draw upon his beliefs about Amerindians and African slaves, while the hidden figure of the nabob draws upon the less violent but more expansive threat of political and social dissolution. However, the evoking of Amerindians and maroons in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are "representation[s]," middle terms, and examples that are not to be conflated with reality. The rhetorical strategy that Burke employs in his writings on India, introducing a middle term in order to better understand a particular phenomenon (i.e. German as Bengal), is present in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke hopes that the reader will grasp the savagery and dangers of the French Revolution through the use of the "cloudy medium" of Amerindian cruelty and *maroonage*.

Burke does not collapse the identities of Europeans and threatening colonial figures. Rather, he renders them as similar or analogous. For example, he writes of the French's rejection of their history, "You would not have been content to be represented as a gang of Maroon slaves."[389] The maroon is not the French Revolutionary, and vice-versa. His portrayal of the treatment of the monarchs on October 6, 1789 also relies less on identity and more on the idea of resemblance. Burke writes that the transfer from Versailles to Paris was "a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages."[390] Here, the idea of resemblance is used to evoke the murder of Jane McCrea and Burke's opposition to the Iroquois and British alliance during the American Revolution. However, the distinct identities of the Onondaga and the French Revolutionaries are not confused; through words like "resembling," Burke keeps these two populations ontologically apart. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the rhetorical uses of figures of savagery to evoke sympathy for nobility as well as antipathy for the French Revolution rely on middle terms from colonial contexts and histories.

Although the savage Amerindian and maroon slave are figures and representations in rhetoric—i.e. middle terms—the figure of the nabob is not. The threat of Amerindians and slaves are rhetorical devices that Burke utilizes to interpret the French Revolution. The threat of the nabob, however, was a reality. At the time of his revolutionary writings, agents of the East India Company were living in Britain, "marrying into [elite] families," and deeply imbricated in the political and social structure of Britain.[391] Thus, Burke's argument that Parliament will remain great as long as "it can keep the breakers of law in India from becoming the makers of law for

[389] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 32.
[390] Ibid., 59.
[391] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 439.

England" does not rely on past history or unknown figures, but rather on known personages who opposed Burke in his ongoing impeachment of Warren Hastings.[392] In his writings on the French Revolution, Burke's rendering of the nabob's threat to Britain and to Europe does not rely on a middle term, or the process of representation or resemblance, but refers to contemporary men in the heart of Europe: the "breakers of law in India" who had returned home. Surprisingly, the nabob is the least terrifying and sublime colonial figure in *Reflections*, even as he represents the greatest threat to Britain and Europe.

## REVOLUTION, EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION, AND PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY

The French Revolution represented a crisis for Edmund Burke, who believed that the French Revolutionaries' policies on religion and nobility threatened the foundations of European civilization. Burke's emphasis on the importance of Christianity and aristocracy to European civilization are apparent as early as *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and as late as his *Letters on the Regicide Peace* (1796). This section examines what Burke believed to be constitutive parts of European civilization, as well as the unique threats that the French Revolution posed to these institutions.

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke writes that all European civilization has been reliant on the contribution of religion and the aristocracy (as represented by the estates of the clergy and nobility), and that the goods of the modern European civilization can be traced to these two sources. He argues:

> Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles and were, indeed, the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion.[393]

In his writings on the French Revolution, Christianity functions as a continual civilizing force on European populations. As Ian-Hampshere has argued, "Burke believed that only the hope of everlasting life or fear of hell fire could prevent the baser aspects of human beings from asserting themselves."[394] In Burke's corpus, we find a universal application of Christianity as a check on human passions, one that supplements and augments government. However, in France after the beginning of the Revolution, the anti-clerical and anti-religious aspects of the Revolutionary policy, including the confiscation of the Catholic Church's lands, challenged the supplement and augmentation of government. Burke conceptualized attacks on the Church lands and the diminishment of the power of the clergy as a disavowal of the consecrated Christian state.[395]

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, religion is not only necessary for consecrating the state, but according to Burke, is animated by a natural impulse that, if not filled by something beneficial, will be filled with more problematic attachments and ideas. He consistently accuses

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[392] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 39.

[393] Ibid., 69.

[394] Hampshere-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought*, 279.

[395] According to him, through Britain's established church, "[The] religious system of which we are now in possession...hath solemnly and forever consecrated the commonwealth and all that officiate it." The consecration of the state places it within an eternal order, a providential order that inspires acceptance, obedience, and reverence. Simultaneously, the consecration of the state also functions to check the passions of men, especially free men, by "operat[ing] with a wholesome awe upon free citizens," who must act in ways that are not informed by temporary gain but rather longtime stability. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 80-81.

the French Revolution of atheism, which for him represents the denial of man's natural sentiment and an unnatural set of beliefs. He writes:

> We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instincts; and it cannot prevail long. But if, in the moment of riot and drunken delirium from the hot spirit drank out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously boiling, we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion which has been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilization amongst us and amongst many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take place of it.[396]

The idea of man as a "religious animal" connects Burke's understanding of the importance of religion in consecrating the state with the psychological and moral description of human beings as needing some form of religious belief. Religion clothes man by raising his status in creation from mere animality and thereby provides men psychological comfort.[397] An atheistic Europe would lose the comforts of religion, the raising of human existence beyond animal life, and Christianity's constraint on the passions of men. Europe would lose civilization in two senses, in the aesthetic sense of the beautification of man and in the moral sense: the civilizing of the passions. As I have argued, Burke recommended civilizing Amerindians through religion as a way to thwart savage passions.

## NATURAL ARISTOCRACY AND EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION

As has been discussed, natural aristocracy was one of Burke's longstanding commitments. Previous chapters focused on how Burke conceptualized natural aristocracy as the soul of a nation, a bulwark against the perpetual immaturity of the majority of the community.[398] The following discussion will focus on the definition of natural aristocracy as those born into social and political power. In "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," Burke writes:

> To be bred in a place of estimation; to see nothing low and sordid from one's infancy; to be taught to respect oneself, to be habituated to the censorial inspection of the public eye; to look early to public opinion; to stand upon such an elevated ground as to be enabled to take a large view of the wide-spread and infinitely diversified combinations of men and affairs in a large society; to have leisure to read, to reflect, to converse.[399]

Aristocratic classes are able to be fully human, because they have been positively shaped by experience and are in positions that allow them to engage in higher pursuits denied by the social constraints of their fellow human beings (e.g. poverty, labor, and lack of wealth). The habits and experiences of those born into aristocratic families have prepared them to take a longer view of society than those who are mired in work, which is most of the populace. Aristocrats are knowledgeable, have been trained to lead, have "self-respect," and have the leisure to engage in philosophy, the arts, and government. In these ways, Burke sees them as having the necessary disposition and training for deliberation and leadership.

According to Burke, the constitution of the National Assembly brought ruination to France by producing governors ill equipped to rule due to their status, temperament, and

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[396] Ibid.
[397] Burke writes that the moral imagination of ancien régime Europe raised the value of man. Ibid., 67.
[398] Burke, "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," 175.
[399] Ibid.

education. In *Reflections*, he argues that the hairdresser or tallow-chandler were not fit to rule France, nor were country lawyers, or small-time clergy. He writes:

> Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression if such as they, either individually or collectively, is permitted to rule. In this you think you are combating prejudice, but you are at war with nature.[400]

Rule by those outside the elite, propertied, and highly educated members of society goes against nature. It allows those at the bottom, without leisure and the proper training, to legislate for all. If an aristocracy is the natural state of mankind, then to "give, therefore, no more importance, in the social order, to such descriptions of men … is a horrible usurpation."[401] Burke sees in the Revolution an inversion of the natural order.

