

**THE INTIMACIES
OF FOUR CONTINENTS
LISA LOWE**

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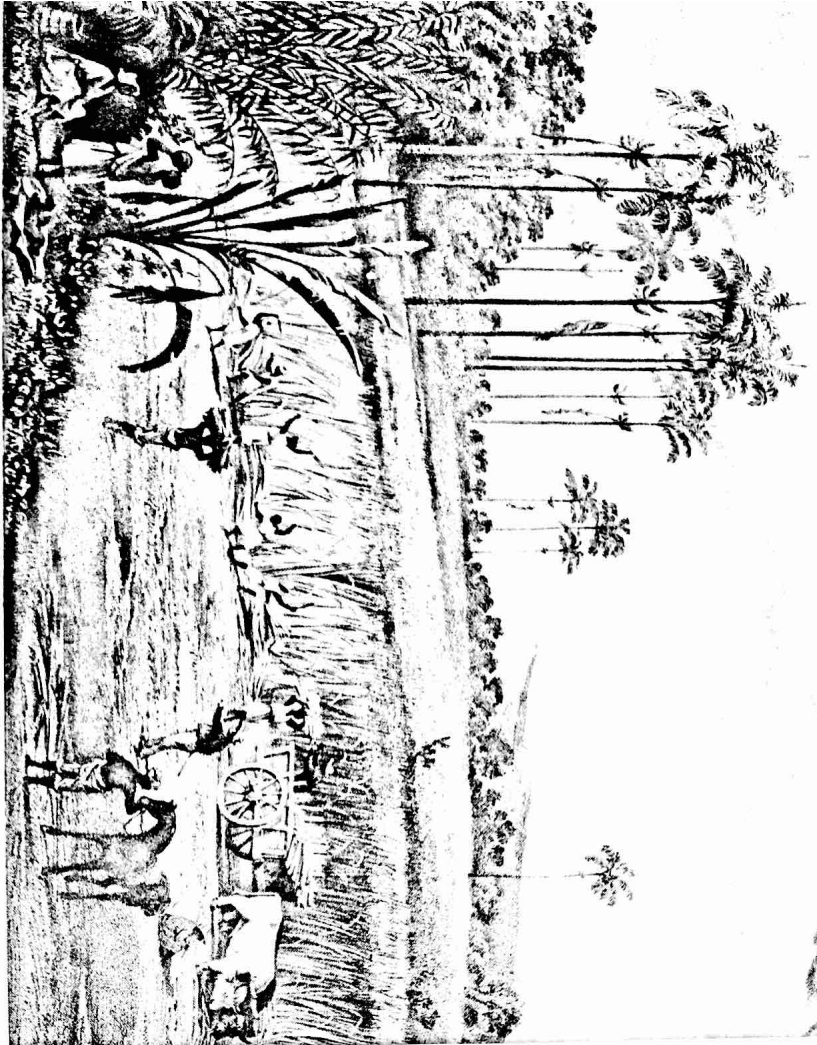
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CHAPTER 1

THE INTIMACIES

OF FOUR CONTINENTS

My study investigates the often obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940), Fernando Ortiz described “peoples from all four quarters of the globe” who labored in the “new world” to produce tobacco and sugar for European consumption.¹ Observing that sugar linked the histories of colonial settlers, native peoples, and slave labor, followed by Chinese and other migrants, Ortiz commented that sugar was “mulatto” from the start. C. L. R. James asserted in *The Black Jacobins* (1938), that the eighteenth-century slave society in San Domingo connected Europe, Africa, and the Americas. He declared that the fortunes created by the slavery-based societies in the Americas gave rise to the French bourgeoisie, producing the conditions for the “rights of man” demanded in the Revolution of 1789.² These understandings that the “new world” of European settlers, indigenous peoples, Africans, and Asians in the Americas was intimately related to the rise of liberal modernity are the inspiration for my investigation.³ Yet I work with the premise that we actually know little about these “intimacies of four continents,” despite separate scholarship about single societies, peoples, or regions. The modern division of knowledge into academic disciplines, focused on discrete areas and objects of interest to the modern national university, has profoundly



1.1 *Cutting Sugar Cane in Trinidad*, Richard Bridgens (1836). Lithograph from *West India Scenery*, by Richard Bridgens. © The British Library Board.

shaped the inquiry into these connections.⁴ Even the questions we can ask about these histories are influenced by the unevenly inhabited and inconsistently understood aftermath of these obscured conditions.

Historians, philosophers, and sociologists have written quite a lot about the origins of liberalism in modern Europe, whether they focus on the French Revolution of 1789 as a key event in the shift from feudal aristocracies to democratic nation-states, or whether they emphasize the gradual displacement of religious explanation by secular scientific rationalism, the shift from mercantilism to industrial capitalism, the growth of modern bureaucracy, or citizenship within the modern state.⁵ Yet these discussions have more often treated liberalism's abstract promises of human freedom, rational progress, and social equality apart from the global conditions on which they depended. I join scholars like Cedric Robinson, Saidiya Hartman, Uday Singh Mehta, Paul Gilroy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Saree Makdisi, Walter Dignolo, Susan Buck-Morss, Jodi A. Byrd, and others, in arguing that liberal philosophy, culture, economics, and government have been commensurate with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire.⁶ There is a distinguished historiography of the Atlantic slave trade and slave economies, which documents slavery throughout the Americas, but it is rare for these scholars to discuss the relationship between slavery and settler colonialism or imported indentured labor.⁷ There is work on indentured labor systems utilizing Europeans and Africans, with some attention to the role of Chinese and Indian migrations to the Americas, but there is less work that examines European colonial conquest and the complex history and survival of native indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, and scarcely any that considers the connections, relations, and mixings among the histories of Asian, African, and indigenous peoples in the Americas.⁸

In examining state archives out of which these historical narratives emerge, I observe the ways in which the archive that mediates the imperatives of the state subsumes colonial violence within narratives of imperial reason and progress. To make legible the forcible encounters, removals, and entanglements omitted in liberal accounts of abolition, emancipation, and independence, I devise other ways of reading so that we might understand the processes through which the forgetting of violent encounter is naturalized, both by the archive, and in the subsequent nar-

rative histories. In a sense, one aim of my project is to be more specific about what I would term the economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding. This economy civilizes and develops freedoms for “man” in modern Europe and North America, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilized, and unfree. Liberal forms of political economy, culture, government, and history propose a narrative of freedom overcoming enslavement that at once denies colonial slavery, erases the seizure of lands from native peoples, displaces migrations and connections across continents, and internalizes these processes in a national struggle of history and consciousness. The social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which “the human” is “freed” by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from “the human.”

My study could be considered an unlikely or unsettling genealogy of modern liberalism, which examines liberalism as a project that includes at once both the universal promises of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade, as well as the global divisions and asymmetries on which the liberal tradition depends, and according to which such liberties are reserved for some and wholly denied to others. In this sense, the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, and not its particular exception. This genealogy also traces the manners in which the liberal affirmations of individualism, civility, mobility, and free enterprise simultaneously innovate new means and forms of subjection, administration, and governance. By genealogy, I mean that my analysis does not accept given categories and concepts as fixed or constant, but rather takes as its work the inquiry into how those categories became established as given, and with what effects. Genealogical method questions the apparent closure of our understanding of historical progress and attempts to contribute to what Michel Foucault has discussed as a historical ontology of ourselves, or a history of the present.⁹ By modern liberalism, I mean broadly the branches of European political philosophy that include the narration of political emancipation through citizenship in the state, the promise of economic freedom in

the development of wage labor and exchange markets, and the conferring of civilization to human persons educated in aesthetic and national culture—in each case unifying particularity, difference, or locality through universal concepts of reason and community.¹⁰ I also include in this definition the literary, cultural, and aesthetic *genres* through which liberal notions of person, civic community, and national society are established and upheld.