To Burke, the threat to the natural aristocracy was apparent when the National Assembly was constituted with the Third Estate (the commoners) as the predominant body over the First (church) and Second (nobility) Estates. The threat to natural aristocracy was also clear in the people's treatment of the king and queen during the transfer of the monarchs from Versailles to Paris. Similarly, the first right of "Declaration of the Rights of Man," denied the privileges of noble birth and membership in the clergy. The ideas both that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights. [And] [s]ocial distinctions may be based only on common utility" challenged the structures of European civilization by challenging the idea of a natural aristocracy as appropriate to rule.[402]

## EUROPE, EUROPEAN LIBERTY, AND CITIZENSHIP

In his final years, Edmund Burke gives a clear vision of Europe as a social and political unit united by common laws, history, and social structure. In these letters, intended to dissuade a British audience from pursuing peace with France, Burke positions post-Revolutionary France (including the Directory) as a threat to a common European civilization. Through undercutting chivalry, Christianity, and aristocracy, the Revolution is conceived of as destroying the fabric of European collective life as well as European citizenship.

In *Letters on the Regicide Peace*, Burke argues that the social life and manners of Europe are uniform enough that any European is at home in any part of the continent. As such, Burke conceptualizes a European citizenship that allows all Europeans to be members of a greater whole. He writes:

> From this resemblance in the modes of intercourse, and in the whole form and fashion of life, no citizen of Europe could be altogether in exile in any part of it. There was nothing more than a pleasing variety to recreate and instruct the mind, to enrich the imagination, and to meliorate the heart. When a man travelled or resided for health, pleasure, business or necessity, from his own country, he never felt himself quite abroad.[403]

The result of thinking of Europe as a distinct social and political whole, built on a commonality of commerce, manners, and government, is a continental identity. Although each citizen of Europe may have a national identity, each also has a transnational one. For Burke, Europe has

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[400] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 43.

[401] Burke, "Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs," 176.

[402] Lynn Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 77–79.

[403] Burke, "*Letters on the Regicide Peace*," 134.

been rightly described as "a Commonwealth" and an "aggregate of nations."[404] In fact, he was contributing to an idea of Europe as an exceptional "place of true civility, of freemen living in secure urban communities under the rule of law."[405] One part of Burke"s account of the "commonwealth" of Europe is his portrayal of European civilization as exceptional.

In Burke's thought, citizens of the "commonwealth" of Europe were able to partake in a valuable and historically constructed liberty; this liberty was the product of centuries of inherited manners, laws, and common transformation of material conditions. For example, in *Letters on the Regicide Peace,* Burke asserts that modern European liberty under any form of government is superior to ancient liberty, because European states have been thoroughly transformed by attention to the needs of individuals.[406] He argues that throughout Europe

> In all these old countries the state has been made to the people, and not the people conformed to the state. Every state has pursued, not only every sort of social advantage, but it has cultivated the welfare of every individual. His wants, his wishes, even his taste have been consulted. This comprehensive scheme virtually produced a degree of personal liberty in forms the most adverse to it. That liberty was found, under monarchies stiled absolute, in a degree unknown to the ancient commonwealths. From hence the powers of all our modern states meet in all their movements with some obstruction.[407]

Burke locates modern European liberty within the transformation of the states of Europe from a pre-modern lack of concern with the "needs," "desires," "wants," "wishes," and "welfare" of their citizens or subjects, to a condition in which the cultivation of social welfare and intercourse become primary concerns of states. In promoting the social "advantage" and "welfare" of citizens, the modern state—through manners and commerce—has given birth to a liberty that is different from those of ancient Rome and Athens. The liberties provided by commerce, property, and manners are substantial even under the most despotic European governments.

Burke's claims about European liberty in *Letters on A Regicide Peace* complemented claims in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that even if ancien régime France was unfree, its despotism was unique because it had art, "science," and "agriculture," unlike the despotism of the East.[408] Burke argued that despotism in Europe had no true equivalent in history due to the social intercourse that occurs alongside the governmental structures.[409] One of Burke's main arguments is that Europeans are socially free within spaces of social and political stratification,

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[404] Burke writes, "The cause must be sought in the similitude throughout Europe of religion, laws, and manners. At bottom, these are all the same. The writers on public law have often called this aggregate of nations a Commonwealth. They had reason. It is virtually one great state having the same basis of general law; with some diversity of provincial customs and local establishments." Ibid., 170.

[405] Padgen, *Lords of All the World*, 24.

[406] Here, we can hear echoes of Burke's assertion in the *Reflections* that "the mixed system of opinion and manners" had "given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world." Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 67.

[407] Burke, "*Letters on the Regicide Peace*," 180.

[408] Burke writes, "To hear some men speak of the late monarchy of France, you would imagine that they were talking of Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword of Tahmas Kouli Khan, or at least describing the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey, where the finest countries in the most genial climates in the world are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war, where arts are unknown, where manufactures languish, where science is extinguished, where agriculture decays, where the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer. Was this the case of France? Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 112.

[409] Ibid., 32.

and that gradual reform could bring out still more "regulated" freedom.[410]

## CONCLUSION

One of the questions that Edmund Burke's writings on the French Revolution poses to scholars is their significance for interpreting his writings on empire and anti-imperialism. Does his evoking of savagery sustain an anti-imperial argument? In particular, does his recognition that Europe can (and France has) succumbed to savagery and barbarism contradict his earlier belief in civilizational hierarchies?

In *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy*, Daniel I. O'Neill argues that for Burke, the destruction of the twin pillars of nobility and religion represented the destruction of European civilization as a whole. O'Neill writes:

> What did the death of Western civilization look like? The short answer is that the collapse of civilization meant the rise of shameless political, social, and cultural democracy that undermine the innate moral sentiments of the masses and transformed them from disciplined and docile subjects into fearless participatory citizens.[411]

As discussed earlier, Burke conceived of the French Revolution as the eruption of savagery and barbarism in Europe, and as such the destruction of European civilization. In earlier chapters, I emphasized the ways in which Burke conceptualized European civilization as greater than all previous and contemporary civilizations. Through examination of Burke's progressive historiography, we saw that his conception of civilization involved a commitment to civilizing those conceived of as savage including Amerindians, slaves, and Africans. In this way, European practices, including manners and religion, were both a measure of human progress and its tool. Do his criticisms of the French Revolution undercut his depiction of Europe as both the highest civilization in history and a model for human progress?

I argue that his writings on the French Revolution present the reader with yet another ambivalent legacy. On one hand, the inversion of the progressive historiography, in which savagery and barbarism emerge *from* European civilization, highlights the fluidity and contextual quality of human nature, whereby changes in material, political, ideological, and psychological structures can radically alter human behavior. This suggests a certain universalism in Burke's conception of humanity. On the other hand, the idea that Europe has regressed affirms the negative valuation of Amerindians, Africans, and slaves.

Burke's writings on the French Revolution display aspects of his ambivalent anti-imperialism. The figure of savage (as represented by the Amerindian and maroon) is intended to promote antipathy for the revolutionaries and fear of the revolution; these representations of savagery conform to and support Burke's lack of support for immediate systematic reform of the Empire as it relates to chattel slavery and the dispossession of Amerindian lands.

The ambivalence of his anti-imperialism can also be seen in the paradoxical status of the nabob in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Although the nabob presents the greatest challenge to Europe and Britain, the figure of the nabob (i.e. "those breakers of the law in India")

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[410] Ibid., 140. On gradual reform, Burke writes, "By a slow but well-sustained progress the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first gives light to us in the second; and so, from light to light, we are conducted with safety through the whole series. We see that parts of the system do not clash. The evils latent in the most promising contrivances are provided for as they arise. One advantage is as little as possible sacrificed to another. We compensate, we reconcile, we balance.

[411] Daniel I. O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 152.

is rendered with less fierceness and animosity than that of the Amerindians and slaves. Although this should be primarily interpreted in light of the rhetorical power of sublime figures to provoke fear and engender appropriate action, it also has the effect of reinforcing the idea of slave and Amerindian savagery as unsympathetic. I contend that the ways in which the sublime figures of savage violence are employed does not lead to an understanding of the injustice of colonial institutions and the need to reform them. Rather, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the delicacy in which Burke discusses the the nabob as a colonial threat to Britain is due to his commitment to bring about justice to those affected by the criminality of Warren Hastings and the agents of the East India Company. His attempts to expand the moral imagination around the figure of the nabob had always been to promote imperial reform. In contrast, his evoking of figures of savage violence (Amerindians and slaves) does not have this larger aim or concern with imperial reform.

At its most daring, Burke's criticism of the French Revolution as savage and barbaric serves as a reminder to Europeans that very little separates different civilizations. This would constitute a compression of civilizational chauvinism. However, Burke's argument relies on the continued devaluation of African slaves and Amerindians. It is this aspect of his deployment of progressive (and regressive) historiography that makes a case for a French Revolution-era anti-imperial Burke difficult. Edmund Burke is quite explicit that Europeans are being dragged down to a lower level, not that the value of Amerindians, maroons, or slaves has risen. In such a context—where one portion of humanity is being decried for its similarity to the lowness of another—these savage figures do not form the basis for systematic recommendations for reform and the alleviation of the oppression of peoples in America.

## CONCLUSION

## EDMUND BURKE'S ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND ITS LIMITS

In this dissertation, I have attempted to illuminate the content and implications of Edmund Burke's criticisms of India, the slave trade, and Amerindian dispossession in order to develop an appreciation of the complexities, limits and tensions in Burke's political thought concerning empire and colonialism. In being attentive to what Jennifer Pitts considers the "limits of Burke's apprehension of injustice,"[412] I theorize the ways in which those facets of his thought usually taken as such limits may actually be constitutive elements of his anti-imperial thought. The limits I explore in this project are Burke's silence on Amerindian dispossession, his ambivalence about slave abolition, his acceptance of conquest, and his acceptance of British rule in India. At the same time, I have sought to establish crucial links between Burke's writings on the French Revolution and his writings on empire. I have identified his commitment to civilizational hierarchy, aristocracy, and religion as common denominators in both his writings on the British Empire and on the French Revolution.

Burke's use of civilizational hierarchies in his writings on America, Africa, Asia, and Europe are fairly consistent. In these writings, he repeatedly positions Amerindians as savage. Ironically, his conceptualization of Amerindians as lacking civilization provides one of the cornerstones of his defense of India; in his "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," Burke calls for the defense of India against rapacious East India Company agents, because Indians are not "gangs of savages, like Guaranies and Chiquitos," but rather "a people of ages civilized and cultivated; cultivated by all the arts of polished life."[413] In this way, the value of Indians is contrasted with the value of Amerindians, while the destruction of civilized people elicits Burke's sympathy and motivates him to address the abuses in India.

Likewise, the civilizational hierarchy at the heart of Burke's claims that Europe has emerged as the civilization par excellence is discerned through his other writings. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he writes that modern Europe had distinguished itself from Asia and ancient civilizations,[414] while in his *Letters on the Regicide Peace*, he argues for the civilizing of Directory France.[415] In "A Sketch of A Negro Code," he advocates for the civilizing of Africans in slave marts and argues for the civilizing of African slaves on West Indian plantations; [416]and in an "Address to the King," he calls for bringing Amerindians into a state of "civility, order, and piety."[417] Due to this consistency in his civilizational hierarchies and their relation to the justification and ends of empire, parts of this dissertation qualify Uday Mehta's assertion that Burke "saw through the abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies" by restricting the claim

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[412] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.

[413] Ibid.

[414] He writes of chivalry, "It is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world." Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 67.

[415] Edmund Burke, "On the Policy of the Allies," *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. IV (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 426.

[416] Burke, "A Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State with the Sketch of A Negro Code," 267.

[417] Edmund Burke, "Address to the King," 170.

to Burke's views of India. [418]

I have also examined the place of the "elastic concept of subjectship" in Burke's understanding of the British Empire. Using Christopher L. Brown's analysis of the emancipation schemes of early anti-slavery advocates, I argue that Burke extends subjectship primarily to Indians under the rule of the East India Company, but denies subjectship to Amerindians between the end of the Seven Years' War and the Revolution (1763-1783), when contention on the status of Amerindians in the British Empire was at its zenith. I also contend that Burke extends some forms of protection to slaves in the Caribbean through an attempt to constitute them as future legal subjects. These protections constitute slaves as potential future subjects of the king, a state that is a far cry from the subjectship granted to Indians.

Burke's commitment to civilizational hierarchies produces a non-universalist, even anti-universalist, conceptualization of humanity. The assignment of Amerindians and Africans to the beginnings of human history is an implicit claim to their lack of humanity. Burke's consistent portrayal of Amerindians and African slaves as purveyors of savage violence—an outgrowth of his understanding of them as savages—is one way he expresses the idea that neither population is fully human; as savages, they are in the words of J.G.A. Pocock "lacking, either accidentally or essentially, some attributes of humanity."[419]

This variation in the conceptualization of humanity corresponds to the variation in Burke's anti-imperialism. As I have argued throughout these chapters, India is conceived of as civilized—populated by Indian property owners, merchants, mechanics, princes and princesses—and is passionately defended by Burke. He links the destruction of India by colonialism to the potential destruction of Britain, in particular British social and political life. At the same time, he publicly challenges members of Parliament, agents of the East India Company, and the public to reform the relationship between Britain and India.

At the other extreme, Burke's silence on Amerindian dispossession and the British North American conquests, as well as his constant evoking of Amerindians as savages, shows how those at the lowest end of his civilizational hierarchy are considered to have lesser value. The destruction of Amerindian land and sovereignty is mostly seen through the lenses of the benefits that the American colonists had brought to North America. Thus, the most ironic aspect of Burke's writings on empire (and his political thought) is that his silences on the destruction of Amerindian sovereignty, people, and lands are matched by his dedication to portraying Amerindians as inhuman and ferocious savages that threaten all civilization.

In a similar vein, I place Burke's anti-slavery advocacy (and thus his anti-imperialism as it relates to African slaves) somewhere between his complete disregard for Amerindians and his defense of Indians. Although the Amerindian and the African are conceptualized as savages, Burke concerns himself with African slaves because of their importance to colonial economies. Slaves may not be fully human, but they are necessary to populate the West Indian colonies, and more importantly to work the West Indian plantations. Whereas Amerindians appear as expendable and as impeding the progress of civilization through their occupation of fertile lands, African slaves are essential to the continuation of the Atlantic economy as laborers. This is why Burke's emancipation scheme extends subjectship to slaves at the same time that it imagines a remote abolition and remote freedom.