In this sense, my study involves connecting what we might call an “archive of liberalism”—that is, the literary, cultural, and political philosophical narratives of progress and individual freedom that perform the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions—with the colonial state archives from which it has been traditionally separated, and the anticolonial intellectual traditions infrequently considered alongside the imperial one. In this effort, I do not treat the colonial archive as a stable, transparent collection of facts. Rather, I regard its architecture of differently functioning offices and departments as rooms of the imperial state; they house the historically specific technologies of colonial governance for knowing and administering colonized populations, which both attest to its contradictions, and yield its critique.¹¹ As Ann Laura Stoler argues, the colonial archive is “a supreme technology of the . . . imperial state, a repository of codified beliefs that clustered (and bore witness to) connections between secrecy, the law, and power.”¹² As a material bureaucracy of rule, *and* the historical trace of imperial activities, the colonial archive portrays colonial governance as a strategic, permeable, and improvisational process: the tireless collection of tables, statistics, measurements, and numbers; the unending volumes of records and reports; the copied and recopied correspondence between offices; the production of legal classifications, cases, and typologies—these actively document *and* produce the risks, problems, and uncertainties that were the conditions of imperial rule. Inasmuch as Colonial Office and Foreign Office papers, India Office Records, War Department memoranda, and Parliamentary Select Committee reports constitute the very media of colonial administration, they likewise conjure what the colonial bureaucracy did not and could not know—its equivocation, ignorance, and incoherence—even as it performed the agency of an imperial will to know. In other words, the colonial state archive both mediates and

subsumes the uncertainties of liberal and imperial governance; in it, one reads the predicaments, both known and unknown, that give rise to the calculations, strategies, forms, and practices of imperial rule.

The vast collections of the Great Britain National Archives, formerly the Public Records Office, hold the papers of the British Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, the Slave Trade and African Department, the War and Colonial Department, the Records of the Treaty and Royal Letter Department, and others. Within these, there are separate records of the settling of territories around the world, the transatlantic slave trade, the governing of colonies, the abolition of slavery, and the emigration of Chinese labor to sites in the Americas. The papers are organized into distinct departments for Trade, Laws, Correspondence, Sessional Records, and so forth, with divisions within each for the administration of regions: for example, Africa and colonial exploration, America and the West Indies, Asia, the Atlantic, Australia and New Zealand, and so forth, and then individual series for each British colony within each area.¹³ There are separate files for acts, treaties, ordinances, taxes, and other specific subjects and functions. The National Archives are organized to preserve government records and information for the public; its imperatives are classification, collection, and documentation, rather than connection or convergence.¹⁴

Hence, it is fair to observe that there is scarce attention to the *relationships between* the matters classified within distinct stores; the organization of the archives discourages links between settler colonialism in North America and the West Indies and the African slave trade; or attention to the conjunction of the abolition of slavery and the importing of Chinese and South Asian indentured labor; or a correlation of the East Indies and China trades and the rise of bourgeois Europe. In order to nuance these connections and interdependencies, one must read *across* the separate repositories organized by office, task, and function, and by period and area, precisely implicating one set of preoccupations in and with another. It has been necessary both to examine the events that are well documented in the collected papers, as well as to heed those matters that are entirely absent, whether actively suppressed or merely deemed insignificant. I notice the aporia in the archives, often belied by discrepant tone or insistent repetitions, and remark the rhetorical anomalies

that obscure omissions, tensions, or outright illogic. While such reading practices deeply respect the primacy of material conditions, they also often defy or disrupt accepted historical chronologies. This approach does not foreground comprehensiveness and teleology, in either a historical or geographical sense, but rather emphasizes the relationality and differentiation of peoples, cultures, and societies, as well as the convergence and divergence of ideas, concepts, and themes. In pursuing particular intimacies and contemporaneities that traverse distinct and separately studied “areas,” the practice of reading across archives unsettles the discretely bounded objects, methods, and temporal frameworks canonized by a national history invested in isolated origins and independent progressive development.¹⁵

The consideration of the colonial archive as intrinsic to the archives of liberalism permits us to understand that as modern liberalism defined the “human” and universalized its attributes to European man, it simultaneously differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human. Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance.¹⁶ In this study of how liberal ideas of political emancipation, ethical individualism, historical progress, and free market economy were employed in the expansion of empire, I observe that the uses of universalizing concepts of reason, civilization, and freedom effect colonial divisions of humanity, affirming liberty for modern man while subordinating the variously colonized and dispossessed peoples whose material labor and resources were the conditions of possibility for that liberty.¹⁷ These processes that comprise the fifteenth-century “discovery” of the “new world,” consolidate themselves through modern liberal political economy and culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We see the longevity of the colonial divisions of humanity in our contemporary moment, in which the human life of citizens protected by the state is bound to the denigration of populations cast in violation of human life, set outside of human society.¹⁸ Furthermore, while violence characterizes exclusion from the universality of the human, it also accompanies inclusion or assimilation into it. Such violence leaves a trace, which returns and

unsettles the apparent closure of the liberal politics, society, and culture that establish the universal. *Race* as a mark of colonial difference is an enduring remainder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten. The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of modern race; racial differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality.

To observe that the genealogy of modern liberalism is simultaneously a genealogy of colonial divisions of humanity is a project of tracking the ways in which race, geography, nation, caste, religion, gender, sexuality and other social differences become elaborated as normative categories for governance under the rubrics of liberty and sovereignty. Elaborations of racial difference were not universal or transhistorical; they did not occur all at once but were local, regional, and differential, articulated in dynamic, interlocking ways with other attributions of social difference within various spaces in an emerging world system.¹⁹ The operations that pronounce colonial divisions of humanity—settler seizure and native removal, slavery and racial dispossession, and racialized expropriations of many kinds—are imbricated processes, not sequential events; they are ongoing and continuous in our contemporary moment, not temporally distinct nor as yet concluded. To investigate modern race is to consider how racial differences articulate complex intersections of social difference within specific conditions.²⁰ We can link the emergence of liberties defined in the abstract terms of citizenship, rights, wage labor, free trade, and sovereignty with the attribution of racial difference to those subjects, regions, and populations that liberal doctrine describes as “unfit for liberty” or “incapable of civilization,” placed at the margins of liberal humanity. Over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal and colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered. Settlers represented indigenous peoples as violent threats to be eliminated in ways that rationalized white settlement and African slavery; they discounted native people as uncivilized or non-Christian, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable

or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past.²¹ Colonial administrators, traders, and company agents cast captive Africans as inhuman chattel, as enslavable property. Colonial governors conceived the Chinese as if they were a plentiful, tractable form of labor that could alternately oppose, replace, or supplement slavery; colonial police and criminal courts represented the Chinese as diseased addicts, degenerate vagrants, and prostitutes. These distinct yet connected racial logics constituted parts of what was in the nineteenth century an emergent Anglo-American settler imperial imaginary, which continues to be elaborated today, casting differentiated peoples across the globe in relation to liberal ideas of civilization and human freedom. The safekeeping and preservation of liberal political society, and the placement of peoples at various distances from liberal humanity—"Indian," "Black," "Negro," "Chinese," "coolie," and so forth—are thus integral parts of the genealogy of modern liberalism.²² Not only differentiated racial classifications, but taxonomies that distinguished between continents and civilizations have been essential to liberal, settler, and colonial governance.²³ In this book, I suggest that the "coloniality" of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection.²⁴

Liberal myths about the "capacity for liberty" and narratives about the need for "civilization" serve to subjugate enslaved, indigenous, and colonized peoples, and to obscure the violence of both their separations and their mixtures. In classic liberal political narratives, the move from the state of nature to political society is justified by the need to contain the natural condition of war in which human life and property interests are threatened by violence. Liberal government secures the "peaceful" conditions of individual and collective security by transferring the violence of the state of nature to the political state, executed through laws that "protect" the subjects within civil society, and constitute other peoples as the very limit of that body. In this book, I elaborate what I believe to be key moments in this genealogy, in which racial classifications and colonial divisions of humanity emerged in the colonial acquisition of territory, and the management of labor, reproduction, and social space. Settlement, slavery, and colonial relations of production were conditions both for encounter and mixing, and for the racial classifications that both denied and yet sought

to organize such mixing. Liberal ideas of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade were articulated in and through the shifting classifications that emerged to manage social difference.