However, it must be noted that in Burke's corpus, neither colonial slavery nor the slave trade are conceptualized as immediate existential threats to Europe. In fact, in the 1790s, his

[418] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 159.
[419] Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 158-159.

prior commitments to defeating Jacobinism and Indianism make abolitionism a minor commitment at best, and an inconvenience at worst. Burke published no writings on slavery during his lifetime, although he vocally opposed the immediate abolition of the slave trade during the late 1780s and early 1790s Parliamentary debates. As such, Burke's conservative abolitionism displayed a deep commitment to not only maintaining long-standing institutions, but also to the belief that Africans were uncivilized and ill-equipped for freedom.

Edmund Burke's writing on empire evinces a deep antipathy towards anti-imperial resistance of Africans and Amerindians. Burke was so opposed to the anti-imperial nature of Amerindian resistance that he consistently interprets anti-imperial actions such as King Philip's War and the Iroquois alliance with Parliament as signs of Amerindian savagery, rather than as autonomous actions aimed at preventing the destruction of Amerindian culture, sovereignty, and land. Likewise, on the West Indian plantation, Burke consistently perceives the rebellion of African slaves as an unmitigated disaster. Unlike abolitionists who thought that such rebellions were a valid form of resistance, or at least argued that it was a just and godly act of retribution for slavery, Burke views the potential and actual uprisings of African slaves as savage violence turned on a legitimate institution. In this way, one of the limits of Burke's anti-imperialism is its inability to validate the resistance of those affected by colonialism in America.

## COMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN ANTI-IMPERIALISM: OTTOBAH CUGOANO AND THE PROMISE OF NON-EUROPEAN ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The final section of this conclusion will attempt to put forward an alternative and complement to Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism. This will be done through contrasting the political thought of Ottobah Cugoano with that of Burke, as well as highlighting how Cugoano's anti-imperial arguments overcome the limits of Burke's anti-imperial thought, in particular Burke's denial of African humanity, his progressive historiography (i.e. civilizational hierarchy), and his continued support for the slave trade and colonial slavery. However, Cugoano and Burke share an expressed anti-imperial belief that the conquest of India has profound negative effects for the people of India and Great Britain.

Ottobah Cugoano (1757- unknown) was an Afro-British abolitionist who kidnapped from Ghana at the age of thirteen, labored in Grenada, and eventually settled in England.[420] In late eighteenth century Britain, he distinguished himself from his white abolitionist contemporaries such as Clarkson and Wilberforce through his radical vision for the end of slavery, which included the immediate abolition of the trade and the rapid emancipation of slaves. Simultaneously, he distinguished himself from other Afro-British abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho by being completely free from benefiting from the products of colonial slavery. As such, according to one interpreter, he was capable of embracing the literary and public persona of "the innocent but angry eye of the participant observer,"[421] a position that both Equiano (as a slave driver) and Sancho (as a grocer who sold the products of plantation slavery) could not inhabit due to their stake in the commerce of plantation slavery.[422] Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, published in 1787, was one of the most radical abolitionist tracts written by an eighteenth century Atlantic author, and called for both the immediate abolition of the slave trade and the rapid emancipation of slaves throughout the

[420] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 9-31.
[421] Ibid., xxi.
[422] Ibid.

British Empire.

## THE MEANING OF COLONIALISM

This analysis of Ottobah Cugoano's thought will begin with an explication of his historical view of modern colonialism. His *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* interprets Spanish encounters with Amerindians after 1492 as emblematic of the framework of all subsequent European colonialism. According to Cugoano, the nature of modern empire as fundamentally destructive could be discerned in the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He writes:

> The Spaniards began their settlements in the West Indies and America, by depredations of rapine, injustice, treachery and murder; and they have continued in the barbarous practice of devastation, cruelty, and oppression ever since; and their principles and maxims in planting colonies have been adopted, in some measure, by every other nation in Europe.[423]

Cugoano narrates the brutality of Spanish conquest through a retelling of the histories of Nicolás de Ovando's conquest of Hispaniola, Hernán Cortés's conquest of Mexico, and Francisco Pizarro's conquest of Peru. However, for Cugoano, Spanish colonialism is not an aberration in the history of colonialism, but rather the key to grasping the essential nature of all modern European colonialism.

Cugoanos history of the beginnings of colonialism in the Americas leads to a contemporary critique of the moral probity of colonialism in the second half of the eighteenth century. At the center of Cugoano's interpretation of colonialism in this era is the expressed belief that the initial violence, rape, "injustice," "treachery," and "murder," that characterized earlier colonization has not abated, but rather continues in the institutions of the slave trade and plantation slavery. Cugoano links the horrors that the British have consistently lamented in the Spanish conquest of the Americas with the practices and institutions of Britain and other European nations.

The slave trade and colonial slavery, first implemented during the Iberian conquests of the Americas, display the conceptual and historical link between colonialism and plantation slavery. Cugoano writes:

> It may be said with confidence as a certain general fact, that all their foreign settlements and colonies were founded on murders and devastations, and that they have continued their depredations in cruel slavery and oppression to this day; for where such predominant wickedness as the African slave-trade, and the West Indian slavery.[424]

For Cugoano, the wickedness of the slave trade and plantation slavery display the continuity between initial settlement and the eighteenth century Atlantic world. Britain's leading role in the slave trade, and its reliance on slave labor in its American colonies, displays the fundamental similarity of British and Spanish imperialism, as well as the fundamental similarity between the fifteenth century and the eighteenth century. I argue that Cugoano's history of European colonialism places plantation slavery at the center of the meaning of colonialism, first by exploring how chattel slavery emerged through the conquest of the Americas,[425] and then showing its continuation across three centuries. Slavery becomes one of the emblems of the

[423] Ibid., 72.
[424] Ibid., 62.
[425] Ibid.

historical and contemporary horrors of European colonialism.

## CUGOANO AND INDIA

Cugoano's belief that all "foreign settlements and colonies" were founded on murders and devastations applies to the British conquest and rule of India. In *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, Cugoano has a particularly Burkean view of the rule of the East India Company in India. Cugoano believed that the spoils of India would spell political ruin for Britain. According to Cugoano, the exploitation of India produced a dangerous set of men who were able to transform their colonial wealth into metropolitan power and prestige. He writes:

> The plunderers abroad send home their cash as fast as they can, and by one means and another the sums wanted to borrow, are soon made up. At last when the wars subside, or other business calls them home, laden with the spoils of the East or elsewhere, they have then the grand part of the their business to negotiate, in buying up bank stock, and lodging their plunder and ill-got wealth in the British or other funds.[426]

For Cugoano, the spoils of unjust wars and colonial plunder are funneled into Britain through "buying stock," investing, and placing their money in British banks. Burke made a similar argument when he wrote that agents of the East India Company "marry into your families; they enter into your senate; they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand."[427] Both Burke and Cugoano identify India as a space that has been mercilessly plundered and whose wealth has been transferred to Britain; Cugoano's stance on "the spoils of the East" firmly places him within the ranks of identifiable eighteenth century anti-imperial thinkers such as Burke and Denis Diderot.

A common argument of anti-imperial thinkers during the eighteenth century was that colonialism was corrupting Europe. Anthony Padgen in *Lords of All the World* argues "that anti-imperial thinkers such as Diderot, Montesquieu, and other anti-imperialists argued that the metropolis could never be fully insulated from the consequences of the processes of overseas expansion which it had itself initiated."[428] It was in this spirit that Burke famously stated that Parliament would maintain its prestige and power only as long as Britain could "keep the breakers of laws in India from becoming the maker of laws in England."[429]

According to Burke, there was evidence that the colonial wealth of India had subverted British law and morality, and was shielding criminal behavior. Thus, in 1783, Burke argued that the melding of plundered wealth with the British elite—through marriage, business partnerships, and loans—had ensured that the wealth created abroad was being used to prevent reforms in imperial institutions. He writes, "There is scarcely an house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest that makes all reform of our Eastern government appear officious and disgusting."[430] Cugoano employed a similar analysis of the connection between imperial wealth and its effects on Britain. Cugoano believed that those involved in colonialism abroad, including wealthy slave traders and agents of merchant companies, were likely to become the leading men in society. According to him, wealthy men actively sought out political power in a government in

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[426] Ibid., 70.
[427] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 439.
[428] Padgen, *Lords of All The World*, 173.
[429] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 39.
[430] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 439.

order to rule as well as to shield themselves.[431] Cugoano and Burke's mutual belief that colonial wealth shielded criminals was borne out by the acquittal of Warren Hastings in 1795.

Cugoano built upon many of Burke's criticisms of the East India Company in his own anti-imperial writing. However, if Burke's thoughts contributed to Cugoano's anti-imperial project, Cugoano's anti-imperialism radically widens its scope in its emphasis on the corruptive influences of empire on British society. Whereas Burke consistently remained silent on whether merchants and slave owners represented a threat to British politics, Cugoano argues that ill-gotten colonial wealth, whether created in India or the Caribbean, threatens Britain. He argues that "the greatest depredators, warriors, contracting companies of merchants, and rich slaver-holders" are corrupting Britain. Cugoano places the "contracting companies of merchants" (the East India Company) on par with the "rich slaver-holders" (plantation owners) in their effects on British social and political life.

## SLAVERY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF BRITISH LIBERTY

Unlike Edmund Burke, who did not see slavery as one "great constitutional question," for Ottobah Cugoano, the laws that support colonial slavery and the slave trade represent a profound threat to the British constitution.[432] The laws of Parliament that protect plantation owners and the merchants of the slave trade are undermining the British constitution and courting disaster. Cugoano writes:

> It may be feared if these unconstitutional laws, reaching from Great-Britain to her colonies, be long continued in and supported, to the carrying on that horrible and wicked traffic in slavery, must at last mark out the whole of the British constitution with ruin and destruction; and that the most generous and tenacious people in the world of liberty, may also at last be reduce to slaves.[433]

Cugoano argues that the support of despotic laws in the colonies will ultimately corrupt the laws of Britain. Combined with his analysis of the corruption of the political elite, he imagines that those who are involved and engaged in violence, rapine, theft, and other oppressive practices throughout the Empire would, whenever convenient, not hesitate to do the same in Britain. Thus, if the laws and people responsible for colonial destruction are not challenged, they will eventually undermine the liberties of Britain. At the same time, Cugoano predicts divine retribution if Britain does not abolish slavery and the slave trade.[434] The idea that the British could be "reduce[d] to slaves" thus likely refers both to the earthly corruptions of involvement with the slave trade and to how divine justice would settle the matter.

## ON THE HUMANITY OF AFRICANS

Edmund Burke and Ottobah Cugoano disagree both on whether the slave trade and

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[431] He writes, "But so it happens in general, that men of activity and affluence, by whatever way they are possessed of riches, or have acquired a greatness of property, they are always preferred to take the lead in matters of government, so that the greatest depredators, warriors, contracting companies of merchants, and rich slaver-holders, always endeavour to push themselves on to get power and interest in their favour; that whatever crimes any of them commit they are seldom brought to a just punishment." Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 90.

[432] F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II, 1784-1797* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 2006), 413.

[433] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 90.

[434] Ibid., 96.

colonial slavery threaten the British constitution, and about the very humanity of Africans. As Anthony Bogues argues in *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, European thinkers struggled with conceptualizing Africans as fully human. He writes:

> There was a Rubicon that neither Paine nor Diderot seemed to be able to cross—the granting of full human status to Africans. In the end, many radical Enlightenment thinkers foundered on this point. The critical issue was that underneath the surface of modern political thought of this period lay a definition of the human that excluded African slaves.[435]

In Burke's case, the denial of full humanity can be seen in his repeated use of the concept of savage to describe Africans, his expressed belief that Africa was in a state of slavery, and his representation of slaves as will-less human beings incapable of rational reflection. As we have seen, Burke's anti-imperialism does not include a robust defense of African humanity.

However, Cugoano does affirm African humanity on two distinct levels that are foundational in his political thought. Cugoano conceptualizes Africans as the bearers of both natural and civil rights, and represents them as fully rational, emotional, and sympathetic beings.

Cugoano has rightly been interpreted as a theorist of natural rights. In *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, he develops a unique conceptualization of natural rights that eschews a sharp dichotomy between natural rights and civil rights and establishes rights as "common" to all of mankind. [436] Thus, he often speaks of slavery as the theft of "the natural liberties of men," insisting that these natural liberties apply to African and European alike.[437] Slavery violates the "common rights and liberties of men" by selling men and women as chattel and robbing them of their freedom.

## CIVIL GOVERNMENT, THE MORAL IMAGINATION, AND CIVILIZATION

Alongside conceptualizing Africans as rights-bearing individuals, Cugoano also interprets Africa as a space of civilization and civil government. Throughout *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, African communities are discussed as spaces of civilization and civil government. Indeed, Cugoano does what Burke was unwilling (or unable) to do in his analysis of slavery in the Americas: render Africans sympathetic by showing their common humanity with Europeans. Cugoano evokes the aspects of European political and social life that his British audience would most readily identify, and demonstrates how these same phenomena exist in African civilization. This includes, but is not limited to, attachment to one's country, love of one's civil freedom, attachment to property, the pleasure of social discourse with friends, and love of one's family. Of this, Cugoano writes:

> As to the Africans selling their own wives and children, nothing can be more opposite to every thing they hold dear and valuable; and nothing can distress them more, than to part with any of their relations and friends. Such are the tender feelings of parents for their children, that, for the loss of a child, they seldom can be rendered happy, even with the intercourse and enjoyment of friends, for years ... And what man of feeling can help

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[435] Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 32.

[436] Ibid., 41.

[437] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 51. He writes, "But the taking away the natural liberties of men, and compelling them to an involuntary slavery or compulsory service, is an injustice and robbery contrary to all law, civilization, reason, justice, equity, and humanity."
Cugoano also writes that slavery robs Africans of "the common rights and liberties of men." Ibid., 71.

> lamenting the loss of parents, friends, liberty, and perhaps property and other valuable and dear connections. Those people annually brought away from Guinea, are born as free, and are brought up with as great a predilection for their own country, freedom and liberty, as the sons and daughters of fair Britain.[438]

For Cugoano, not only are Africans attached to their family and friends (something slavers denied), they are also attached to their liberty in a way that the British would understand. He argues that Africans are as sensitive and as emotionally developed as their European counterparts. They feel anguish not only at the loss of loved ones, but also at the loss of freedoms and the benefits of civil life.