In the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), for example, Locke's state of nature prior to government serves as the means to outline the definition of liberal rights to property and against tyranny. The mythical state of nature alludes to the settling of the "new world" of the Americas, whose fictional "newness" would have been apparent for Locke, who was a member of the English company that settled the Carolina colony and the presumed author of its *Fundamental Constitutions*, and who served as Treasurer for the English Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations.²⁵ While many liberal thinkers from Locke to Mill were famously involved in colonial settlement and trade, my argument about liberalism and colonialism is not one of biographical complicity but rather observes that it is precisely by means of liberal principles that political philosophy provided for colonial settlement, slavery, and indenture. While Locke's natural law would seem to grant native people's rightful possession of the land on which they hunt, gather, and labor, natural law contributed to English settlement through the provision that "everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of the law . . . to preserve the innocent and restrain offenders."²⁶ After leaving the state of nature to form a political society, Locke maintains the liberal citizen's right "to destroy a Man who makes War upon him," as the native American people were regularly represented.²⁷ The treaties and correspondence collected in the Colonial Office papers repeatedly represent lands in the Americas and West Indies as "not possessed by any Christian prince of People" and refer to "Indians" or "native" peoples as "infidels" and "Savages," antithetical to "human civility," with whom the settlers are in "continual war."²⁸ The native resistance to European intrusion was regularly cast as a threat to the security of settler sovereignty, which rationalized war and suppression. For example, the "King's Bill containing a grant to Francis Lord Willoughby of Parham and Lawrence Hyde," May 6, 1663, with respect to settling an English colony in Guiana, guarantees settlers' rights "in case of invasion by the natives or any other enemies train and muster the inhabitants and fight with any persons not in amity with his Majesty, to proclaim martial law, and subdue all tumults, rebellions, and mutinies."²⁹

In King Philip's War, the Puritan war against the native American people in southern New England was justified by portraying them as threats to the settlers, and thereby giving up their rightful claims.³⁰ In Locke's *Two Treatises*, the provision for rightful conquest is described as "an Absolute Power over the Lives of those, who by an Unjust War have forfeited them."³¹

Moreover, settler powers were further justified by Locke's definition of the right to property, in which labor entitles one to possession of land, and which represents the lands in the Americas as if they were insufficiently cultivated, or devoid of inhabitants: "Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property."³² This "appropriation of any parcel of *Land*, by improving to *terra nullius* in international law, the term used to describe territory that has not been subject to the sovereignty of any state. The representation of the so-called new world as vacant and uninhabited by Christianized persons, was a central trope of settler colonialism, employed to banish, sequester, and dispossess indigenous peoples of their lands.³³ Indigenous studies scholars such as Glen Coulthard, Jodi A. Byrd, I. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Shona N. Jackson and others have distinguished the liberal rationale for settler colonialism, in which settler conquest sought to eliminate or assimilate indigenous people and appropriate their lands, from the liberal economic provisions for modern colonial projects that focused on the extraction of resources and exploitation of labor.³⁴ Because ongoing settler projects of seizure, removal, and elimination are neither analogous to the history and afterlife of racial slavery, nor akin to the racialized exploitation of immigrant laborers, the discussion of settler colonialism cannot be simply folded into discussions of race without reckoning with its difference. Jodi A. Byrd observes that "Racialization and colonization have worked simultaneously to other and abject entire peoples so they can be enslaved, excluded, removed, and killed in the name of progress and capitalism," but cautions that we do not "obfuscate the distinctions between the two systems of dominance and the coerced complexities amid both."³⁵ In other words, liberalism comprises a multifaceted, flexible, and contradictory set of provisions that at once rational-

izes settler appropriation and removal differently than it justifies either the subjection of human beings as enslaved property, or the extraction of labor from indentured emigrants, however much these processes share a colonial past and an ongoing colonial present. In this book, I stress that the differentially situated histories of indigeneity, slavery, industry, trade, and immigration give rise to linked, but not identical, genealogies of liberalism. I focus on relation across differences rather than equivalence, on the convergence of asymmetries rather than the imperatives of identity.

Lockean liberal political and economic rights to property and commerce were also notoriously employed to justify the slave trade and the ownership of slaves. The correspondence of colonial administrators, slave traders, and company agents are replete with statements that affirmed their rights to own and trade human beings, designated as chattel and cargo, without reckoning with the system of enslavement that depended on violence, violation, and dehumanization. Royal African Company papers describe "supplies of considerable Numbers of Negroes at very moderate rates" and boast, "This Cheapness of Negroes was the very Root that Caused such an Improvement and Growth of the Plantations, Such an Exportation of British Manufactures, Such an Importation of Sugar, Tobacco, Bullion, and other Products of America, and Such an Increase of Shipping and Navigation for those Purposes."³⁶ The seventeenth-century traveler Richard Ligon wrote, "They Choose them as they do horses in a market."³⁷ The transatlantic slave trade tore African captives from their social worlds and violently forced them into community with one another, aboard the slave ships, and then on the plantations. In *Saltwater Slavery*, Stephanie Smallwood's study of the seventeenth-century slave trade, this brutal transformation of African persons into commodities as the origin of the racialization of Blacks as enslaved property is examined. In her analysis of the Royal African Company papers, Smallwood notes that the operative unit of the slave ship was never the individual person but was rather the "full complement" of human cargo. Being owned as property was the idiom that defined the slaves' new condition, replacing kinship and location as cultural media that bound person to society. Smallwood eloquently extends Orlando Patterson's observations that natal alienation committed slaves to "social death" and emphasizes that "saltwater slavery was something more, something horrifyingly different," in

that the slaves were unable to “die honorably,” were no longer “dead kin connected with community of the living.”³⁸

The “horrifying differences” included corporal tortures and sexual violation, and the subjection of slavewomen as breeders of enslaved offspring to whom they were forbidden maternal claim. In her discussion of the 1662 law of *partus sequitur ventrem* dictating that the children of a slavewoman inherited the mother’s status as slaves, historian Jennifer Morgan notes that the law is evidence that not only the most intimate spheres of slave relations were legislated, but that slavewomen’s bodies were the most vulnerable sites within colonial slavery’s permanent state of exception, forced to reproduce “kinlessness.”³⁹ Saidiya Hartman likewise observes that slaves were not civic persons, but dehumanized property, and she argues that slavery founded the conditions of possibility for liberal civil society to emerge, reproducing Black exile from individual will, domesticity, property, and social recognition in the aftermath of so-called emancipation.⁴⁰ Simon Gikandi observes that the distance of colonial slave societies from metropolitan Europe kept the overt horrors of slavery out of view for most eighteenth-century English, but slavery’s brutalities shaped and haunted English society, culture, values, and taste.⁴¹

While the language of both political and economic rights had been used to justify European ownership and trade in captive people, by the late eighteenth century, abolitionists employed liberal principles to argue for the emancipation of slaves, however much liberalism’s imbrication in colonial slavery paradoxically restricted the realization of freedom. Christian abolitionists, like William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp, submitted that slavery was cruel and immoral, and that its end was necessary for a just, humanitarian English society.⁴² Black British abolitionists like Robert Wedderburn, Mary Prince, Olaudah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoana were often persuaded to articulate their opposition to slavery in similar terms.⁴³ Adam Smith and his followers had insisted that freed men would work better than slaves, and that slave labor was the more expensive form of labor.⁴⁴ Notions of free labor were used by Francis Hutcheson to argue that “all men have strong desires of liberty and property,” and that no rational creature could be changed into “a piece of goods void of all right.”⁴⁵ Yet while such arguments brought

economic and political reforms to England, they failed to curtail the slave trade, and conditions of enslavement persisted for former slaves far beyond so-called emancipation. Abstract notions of individual rights neither removed social barriers nor included the material means necessary to fulfill the promised freedoms, and liberal abolitionist arguments were less important to the passage of the Slave Trade Act and the Slavery Abolition Act than were the dramatic revolts and everyday practices of enslaved peoples themselves. Nothing has been a more powerful force against the dehumanizing subjugation of a people than the imminent threat of their rebellion and uprising. As I contend in this chapter, the Colonial Office papers regarding the decisions to end the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in the empire in 1834, demonstrate that Colonial Office administrators were more concerned both to prevent Black revolution in the colonies, and to expand profits in the sugar industry, than with the immorality of the dehumanizing system. Liberal parliamentarians legislating the four-year “apprenticeship” and the postemancipation societies after 1838 were guided more by the interests of West Indian colonial governors and ex-slaveholders, than by the commitment to providing material resources that would make self-determination possible for former slaves.⁴⁶ In chapter 2, I discuss the abolitionist embrace of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written By Himself* (1789) as a narrative of liberal freedom and observe that the autobiography, as the narrative genre of liberal political subjectivity that affirms individual right, cannot resolve the persistent contradictions of colonial slavery. Equiano’s autobiography portrays his life as a freed man continuously threatened by the possibility of abduction and reenslavement.