Cugoano attempts to expand the moral imagination of the British public in the way that Burke attempts in his advocacy for the reform of the East India Company. Whereas Burke analogizes Indian civilization to European civilization, and in one case compares Bengal to Germany,[439] Cugoano compares African communities to feudal Scotland. He writes:

> Their different chieftains, which bear a reliance on the great chief, or king, exercise a kind of government something like that feudal institution which prevailed some time in Scotland. In this respect, though the common people are free, they often suffer by the villainy of their different chieftains, and by the wars and feuds which happen among them. Nevertheless their freedom and rights are dear to them, as those privileges are to other people. And it may be said that freedom, and the liberty of enjoying their own privileges, burns with as much zeal and fervor in the breast of an Ethiopian, as in the breast of any inhabitant on the globe. [440]

Cugoano's linking of African societies to feudal Scotland, which was a familiar society in the British imagination, works to provide greater understanding of what was perceived of as foreign and savage. Comparing African societies to feudalism raises the perceived civilizational level of Africans beyond that of the savage. Cugoano explicitly denies that Africans are "dispersed and unsociable," words usually associated with the image of the savage Amerindian and immortalized in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*.

The assertion that freedom is as dear to Africans as it is any "inhabitant of the globe," including Europe, represents a profound vista in his thought. African attachment to freedom and European attachment to freedom are equal because African societies are fundamentally civil societies in which freedom and rights are exercised in "enjoying" privileges. Burke is sympathetic to this position in that he conceives of Amerindians—the paradigm of savagery in modern historiography—as cultural agents, but he of course presents them as deficient in comparison with Europeans.

By showing the deep civil nature of African society (and later Amerindian society), Cugoano undercuts the fundamental distinction that denied rights to uncivilized and barbaric people, as well as denied full humanity to Africans and other non-European people. At the same time, Cugoano questions the civilizational level of Europe.

## RADICAL ABOLITIONISM

Cugoano's political thought, which is grounded in his conceptualization of common rights and natural liberty and an understanding of Africans as civil beings, has profound

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[438] Ibid., 27.
[439] Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 445.
[440] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 29.

implications for his recommendations for the slave trade and plantation slavery. The slave trade must immediately be abolished because human beings have a natural right to self-possession and Africans are fully human. He writes, "I would propose that a total abolition of slavery should be made and proclaimed; and that an universal emancipation of slaves should begin from the date thereof."[441] In Cugoano's proposal, any slave who has spent seven years in bondage, has knowledge of Christianity, and was honest would be immediately emancipated. Any enslaved person who had not been in bondage for seven years would become emancipated upon reaching seven years.

The Christianization of slaves places Cugoano firmly within a larger Christian ethos: one that is shared by many Afro-British abolitionists, including Oloudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho. In a similar vein, his commitment to a seven-year lag between purchase and emancipation—"In the course of that time, they would have sufficiently paid their owners by their labour"—appears to conform to the idea of self purchase."[442] The requirements of "knowledge of the Christian religion" and the seven-year period of unpaid labor could be interpreted as a pragmatic and strategic response to a public that would be wary of an immediate and universal emancipation. Whether Cugoano incorporated this line of argumentation in order to ensure that Christian audiences would support abolition, or because of a deeply held belief in the truth of Christian morality, is inconsequential. Although it is refracted differently throughout the text, at the heart of Cugoano's thought is the belief that ending slavery and emancipating slaves is both sensible and just:

> But why should total abolition, and an universal emancipation of slaves, and the enfranchisement of all the Black People employed in the culture of the Colonies, taking place as it ought to do, and without any hesitation, or delay for a moment, even though it might have some seeming appearance of loss either to government or to individuals, be feared at all?[443]

For a person who believes that Africans are fully human, intelligent, capable, and just people who have been unjustly kidnapped and enslaved, universal emancipation represents a return of natural and civil liberty, something they previously enjoyed or should have enjoyed.[444] From Cugoano's perspective, immediate emancipation represents the only logical outcome in light of the humanity of Africans and their natural rights. Thus, he states that Britain must "restore that justice and liberty which is our natural right, that we have been unlawfully deprived and cruelly wrong of, and to deliver us from that captivity and bondage which we now suffer under."[445] Justice would be restoration of liberty.

## BURKE AND CUGOANO SIDE BY SIDE

Aspects of Edmund Burke's anti-imperialism, including the denial of full humanity to Amerindians and Africans, the legitimizing of conquest, and the requirement of gradual abolition (and reform), stand in stark contrast with Ottobah Cugoano's anti-imperialism. For example, the history and conceptual framework through which Cugoano articulates modern colonialism, with its emphasis on the conquest of Amerindian nations and its continuation with slavery, display a

[441] Ibid., 98.
[442] Ibid., 99.
[443] Ibid,. 98.
[444] Ibid., 11.
[445] Ibid., 96.

profound appreciation of the effect of colonialism on Amerindians and Africans. The ideas that modern colonialism begins in the Americas, and that the horrors of empire in India and slavery are intimately connected, are important developments in anti-imperial thought.

Cugoano sees all modern colonialism through the lense of the conquest of the Americas, and thereby places Amerindians as the severe instances of colonialism. Of the relationship between Amerindians and colonists, he writes:

> None but men of the most brutish and depraved nature, led on by the invidious influence of infernal wickedness, could have made their settlements in the different parts of the world discovered by them, and have treated *the various Indian nations*, in the manner that the barbarous inhuman Europeans have done.[446]

This is scathing moral disapprobation not only of Spanish colonialism, but also British colonialism in North America. In contrast to Burke, who wrote that British settlers' policy of attempting to "extirpate" Amerindians during warfare was "injudicious," and hints that there was shared blame for aggression, force, and deaths,[447] Cugoano interprets past and present colonial interactions within the paradigm of the first European conquests of the Caribbean and South America. From Cugoano's perspective, European colonists, not Amerindians, were the "plunderers and destroyers of nations."[448]

Cugoano's injunction against conquest, summed up in the idea "that all their foreign settlements and colonies were founded on murders and devastations"[449] and the idea that men have a natural right to self-possession, is at odds with Burke's acceptance of the conquests of America as necessary for establishing European colonies, and his acceptance of conquest if it is executed in a humane fashion.

Burke's anti-imperialism utilized civilizational hierarchies, disregarded the full humanity of Amerindians and Africans, and refused to sympathetically render the destructive nature of plantation slavery and Amerindian dispossession. Jennifer Pitts has labeled these aspects of Burke's political thought "blind spots" and considers them "considerable exclusions," some of which were tempered over the course of his life.[450] However, I argue that these blind spots and considerable exclusions are not ancillary, but rather constitutive to his political thought, including his anti-imperialism.

The blind spots in Burke's political theory are directly in Cugoano's field of vision, producing the foundations of both his anti-imperialism and his political thought. Put another way, Cugoano's political thought appears to be rooted firmly in Africa and the Americas, even while it articulates both universal truths, and trenchant critiques of British policy in India, Britain, Africa, and the Americas. As such, Cugoano's writing represents one of the clearest and earliest examples of non-European anti-imperial thought that emerges from an active engagement with the dismantling of colonial slavery.

## ON REPARATIONS

Ottobah Cugoano has the peculiar status as one of the first people to theorize the possibility of reparations for colonial slavery and the slave trade. However, as has been pointed

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[446] Ibid., 62.
[447] Edmund Burke and William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, 2:162.
[448] Ottobah Quobna Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 113.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 62.

out by scholars, his idea of reparations expressed in the 1780s and early 1790s does not include monetary compensation, but rather the immediate end of the trade and plantation slavery. For Cugoano, his proposals for abolition and emancipation would be "a just commutation for what cannot be fully restored, in order to make restoration, as far as could be, for the injuries already done."[451] In this way, Cugoano articulates an idea that slavery and the slave trade resulted in effects that cannot be fully repaired. Cugoano appears to follow John Locke's argument that murder is without reparation, and expands it to account for enslavement.[452] Thus Cugoano states:

> When a man is carried captive and enslaved, and maimed and cruelly treated, that would make no adequate reparation and restitution for the injuries he had received, if he was even to get the person who had ensnared him to be taken captive and treated in the same manner. What he is to seek after is a deliverance and protection for himself, and not a revenge upon others.[453]

For Cugoano, although slave owners and slave traders could be rightfully put to death for stealing both life and liberty from Africans, the death penalty would neither provide "adequate reparation and restitution" nor provide Africans with what they needed in the present moment (i.e. "deliverance and protection"). Cugoano's discussion of the need to balance the punitive aspects of Divine Law (i.e. "an equal retaliation and restoration for every injury that men may do to others") with forgiveness leads him to argue that slave owners and traders should be stopped rather than killed. Thus, what is required is that "some plan might be adopted in such a manner as effectually to relieve the grievances and oppression of the Africans."[454]

For those scholars and thinkers critical of the theoretical and legal apparatus surrounding recent arguments for reparations, Cugoano serves as a forerunner to a line of thought that sees slavery as irreparable in a larger sense.[455] Similarly, Cugoano's thought serves as a guide for what nations responsible for slavery could do for the enslaved, formerly enslaved, and/or their descendants, which is to provide justice through the guaranteeing of "liberty which is our natural right."[456] Justice and liberty become the horizon of reparations, and in Cugoano's framework they require the state to decisively end the oppression that African (and African descendant) communities face from both the state and private citizens. In this way, reparations do not repair what cannot be repaired, but rather alleviate and destroy the violence that continues to exist through plantation slavery and its effects.

Examining Burke on reparations presents an interesting vista for interpretation. In the context of contemporary claims for reparations, the idea of compensation for past injustices would be inimical to Burke's political theory. By the end of his life, in his writings on Ireland and France, Burke was loath to see history as an excuse for the redistribution of wealth and prior claims to wealth, especially in the form of land. He consistently grounds all property rights in the right of prescription, which leads to his injunction against further "confiscations" in Ireland.[457]

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[451] Ibid., 102.

[452] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11. Locke writes, "Thus it is, that every man, in the state of nature, has a power to kill a murderer, both to deter others from doing the like injury, which no reparation can compensate, by the example of the punishment."

[453] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 52.

[454] Ibid., 102.

[455] Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92 (Berkeley: University of California Press, Fall 2005), 9. "By 1787 it was too late to imagine the repair of its injury."

[456] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 96.

[457] Edmund Burke, "Tracts on the Popery Laws," in *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Edmund Burke*, vol. 6 (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1852), 66.

Alongside his advocacy for conceptualizing all property as based in prescription, his expressed belief that conquests provide benefits to those conquered make him an unlikely candidate for conceptualizing reparations, whether they are monetary, tied to seeking acknowledgement of a historical injustice, or an apology.[458]

However, Burke's writings on Ireland share commonalities with Cugoano's commitment to reparations, and highlight Burke's commitment to justice for those misgoverned and oppressed. In particular, Burke's use of the "interior history" of Ireland represents a similar historiography as Cugoano's history of colonialism and slavery in the modern world. Although Burke's conception of history precludes "punishing innocent" people in the present, justice should still be served in the present, through a historical understanding of present injustice and the abuse of power in contemporary settings.[459]

The shared vision of Cugoano and Burke on history, injustice, and reparations can be clearly discerned in Burke's writings on Ireland and Cugoano's writings on colonialism. In his "Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe," Burke describes Anglo-Irish—and therefore British—rule in Ireland in the language of colonial violence. There, he argues that the primary mode of governance is force and subjection. For Burke, late eighteenth century Anglo-Irish and Irish Catholic interactions represent both the failure of the British to integrate the two populations and the continuation of English conquest of Ireland. As opposed to the ways in which the Romans colonized, the English colonization in Ireland, (especially after the English Revolution), had failed to evolve into a stable and just relationship. He writes:

> For a much longer time than that which had sufficed to blend the Romans with the nation [the Gauls] to which of all others they were the most adverse, the Protestants settled in Ireland considered themselves in no other light than that of a colonial garrison, to keep the natives in subjection to the other state of Great Britain. The whole spirit of the revolution in Ireland, was that of not the mildest conqueror. In truth, the spirit of these proceedings did not commence at that aera, nor was religion of any kind their primary object. What was done, was not in the spirit of two religious factions; but between two adverse nations.[460]

According to Burke, Ireland has historically been ruled based on Protestant hatred of the Irish Catholic, which was initially a national antipathy. Burke's claim that the Glorious Revolution in Ireland represented an English attempt to subjugate its native population means that the historical configuration of Protestant and Irish Catholic relations was one of fierce animosity. The image of a garrison, pure force, flies in the face of Burke's understanding of trusteeship, which requires not only attention to the well-being, rights, and happiness of those who are ruled—i.e. ruling for benefit—but also requires emotional attachments that cannot exist when rulers consider their subjects perpetual rebels.

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[458] Duncan Ivison provides an insightful description of the different forms of reparations commonly argued for in the political sphere. He writes, "By restitution I mean the restoration, or handing back of the thing that was originally taken. If my wages are stolen, I get them back; if our land is stolen, we get it back. By compensation I mean the attempt to make amends for, or offset the consequences of the wrong are such so as to render literal restitution impossible...by recognition or acknowledgment I mean the sense in which reparations force the recognition of the basic humanity and subjectivity of the victims denied in the perpetration of harm against them." Duncan Ivison, "Historical Injustice" in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 510.

[459] Burke, "Tracts on the Popery Laws," 66.

[460] Edmund Burke, "Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, M.P," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke: Vol. 4* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1852), 479.

For Burke, the complexities of Irish history both explain the source of oppression that Irish Catholics faced and support arguments for their alleviation. In his "Tracts on the Popery Laws," written in 1767, Burke writes an alternative history to Anglo-Irish relations that rebuts Anglo propagandists. This history reveals that British rule in Ireland had always been a mode of domination that functioned as general oppression. Anglo-Irish political claims that Irish Catholics should remain without access to legal remedies and without the ability to inherit landed property were premised on a selective reading of Irish Catholics as rebels and traitors to England. Whereas the dominant Anglo-Irish historians saw Irish rebellion as a persistent and unalterable state, Burke argued that systematic oppression had bred rebellion, and if oppression ended, the Irish Catholics would be loyal subjects. He writes:

> Those miserable performances which go about under the names of Histories of Ireland … [which] would persuade us, contrary to the known order of Nature, that indulgence and moderation in Governors is the natural incitement in subjects to rebel. But there is an interior history of Ireland, the genuine voice of its records and monuments … For they even now should to those who have been at pains to examine them, and they may show one day to all of the world, that these rebellions were not produced by toleration, but by persecution – that they arose not from just and mild government, but from unparalleled oppression.[461]

The "interior history" of Ireland is the history of the "unparalleled oppression" that Irish Catholics had suffered at the hands of Anglo-Irish populations who confiscated their lands, denied them fundamental legal rights, and placed them in a state of legal and social destitution within their own land.