The narrative overcoming of enslavement by freedom is found in political philosophy, as well, in which the opposition between slavery and right appears as the central contradiction to be resolved by political society. Drawing on the Greco-Roman tradition, modern European political philosophers defined “freedom” as the overcoming of “slavery,” yet “slavery” was often located in a temporally distant “old world” rather than in the “new world” of the Americas.⁴⁷ For example, in *The Social Contract* (*Du contrat social*, 1762), Rousseau stated, “These words *slave* and *right* are contradictory and mutually exclusive.”⁴⁸ Rousseau specified enslavement

as the illegitimate subjection of European man in the French ancien régime and associated this condition with ancient slavery, resolving the contradiction between slavery and right temporally, through the founding of a new republic representing the *general will*. In locating slavery in the distant past, or in European man's inequality, Rousseau performed a rhetorical elision of colonial slavery in spaces that were intimately connected, yet at a geographical distance, from eighteenth-century Europe. The connections between the French Caribbean and the prosperity of the maritime bourgeoisie in Nantes and Bordeaux were left unmentioned. At the end of the eighteenth century, political emancipation became a new form of human freedom, in which the individual person, dissolved into the concentrated sovereignty of the collectivity, became *human* through citizenship in the unity of political society. Posed in this way, political emancipation installed the elision of colonial slavery within liberal narratives of human freedom; moreover, the liberal narrative builds the disavowal of settler appropriation into the promises of freedom over-coming slavery. In chapter 5, I discuss the legacy of these erasures in the development of European freedom for the antislavery and anticolonial histories of C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois.

By the close of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, liberals defended wage labor, free trade, and liberal government against foreign barbarism and despotism as a justification for elaborating imperial trade and government. The economic theories of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill contributed to the end of mercantile monopoly, while the promotion of wage labor and free trade provided for accelerated industrial production and trade. Both the Slavery Abolition Act of 1834 and the end of the British East India Company as a commercial monopoly in 1833 appeared to signal moves away from colonial slavery, mercantilist exclusivity, and older forms of territorial conquest, toward a British-led worldwide trade in manufactured goods and new forms of imperial governance. In chapter 3, I interpret the papers of the Select Committees appointed by Parliament to investigate the renewal of the East India Company Charters in 1793, 1813, and 1830 and suggest that the decision to open the Asian trades to private merchants was very much an imperial innovation of both trade and government, a measure taken both to reckon with the trade deficit with

China, and to convert the company from an exclusive trading monopoly into a privately owned colonial military government, occupying India on behalf of the British state. I consider the links between “free trade” policies, which expanded the trades in colonial commodities like tea, chintz, calico, silk, and opium, and the transformation of imperial governance and the emergence of a new international order.

Liberal utilitarian and humanitarian arguments provided for the innovations in imperial governance that administered the conduct of trade in the treaty ports, and criminal justice in the new Crown Colony of Hong Kong. In chapter 4, I discuss John Stuart Mill's writings on free trade and representative government together with India Office and Foreign Office records regarding post–Opium War coastal China and Hong Kong. While the promotion of liberty would appear to eradicate or vanquish despotic modes of governing, in the nineteenth-century liberal tradition exemplified by Mill, despotism was discussed not as counter to liberty, but as the very condition out of which liberty arises and the condition to which it is integral and bound. In cases of extreme exigency, Mill argued, despotism was “a necessary medicine for diseases of the body politic which could not be rid of by less violent means.”⁴⁹ In other words, Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* was as much a provision for the colonial states' “necessary” use of force to educate those “unfit for liberty,” as it was the argument for liberal representation in Britain. Mill consistently defined liberty by distinguishing those “incapable of self-government” from those with the capacity for liberty, and his ideas of education, moral, and social development rationalized government authority to maintain “order and progress,” justifying militarized colonialism in India and the invention of modes of surveillance and security to conduct “free trade.”⁵⁰ “Liberty” did not contradict colonial rule but rather accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule, and colonialism as the expansion of imperial trades in Asia. In other words, one does not observe a simple replacement of earlier colonialisms by liberal free trade, but rather an accommodation of both residual practices of enclosure and usurpation with new innovations of governed movement and expansion. The new form of imperial sovereignty expressed by nineteenth-century “free trade” in India and China consisted in the power to adapt and improvise combinations of colonial slavery with new forms

of migrant labor, monopoly with *laissez-faire*, and an older-style colonial territorial rule with new forms of security and governed mobility.⁵¹ Modern notions of rights, emancipation, free labor, and free trade did not contravene colonial rule; rather they precisely permitted expanded Anglo-American rule by adopting settler means of appropriation and removal, and accommodating existing forms of governance to and military occupation, while innovating new forms of governance to “keep the peace.”⁵² The abstract promises of abolition, emancipation, and the end of monopoly often obscure their embeddedness within colonial conditions of settlement, slavery, coerced labor, and imperial trades.

Social relations in the colonized Americas, Asia, and Africa were the condition of possibility for Western liberalism to think the universality of human freedom, however much freedoms for slaves, colonized, and indigenous peoples were precisely exempted by that philosophy. Modern history and social science pronounce the universality of liberal categories of development yet omit the global relations on which they depended. Indeed, it is the pronounced asymmetry of the colonial divisions of humanity that is the signature feature of liberal modes of distinction that privilege particular subjects and societies as rational, civilized and human, and treat others as the laboring, replaceable, or disposable contexts that constitute that humanity. What some have represented as a linear temporal progression from colonial abjection to liberal freedom actually elides what might be more properly conceived as a spatial dynamic, in which forms of both liberal subject and society in the imperial center are possible only in relation to laboring lives in the colonized geographies or “zones of exception” with which they coexist, however disavowed.⁵³ In other words, the management of life and death that we now associate with neoliberal security regimes and the state of exception in crisis and war are constituted in and through the colonial differences explored here.⁵⁴

In this first chapter, I read British Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) pertaining to Chinese and Indian emigration, to frame the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century “intimacies” that linked European liberalism with settler colonialism in the Americas, transatlantic African slavery, and Asian contract labor. In chapter 2, I consider the canonization of Equi-

ano’s autobiography as the quintessential narrative of progress, which suggests that the slavery of the past is overcome and replaced by modern freedom. I observe the many ways that Equiano’s autobiography illustrates the complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that promised freedom rests. By means of a discussion of C. L. R. James’s interest in William Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair*, I turn in chapter 3 to discuss “free trade,” colonial commodification, and the end of the British East India Company monopoly. Early nineteenth-century ideas of free trade were intrinsic both to economic liberty in England and to the improvisation of new forms of sovereignty in the empire, as Britain moved from mercantilism to expanded worldwide trade, and integrated colonial practices of slavery and conquest with new forms of governance linked to the production of value through the circulation of goods and people. In chapter 4, I investigate the ways that ideas of liberty provided the means to combine colonial practices in the Americas with the expansion of British imperial reach in Asia, creating the conditions for new imperial modes of governance in the post-Opium War treaty ports in coastal China and in the new Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Finally, in chapter 5, I explore how the conditions that gave rise to the mass mobilizations of millions of Chinese workers after 1840 to sites around the world significantly shaped not only the British and U.S. imperial imaginations, but the Black anticolonial and antislavery imaginations, as well. As European and U.S. American liberalism reckoned with Asia, so too was Asia critical to anticolonial and antislavery notions of decolonization and emancipation.

In my formulation of the “intimacies of four continents,” I join Ann Laura Stoler, Amy Kaplan, Laura Wexler, Antoinette Burton, Philippa Levine, Peggy Pascoe, Nayan Shah, and others whose important work has demonstrated that the intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government.⁵⁵ Yet unlike their excellent work on the “intimate” sphere of sexual, reproductive, or household relations as a site of empire, I do not focus on this sphere, *per se*. Rather I use the concept of intimacy as a heuristic, and a means to observe the historical division of world processes into those that develop modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life, and those processes that are forgotten, cast as failed

or irrelevant because they do not produce “value” legible within modern classifications. Just as we may observe colonial divisions of intimacy, which charts the I suggest there is also a colonial division of intimacy, which charts the historically differentiated access to the domains of liberal personhood, from inferiority and individual will, to the possession of property and domesticity.⁵⁷ In this sense, I employ the concept of intimacy as a way to develop a “political economy” of intimacies, by which I mean a particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy. This understanding unsettles the meaning of intimacy as the privileged sign of liberal inferiority or domesticity, by situating this more familiar meaning in relation to the global processes and colonial connections that are the conditions of its production. Put otherwise, I emphasize a constellation of asymmetrical and unevenly legible “intimacies,” rather than the singular “intimacy” of what the political theorist C. B. Macpherson famously termed “the possessive individual.”⁵⁷ I suggest instead we may unsettle the “dominant” notion of intimacy as the possession of the individual, if we consider both the “residual” and “emergent” forms of intimacies on which that dominance depends.⁵⁸ This involves considering scenes of close connection in relation to a global geography that one more often conceives in terms of vast spatial distances. It means drawing into relation with one another the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean and the development of colonial modes of biopolitical violence in Asia that sought to replace African enslaved labor with Chinese “free” labor there and elsewhere; it means revealing the proximity of the geographically; and conceptually, distant sites of the Caribbean and China, and appreciating together settler practices with the racialized laboring figures of the slave and the “coolie.”⁵⁹

Among the definitions of *intimacy* offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is first, the “quality or condition of being personally intimate,” including the meanings of intimate friendship, close familiarity, closeness of observation or knowledge, and it is often employed as a euphemism for “sexual intercourse”; a second meaning, characterized as “rare” and confined to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is expressed as “intimate or close connexion or union”; and a third meaning noted as “obsolete” after the eighteenth century is “inner or inmost nature; an inward quality or feature.”⁶⁰ While a “dominant” understanding of intimacy, from

the early nineteenth century and into the present is “being personally intimate,” which includes sexual and romantic intimacy within and in relation to bourgeois marriage and family, we may situate this meaning in relation to “residual” and “emergent” ways of constructing the sense of intimacy as “close connexion,” that is, the implied but less visible forms of alliance, affinity, and society among variously colonized peoples beyond the metropolitan national center.

By *residual*, the literary critic Raymond Williams referred to elements of the past that continue, but are less legible within a contemporary social formation; for example, Williams considered organized religion and rural pastoral society to be still active residues in the modern English bourgeois society that was more visibly organized in terms of urban industrial capitalism, secular history, and rational science. Residual processes persist and may even deepen, despite a new dominant rendering them less legible. I modify the concepts that Williams developed for the analysis of English society to observe that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the newly dominant form of national liberal republics made less available the residual intimacies of colonialism and slavery that nonetheless continued as the practical conditions for liberal forms of personhood, society, and government; in other words, settler practices and the afterlife of slavery are residues that continue beyond declarations of independence and emancipation. Williams used the term *emergent*, akin to Antonio Gramsci’s idea of the “subaltern,” to refer to the incomplete, still unfolding meanings, practices, and relationships associated with the emergence of elements in a new social and cultural formation. Elements in active, but not yet fully articulated emergent, social worlds may be appropriated or incorporated into the dominant, while others may develop into explicitly oppositional activities. Thus, the emergent may only be recognized with hindsight, in retrospect, since its potential power to contest, shift, or transform the dominant is not yet disclosed within its time of emergence.⁶¹ Because residual processes are ongoing, residual elements may be articulated by and within new social practices, in effect, as a “new” emergent formation. In this sense, we might consider the political, sexual, and intellectual connections and relations among slaves, peoples of indigenous descent, and colonized laborers as an emergent “intimacies of four continents” forged

out of residual processes, whose presence is often eclipsed by the more dominant Anglo-American histories of liberal subjectivity, domesticity, and household.

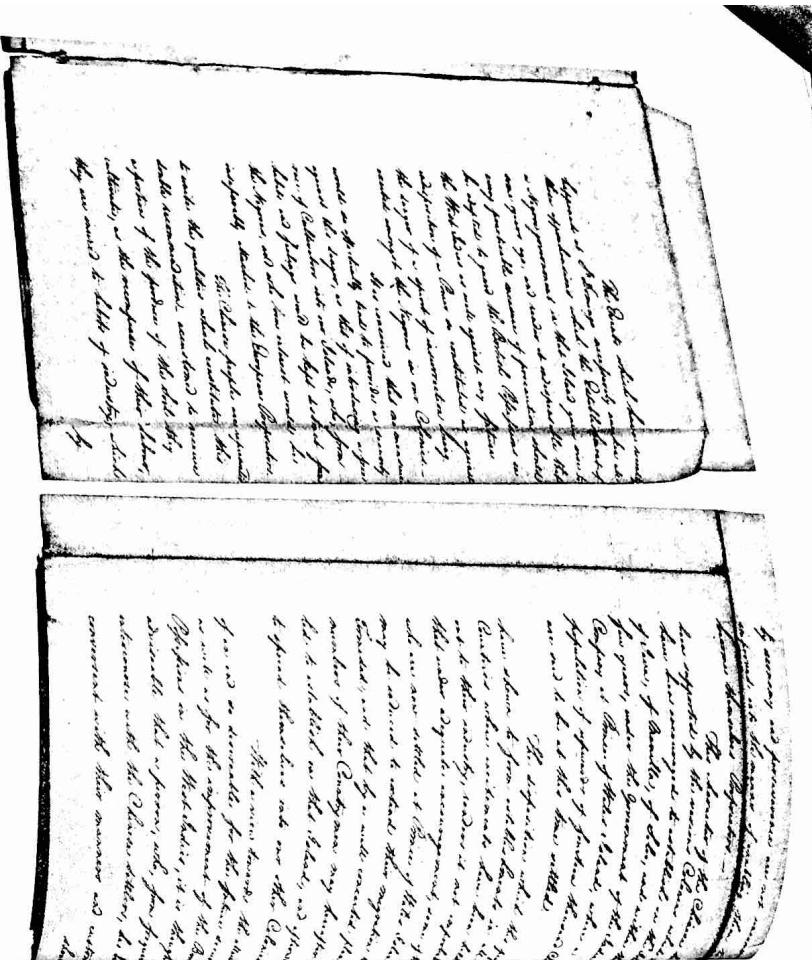
Thus, the project of specifying “the intimacies of four continents” is one of examining the dynamic relationship among the always present but differently manifest and available histories and social forces. It includes, on the one hand, identifying the residual processes of settler colonialism that appropriated lands from indigenous people, and the colonial logics through which men and women from Africa and Asia were forcibly transported to in the Americas, who with native, mixed, and creole peoples constituted colonial societies that produced the assets for the bourgeois republics in Europe and North America out of which intimacy, as liberal possessive individualism, became the hallmark. Even before the British began transporting captive African slaves to work on West Indian plantations, European settler colonialism dispossessed but did not destroy indigenous peoples in the so-called new world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The destructive subjugation of native people to confiscate their land created the conditions in which European mercantile powers imported African slaves to establish plantation economies in the Americas.⁶² Yet while the Europeans displaced the native peoples in the Caribbean, and converted their resistance as “threat” to understand these settler practices as having totally eliminated indigenous peoples to the point of extinction, as some modern histories have suggested, or to ignore the ongoing nature of settler colonialism by consigning native people exclusively to the past, is to continue to erase indigenous people and history in a manner that echoes and reproduces earlier disposessions.⁶³ What we might identify as residual within the histories of settler or colonial capitalism does not disappear. To the contrary, it persists and endures, even if less legible within the obfuscations of a new dominant. Reading British Colonial Office papers on the conquest of the Americas and the West Indies—with papers on Chinese emigration, and in tandem with anti-slavery and pro-slavery debates among British parliamentarians and West Indian governors and planters—the intimacies of four continents becomes a way to discuss the coeval global processes of settler colonialism, slavery, and imported colonial labor, as the conditions for British and American national for-

mations of liberty, liberal personhood, society, and government at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.⁶⁴

The dominant meaning of intimacy, as sexual or reproductive relations of the individual person within the liberal private sphere, is a defining property of the modern citizen in civil society. Critically engaging with this dominant sense, Lauren Berlant has examined the formation of intimacy as the affective medium for republican citizenship and the subject's felt sense of individual belonging in liberal society; fantasy, sentiment, and desire in literature and popular culture produce the contours of intimacy that mediate the individual's inhabiting of everyday life in social relations.⁶⁵ This mythic and affective individualism is central to the constitution of domestic household as the property and privileged signifier of the liberal person and articulates the disciplining of gendered subjectivity and desire in relation to family and home. Further, intimacy as interiority is elaborated in the philosophical tradition in which the liberal subject observes, examines, and comes to possess knowledge of self and others.⁶⁶ Philosophy elaborates this subject with interiority, who apprehends and judges the field of people, land, and things, as the definition of human being. Ultimately, I would wish to frame this sense of intimacy as a particular fiction that depends on the “intimacies of four continents,” in other words, the circuits, connections, associations, and mixings of differentially laboring peoples, eclipsed by the operations that universalize the Anglo-American liberal individual. Yet we appreciate that such configurations—heuristically termed dominant, residual, and emergent—are not static, transparent, or fixed in time, but are precisely in dynamic and unstable flux, with particular formations becoming more or less available in response to the material conditions of specific historical forces. To write about the intimacies of four continents is thus intended to open an investigation, and to contribute a manner of reading and interpretation, and not to identify an empirical foundation or establish a new historical object.