However, for Burke the unparalleled oppressions of the "interior history" of Ireland have not yet passed, but were embodied in the legal apparatus of the Penal Laws which continued to shape all aspects of Irish society. In his letter "Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe" written twenty-five years later than the "Tract on the Penal Laws," Burke describes the penal laws passed after the restoration of the English monarchy as an "unparalleled code of oppression," which were "manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people; whom the victors delighted to trample upon, and were not all afraid to provoke."[462] At the time of Burke's letter (1792), Irish Catholics still were unable to inherit landed property, to practice law or medicine, or own arms for self-defense. Irish Catholics were not treated as true subjects of the Crown but rather as rebels who had to be continually subdued. For Burke, it is the continued legitimacy of the Penal Laws that signified that the wound of conquest, including the late seventeenth century "subduing" of Ireland was not closed. Burke's understanding of the "interior history" and the "unparalleled oppression" of Irish Catholics that followed the enactment of the Penal Laws fits well with one aspect of Cugoano's idea of reparations: its forward-looking orientation.

In both Cugoano and Burke, contemporary injustice is rooted in the past, and necessitates reform of institutions to break the continuity with the violence of colonialism and conquest. Here, Duncan Ivison's parsing of the relationship between historical injustice and contemporary responsibility is invaluable. For Ivison, reflection on history can lead to collective action. He writes:

> The first is to see claims about historical injustice as being essentially forward-looking, insofar as their main purpose is to link present-day injustices to a long history of injustice

[461] Burke, "Tracts on the Popery Laws," 37.
[462] Edmund Burke, "Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, M.P," 528.

> and to motivate and mobilize collective action to get people to take political responsibility for changing the situation. History matters here mainly in terms of what we might call the 'politics of memory'. The differing ways in which 'we'—both individually and collectively—remember the past and situate ourselves in relation to it, significantly shapes our sense of whether and how the past persists in the present.[463]

The collective memory that Burke sought to motivate as the "interior history" of Ireland, was meant to motivate not only Anglo-Protestant reformers, but also the larger British public. Burke's use of history and historical injustice was intended to provide better governance of Ireland and an end to the Penal Laws that kept the Irish Catholics in a state of unnatural subordination without property rights, religious freedom, and equal legal standing. In this way, the "interior history" of Ireland serves as the historical narrative that justifies the repeal of the Penal Laws and integration of Irish Catholic populations into the British Empire with greater rights, privileges, and liberties.

Burke is committed to the rectification of present injustices, rooted in the English conquest and subsequent colonization of Ireland. However, it is clear that Burke would be against the three forms of reparations—"restitution," "compensation" and "acknowledgement," that Ivison defines in his essay.[464] Burke explicitly disavowed any restitution of Irish Catholic lands when he wrote, "I shall never praise confiscation or counter-confiscations as long as I live."[465] Any "compensation" for past confiscations would strike him as "punishing innocent men" for deeds in which they did not participate.[466] At the same time, an "acknowledgement" of historical injustice that did not accompany the repeal of the Penal Laws would be meaningless, whereby an acknowledgment that accompanied a repeal of the Penal Laws would be superfluous.

Cugoano believes that "reparations" in the sense of compensation and restitution are impossible because slavery occupies a similar position to murder; its victims cannot be repaired. However, although there could be no reparation for slavery, Cugoano conceptualizes the end of the slave trade and abolition as "a just commutation for what cannot be fully restored, in order to make restoration, as far as could be, for the injuries already done."[467] Cugoano's focus was on the contemporary injustices of colonial slavery and the slave trade, and the need for their destruction.

Burke and Cugoano would disagree on why reparations for slavery would not work. Cugoano sees reparations as fundamentally impossible in reference to slavery because what has been taken cannot be restored; while Burke would see reparations for slavery as problematic because it either would punish innocent people (if it happens after the deaths of the perpetrators), or it would disrupt private property. Similarly, Burke and Cugoano profoundly disagree on the immediacy of the abolition of the slave trade and emancipation of slaves: where Cugoano sees the need for immediate abolition and rapid emancipation, Burke sees the need for gradual abolition and a remote emancipation. However, Burke and Cugoano have complementary visions of justice that are grounded in the need for systematic reforms of sections of the British Empire. Here, in light of Burke's and Cugoano's vision of imperial reform, it might be best to think through the ways in which their views of historical injustice can shape our understanding of

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[463] Duncan Ivison, "Historical Injustice," 519.

[464] Ibid., 510.

[465] Burke, "Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, M.P," 528.

[466] "History records many things which ought to make us hate evil actions; but neither history nor morals, nor policy, can teach us to punish innocent men on that account." Burke appears to share the Lockean notion that the sons do not inherit the x of the father.

[467] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 102.

contemporary injustices. Although Burke's vision of reparations would deny reparations to the descendants of slaves, or to formerly colonized communities and nations, this denial need not lead to continuation of the status quo—especially if the status quo is rooted in a historical injustice continuing into the present. Moreover, Burke argues that the lesson of history is to make us more attentive to the abuses of power in our society. Thus, in response to the idea of confiscating Anglo-Irish lands, Burke wrote:

> History records many things which ought to make us hate evil actions; but neither history nor morals, nor policy, can teach us to punish innocent men on that account. What lesson does the iniquity of prevalent factions read to us? It ought to lesson us into an abhorrence of the abuse of our own power in our own day; when we hate its excesses so much in other persons and in other times.[468]

A Burkean interpretation of contemporary times may focus on the ways in which power functions in the present. Such a focus could still provide for substantial reform and the mitigation of historical injustices in the present, as Burke sought to do in the eighteenth century.

## NON-EUROPEAN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Although Ottobah Cugoano represents one of the clearest examples of a non-European anti-imperial thinker, there were other eighteenth century non-European anti-imperial thinkers throughout the Atlantic world. Chief Pontiac of the Ottawa, who led Pontiac's War in 1763, and Joseph Chayolter, who was one of the leaders of the "Black" Caribs on St. Vincent during the latter half of the eighteenth century, could be interpreted as eighteenth century Amerindian anti-imperial thinkers and actors. Both were Amerindian leaders who understood and challenged the conceptual and practical relationship of the British Empire to Amerindian sovereignty, land, and culture.

Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture, both leaders of the Haitian Revolution, could also be interpreted as anti-imperial thinkers, for their conceptualization of the relationship of slavery, abolition, emancipation, and national sovereignty in the late 1790s. By ending this project with a focus on the work of Cugoano, I hope to shift the discussion of eighteenth century anti-imperialism away from its exclusive focus on European thinkers. Exploring non-European eighteenth century anti-imperial thinkers and activists would provide further depth in understanding eighteenth century political and social thought. A future project would necessarily query how we can understand and come to grips with anti-imperial political thought and action at the edge of empire. How did eighteenth century non-European subjects of empire understanding the British Empire, the history of colonialism, and plantation slavery? And more importantly, how did they resist the British Empire, in thought and action?

[468] Edmund Burke, "Tracts on the Popery Laws," 66.

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