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In a “Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company,” written in 1803 just following the Haitian Revolution, colonial administrator John



1.2 "Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company" (1803). Colonial Office Correspondence, Great Britain National Archives, London.

Sullivan laid the groundwork for the introduction of Chinese indentured laborers into the British West Indian island of Trinidad. He wrote:

The events which have recently happened at St. Domingo necessarily awakes all those apprehensions which the establishment of a Negro government in that land gave rise to some years ago, and render it indispensable that every practicable measure of precaution should be adopted to guard the British possessions in the West Indies as well against . . . the danger of a spirit of insurrection being excited amongst the Negroes in our colonies.

. . . no measure would so effectually tend to provide a security against this danger, as that of introducing a free race of cultivators into

our islands, who, from habits and feelings could be kept distinct from the Negroes; and who from interest would be inseparably attached to the European proprietors. . . . The Chinese people . . . unite the qualities which constitute this double recommendation. (*Great Britain Colonial Office Correspondence*, CO 295, vol. 17)

For two centuries, British mercantile colonialism depended on the settlement of the Americas and West Indies that displaced and dispossessed native peoples, and the command of the British Atlantic slave system that transported captured West and Central African peoples to labor on plantations in the Americas. After two centuries, this British plan to import Chinese workers appears to mark a significant, yet largely ignored shift in the management of race and labor in the West Indian colonies. The decision to experiment with a different form of labor was explicitly racialized—"a free race . . . who could be kept distinct from the Negroes"—but moreover it framed the importation of this newly, and differently, "raced" Chinese labor as a solution to both the colonial need to suppress Black slave rebellion and the capitalist desire to expand production. Yet by the late eighteenth century, British dominance appeared contested by "transcolonial" rivalries from the French West Indies and Spanish Cuba and Peru, and by U.S. independence—all of which prompted the innovation of sugar production and recalibrated the importance of the West Indies to the British economy.⁶⁷ In this sense, many historians explain the end of slavery in the Americas throughout the nineteenth century as a response to humanist arguments in Britain, France, Spain, and the United States about the immorality of slavery, and they conceive abolition and emancipation as resolutions within national narratives of progress in which slavery is legible as a distant origin out of which free modern societies are established. In the words of David Brion Davis, "the emergence of an international antislavery opinion represented a momentous turning point in the evolution of man's moral perception, and thus in man's image of himself."⁶⁸ Yet we might view the British decision to end the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in its empire in 1834, as equally pragmatic attempts to stave off potential Black revolution, on the one hand, and to resolve difficulties in the sugar economy resulting from the relative inflexibility of slave labor within colonial mercantilism, on the other.⁶⁹

The “Trinidad experiment” imagined the Chinese as a “racial barrier between [the British] and the Negroes,” the addition of which would produce a new division of labor in which the Black slaves would continue to perform fieldwork, and imagine the Chinese as “a free race of cultivators” who could grind, refine, and crystallize the cane.⁷⁰ The British described the Chinese workers as “free,” yet the men would be shipped on vessels much like those that had brought the slaves they were designed to replace: some would fall to disease, die, suffer abuse, and mutiny; those who survived the three-month voyage would encounter coercive, confined conditions upon arrival. In this sense, the British political discourse announcing a decision to move from “primitive slavery” to “free labor” may have been a modern utilitarian move, in which abolition proved an expedient, and only coincidentally “enlightened” solution. The representations of indentured labor as “freely” contracted buttressed liberal promises of freedom for former slaves, while enabling planters to derive benefits from the so-called transition from slavery to free labor that in effect included a range of intermediate forms of coercive labor from rented slaves, sharecroppers, and convicts, to day laborers, debt peonage, workers paid by task, and indentureship.⁷¹ The Chinese were instrumentally used in this political discourse as a *figure*, a fantasy of “free” yet racialized and coerced labor, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and the indentured alike. In other words, in 1807, the category of “freedom” was central to the development of what we could call a modern racial governmentality in which a political, economic, and social hierarchy ranging from “free” to “unfree” was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of metropolitan and colonized peoples; this racial governmentality managed and divided through the liberal myth of inclusive freedom that simultaneously disavowed settler appropriation and symbolized freedom as the introduction of free labor and the abolition of slavery. In 1807, as Britain moved from mercantilist plantation production toward an expanded international trade in diversified manufactured goods, the Chinese “coolie” appears in colonial and parliamentary papers as a *figure* introducing this alleged transition from slavery to freedom.

In the British colonial archive, one finds the term *coolie* used variously to refer to workers of both Chinese and South Asian origin who

were imported to work in the West Indies, Cuba, Peru, Brazil, Australia, the western United States, Hawaii, Mauritius, South Africa, and Fiji.⁷² The great instability and multivalence of the term *coolie* suggests that it was a shifting, historically contingent designation for an intermediary form of Asian labor, used both to define and to obscure the boundary between enslavement and freedom, and to normalize both. As Moon-Ho Jung eloquently states, *coolies* “were never a people or a legal category. Rather coolies were a conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged worldwide in the era of slave emancipation, a product of the imaginers rather than the imagined.”⁷³ Madhavi Kale likewise examines the variable construction of Indian *coolies* in British debates, who were celebrated as “free labour” when arguing for importation, and vilified as “like slaves” in arguments against the trade. Kale emphasizes that “labor is a category, a role and not people.”⁷⁴ In the British colonial archive, the use of “coolie” to refer to Asian labor from China, India, and other parts of the world suggests that, from the British colonial perspective, it was the instrumental use of a particular category of labor, rather than the precise Asian origin of the workers, that was emphasized. After emancipation, West Indian Governors and planters were at pains to convince the Colonial Office and British government that they suffered an acute labor shortage due to the exodus of former slaves from the plantations.⁷⁵ As Walton Look Lai has documented, the importation of Chinese workers began in earnest in 1834, with movement to the West Indies reaching its peak between 1853 and 1866.⁷⁶ By 1837, the Colonial Office sought to address the postemancipation demands for labor on West Indian sugar plantations with the additional recruitment of indentured workers from colonial India, and by the 1870s, the indentured workers on the West Indian plantations were overwhelmingly South Asian. This “imperial reallocation labor strategy,” as Madhavi Kale terms it, which sought to profit from the portability of capital and labor, was affected not only by British liberals and antislavery advocates, but also by conditions on the subcontinent, which encompassed Indian responses to the extensive effects of British colonialism.⁷⁷

The 1803 “Secret Memorandum” alludes to “intimacies” between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas and reveals that the idea to import laborers from Asia was closely linked to the British decisions to end the

slave trade and to emancipate slaves in the West Indies. Yet “freedom” no more described the coerced workers from coastal China and later India, or the indigenous peoples from whom the emancipated slaves. In 1834, Britain initiated the four-year period of “apprenticeship” in the West Indies that was to grant full “emancipation” to slaves in 1838. This “emancipation” was to promise slaves this set of institutions comprising “freedom”: “emancipation” proposed a narrative development in which wage labor, contract, marriage, and family would be the formal institutions through which modern freedom could be attained and the condition of slavery overcome. However, “emancipation” clearly did not establish freedom for Black peoples in the British West Indies, many of whom were still confined to the plantation, and others were left bound in economic servitude and poverty. Indeed, as Thomas Holt argues, the socialization of former slaves into liberal promises of freedom in Jamaica was part of the gradual disciplining of Blacks into wage work, which Marx would call another form of slavery.⁷⁸ Demetrius Eudell demonstrates that the laws that governed emancipation in the West Indies in effect disciplined, controlled, and punished former slaves as it protected the interests of the estates and plantations. Strategies for the obstruction of freedom for former slaves ranged from Vagrancy Acts, which criminalized their departures from the estates, to the pricing of land out of their reach, which both raised property values, and created a continuing supply of labor for the former slaveholders. The paternalistic political language of the four-year “apprenticeship” was concerned to protect “justice” for the ex-slaveholder, not the former slave, and questioned whether Blacks were “prepared” or “fitted” for freedom.⁷⁹ Saidiya Hartman observes that legal and political emancipation, invoked through notions of property, self-possession, and individual will, effectively inserted former slaves into a temporality of belatedness and social debt in relation to a freedom never earned and always yet to come, actually obscuring the endurance of pervasive practices of subjection and dispossession.⁸⁰ Catherine Hall suggests that the disciplining of former slaves in Jamaica likewise included their “civilization” into English bourgeois notions of gender, morality, and family, as well as inculcating in the newly freed the judgment that they were essentially “savage” and unable to adapt to the requirements of civi-

lization.⁸¹ The British introduction of the Chinese as so-called free laborers at the critical time of slave emancipation calculated that they would occupy an intermediary position within this governmentality in which the colonized joined the universally human through development of ethical, political, and economic freedom. In other words, the liberal promise that former slaves and native and migrant workers could enter voluntarily into contract was a dominant mode for the initiation of the “unfree” into consensual social relations between “free” human persons: in the crucible of American modernity, Army Dru Stanley has observed, the contracts of labor and marriage became the very symbols of humanity and freedom.⁸²

To appreciate the particular plasticity of the figure of the *coolie* within liberal capitalist modernity, we need only realize that toward the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. discourses about the Chinese laborer contradicted the British discourse that portrayed the Chinese contract laborers as “free.”⁸³ In the United States, for example, those arguing for the prohibition of Chinese female immigration in the Page Law of 1875, and the end to all further Chinese immigration in Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, emphasized that Chinese laborers recruited to work in mining, agriculture, and railroad construction in the mid-nineteenth century were precisely “unfree” and therefore ineligible for citizenship.⁸⁴ Moon-Ho Jung observes of the nineteenth-century U.S. debates that the Chinese *coolie* was opportunistically constructed as a transitional figure, midway between slavery and free labor.⁸⁵ The Chinese contract laborer occupied a liminal, ambiguous intermediary position throughout the nineteenth century, brought to the Americas to supplement, replace, and obscure the labor previously performed by slaves, yet to be differentially distinguished from them. In the British West Indies, the Chinese were cast as a freely contracted alternative to slave labor, yet in the U.S. they were more often described as antithetical to modern political forms.⁸⁶ In Cuba, where the Chinese were indispensable to the modernization of the sugar industry, *coolies* were presented as a new source of unfree labor, a viable supplement to slavery.⁸⁷ In Australia, the Chinese replaced convict labor; the introduction of Chinese labor into New South Wales was not precipitated by the end of African slavery as it was in the Americas, but generated by the shortage of another form of unfree labor, that of prisoners in penal settlements in which over half of the population had

arrived as convicts, yet whose numbers by 1851 had dwindled to fewer than 15 percent.⁸⁸ In Hawaii, the Chinese were introduced to replace indigenous workers.⁸⁹ In each context, the Chinese *coolie* figured not merely another labor supply, but moreover, a shift from colonial mercantilism to a new division of labor and the expansion of international trade. Yet whether in the British West Indies, where slavery was legally terminated in 1834; in the United States, where the Civil War ended slavery in 1865; or in Spanish Cuba, where slavery was not abolished until later in the 1880s, African, Asian, and mixed native workers labored alongside one another and often struggled together, even if these associations are unacknowledged in the archives.

We may situate this residual condition of the intimacies across continents in relation to the more dominant concept of intimacy as the property of the individual, often figured as conjugal and familial relations in the bourgeois home distinguished from the public realm of work, society, and politics. For European and North American subjects in the nineteenth century, the dominant notion of intimacy in the private sphere became central not only as a defining property of the modern liberal individual in civil society, but ideas of privacy in bourgeois domesticity were constituted as the individual's possession to be politically protected, as in "the right to privacy." We can trace this narrative of the modern individual, or Western man, who possesses interiority of person, as well as a private household, in the political philosophical tradition from Locke and Rousseau to Kant and Hegel. In *Philosophy of Right* (*Philosophie des Rechts*, 1821), for example, Hegel traced the dialectical development of freedom for the individual and the state through the forms of property, family, and civil society.⁹⁰

Property in oneself and in the objects one makes through will, labor, and contract are all levels in Hegel's dialectical development; the individual's possession of his own person, his own interiority, is a first sense of property. He then invests will and work into nature, making that nature objective, transforming world and himself.⁹¹ The ethical actions of marriage and the development of the family are then more complex developments within Hegel's teleology of freedom. The individual man establishes his relation to family through marriage to a woman whose proper place is the "inner" world of the family, the family constituting

the key intermediary institution between civil society and the state. Marriage is defined by Hegel as a primary principle and social relation on which the ethical community depends; it is necessary to the founding of the ethical state: "The ethical side of marriage consists in the consciousness that the union is a substantive end."⁹² In this sense, Hegel defined "freedom" as achieved through a developmental process in which the individual first possessed himself and his own interiority, then put his will in an object through labor, and then made a contract to exchange the thing. Marriage and the family were primary and necessary stages in the investment in civil institutions and the progressive unfolding of the ethical life; "inner" life within the family was the property of the individual becoming "free." Hegel elaborates the dominant European notion of "intimacy," in which property, marriage, and family were conditions for the possibility of moral action, and the means through which the individual will was brought consciously into identity with the universal will, expressing the realization of true "freedom," rather than mere duty or servitude.

The feminized space of domestic intimacy and the masculine world of work and battle became a nineteenth-century ideal for European, British, and northeastern American societies. The art critic and essayist John Ruskin famously wrote, for example, "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest. . . . But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. . . . This is the true nature of home."⁹³ Yet despite this regulative ideal, the separation of the feminine private sphere and the masculine public sphere has been criticized at length by feminist scholars as various as Nancy Fraser, Patricia Hill Collins, and Evelyn Nakano Glenn as an abstraction for ordering relations in civil society that is contradicted by the social realities of women's lives.⁹⁴ The paradigm of separate spheres, moreover, cannot be easily extended to colonial or slavery societies, where the practice of private and public spheres was unevenly imposed: colonial households and districts may have aspired to such divisions in manners reminiscent of the European metropolis, but colonized subjects were at once differentiated

from, and yet subordinated to, regulating imperial notions of privacy and publicity. Furthermore, in the colonial context, sexual relations were not limited to a “private” sphere but included practices that disrespected such separations, ranging from rape, assault, domestic servitude, or concubinage, to “consensual relations” between colonizers and colonized, what Ann Laura Stoler has termed the “intimacies of empire.”⁹⁵ We must thus situate this ideal of intimacy—sexual and affective intimacy within the private sphere of the bourgeois household—within the material conditions of colonial relations. Bourgeois intimacy was a regulating ideal through which the colonial powers administered the enslaved and colonized and sought to indoctrinate the newly freed into forms of Christian marriage and family. The colonial management of sexuality, affect, marriage, and family among the colonized formed a central part of the microphysics of colonial rule.⁹⁶ Bourgeois intimacy, derived from the private and public split that was the socio-spatial medium for both metropolitan and colonial hegemony, was produced by the “intimacies of four continents”—both in the sense that settler colonial appropriation with enslaved and indentured labor founded the formative wealth of the European bourgeoisie, and as I discuss in chapter 3, in the sense that colonized workers produced the material comforts and commodities that furnished the bourgeois home.

Reading British documents on the design of introducing Chinese contract laborers to West Indian plantations, we can observe that the *figure* of the Chinese woman held a significant place in the colonial discourses that conveyed the idea of bourgeois intimacy to the colonies. The Chinese woman is repeatedly mentioned throughout the plans for importing Chinese labor to the Americas, as a trope in the colonial imagination for the capacity of the colonized to develop into a reproductive, family community. From the inception of the plan to introduce Chinese into Trinidad, throughout the nineteenth century, administrators stated their desire to import Chinese women, although other historical sources indicate that Chinese female emigration was actually quite rare. Attorney-General Archibald Gloster wrote:

I think it one of the best schemes possible; and if followed up with larger importation, and with women, that it will give this colony a

strength far beyond what other colonies possess. It will be a barrier between us and the Negroes with whom they do not associate; & consequently to whom they will always offer formidable opposition. The substituting of their labour instead of Negro labour is out of the question, as to the common business of the plantation. They are not habituated to it, nor will they take to it in the same way, nor can we force them by the same methods; but their industrious habits, and constitutional strength, will I think greatly aid the planters. They will cut and weed cane. They will attend about our mills. They will act as mechanics.⁹⁷

The introduction of the Chinese into the slave plantation economy was in this way described in terms of a need for a nominally “free” labor force, one that would not substitute for the slaves, but would perform different labors and would be distinguished racially and socially from both the white European colonial planters and the Black slaves. In Gloster’s imagination, the importation of “Chinese women” would permit the establishment of Chinese families that would secure the “racial barrier between us and the Negroes.” The British introduced the Chinese into the community of settlers and slaves as a contiguous “other” whose liminality permitted them to be, at one moment, incorporated as part of colonial labor, and at another, elided or excluded by its humanist universals. Neither free European nor the white European’s “other,” the Black slave, neither lord nor bonded, the Chinese were represented as a paradoxical figure, at once *both* an addition that would stabilize the colonial order *and* the supplement whose addition might likewise threaten the attainment of any such stability.⁹⁸ The Chinese woman was handmaiden to this colonial fantasy of assimilating the colonized to forms of bourgeois family and freedom at a time when the possession and determination of life or death was unavailable for both the enslaved and the indentured.⁹⁹ That Gloster goes on in the same document to liken the Chinese to “our Peons, or native Indians . . . Mulattoes or Mestees” indicates no actual similarity between the Chinese laborer and the mixed, part-native, or native-descendant peoples with whom the Chinese may have worked. Anbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein describe the invention of race and ethnicity in

the Americas as shifting, flexible classifications of difference devised for governing different peoples for labor extraction within the colonial division of labor: plantation slavery, various forms of coerced cash-crop labor (*repartimiento*, *mita*, peonage), indentured labor (*engagés*), and so on.¹⁰⁰ The British colonial conflation of the Chinese with indigenous and racially mixed people expresses this moment in the history of coloniality, in which a racial taxonomy gradually emerged both to manage and modernize labor, reproduction, and society among the colonized, as well as to rationalize the conditions of creolized mixing and to discipline the range of potential “intimacies” among them.¹⁰¹

With respect to the longer history of Black African and Native American interethnic contacts from the fifteenth century onward, Jack Forbes has argued that native, as well as part African and part native persons, were mostly misclassified with terms ranging from “loro,” “mestizo,” “gens de couleur,” or “mulatto,” to “dark” or “brown,” to even “negro,” “noir,” or “black.”¹⁰² The late eighteenth-century topographer of St. Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry, presented eleven racial categories of 110 combined nations ranked from absolute white (128 parts white blood) to absolute black (128 parts black).¹⁰³ We can explain the dramatic, encyclopedic proliferation of both racial classification and racial misattribution of this period by observing that racial governance continually innovated new terms for managing populations and social spaces in the Americas. Even as racial categories drew on fictions of distinction and purity, an insistent discourse about racial difference admitted the existence of a creolized and miscegenated population borne of colonialism. The colonial relations of production, which precisely required racial mixing, constituted what we might call the “political unconscious” of modern European taxonomies of race; the relations of production were the absent yet necessary context that founded the possibility for racial classification, and the context with which such ordering was in contradiction.¹⁰⁴ Joan Dayan has written of Haiti that “if racial mixing threatened to contaminate, the masters had to conjure purity out of phantasmal impurity. This sanitizing ritual engendered remarkable racial fictions.”¹⁰⁵

The West Indian Governors’ offices stated that the needs of the plantation demanded male workers, but even in the early correspondence, we see the Colonial Office rationalizing the idea of creating Chinese fami-

lies through the desire for a stable racial “barrier” between the colonial whites and the enslaved blacks. Yet the recurring figure of the Chinese woman, which persists in the colonial correspondence and parliamentary debates prior to the abolition of the slave trade through the peak years of Chinese emigration in the 1850s–60s, suggests a curious colonial fantasy that projected this dominant meaning of intimacy, as bourgeois-style household, on the Chinese indentured community. In the colonial archive, the repeated refrain “with the import of Chinese women” belies the histories that suggest the Chinese in the Caribbean and North America did not establish family communities in significant numbers until the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ The persistent mention of Chinese reproduction implies that for some colonial administrators, the “value” of the Chinese may not have been exclusively labor, but also the instrumental use of the figure of Chinese women’s sexuality as resembling the “civility” of European marriage and family, in an implicit contrast to the sexualized representations of female African and African-descendant peoples.¹⁰⁷

In the discussions during 1803–7 before the British decision to end slavery, this fantasy of Chinese family civility was a way of marking a racial difference between “Chinese free labor” and “Negro slaves,” through imagining the Chinese as closer to liberal ideas of human person, family, and society. Later, in the 1850s–60s, following the “end” of slavery in the British West Indies in 1834, by which time there were significant numbers of working “free” people of color and South Asian Indian emigrant laborers, this phantasm continued to figure as a part of a racialized classification of laboring cultures. For example, in 1851, the agent in charge of Chinese emigration, James T. White, fantasized a class hierarchy among the groups of the “Chinese,” “Bengalees” and “Negroes” based on the races’ ostensive physical traits and capacities for forming families, stating the social potential of the Chinese to form “middle class” families through Christian marriage and reproduction. White wrote: “Chinese have sufficient intelligence and ambition to rise in the world, and in a short time would become useful and valuable as a middle class in the West Indies . . . one difficulty . . . is the impossibility of obtaining women and families.”¹⁰⁸ The regulating abstraction of the bourgeois family form required representations of “Chinese culture” that defined it as one whose traditions could be summarized by the protection

of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa, in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States” and called for “the emancipation of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown, and black.”¹¹⁴ In his history of the colonial division of labor in Guyana that separated Blacks and Asians and permitted the postemancipation exploitation of those divisions, Walter Rodney imagined the “definite historical achievement” that would have been possible if Black and Asian workers, the descendants of slaves and indentured laborers, could have forged solidarity across the residues of colonial division.¹¹⁵ These “flashes” of the intimacies of four continents critically frame the more restricted dominant meaning of intimacy as the interiority and private property of the European and North American individual.

Interpreting the multivalence of “intimacy” is a means to understand the process through which the “intimacies of four continents” were racialized and sublated by a more restricted notion of “intimacy” as the property of the possessive individual. Reading the colonial archive, I observe how colonized populations were differentially racialized through their proximities from normative ideas of family reproduction that became central to early nineteenth-century liberalism. Reading literature, autobiography, political philosophy, political economy, and cultural genres of liberalism, I observe likewise how the racialized distributions of freedom and humanity were equally a part of this legacy. Modern hierarchies of race appear to have emerged in the contradiction between liberal aspirations to universality and the needs of modern colonial regimes to manage work, reproduction, and the social organization of the colonized. Racial governance was underwritten by liberal philosophies that at once disavowed the violence of settler colonialism and narrated modernity as the progress from slavery to freedom. The “intimacies of four continents” may be the “political unconscious” of this modern fiction of progress and redemption. However, these “intimacies” remain almost entirely illegible in the historiography of modern freedom, making the naming and interpretation of this global conjunction a problem of knowledge itself. It has been estimated that between 1451 and 1870, 11,569,000 African slaves were brought to the “new world,”¹¹⁶ and that after the sixteenth century, out of eighty million native peoples in the Americas, there remained ten.¹¹⁷ Between 1834 and the end of the century, a

reported half a million Asian immigrants made their way to the British West Indies, in the context of tens of millions more going to Latin America, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia.¹¹⁸ But, while these numbers powerfully convey the labor of working peoples in the building of the “new world,” I am less concerned to pursue the significance in demographic terms, and more concerned to inquire into the politics of knowledge with respect to connections between Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas that were critical to the imbrication of liberal freedom with the rise of a global capitalist system. We still seek new methods, not only to understand settler colonialism as the condition for African slavery in the Americas, but also to examine how the liberal narratives that symbolize freedom in the abolition of that slavery erase this connection and further impede our access to indigenous and slave histories. We require new archives and readings to link the introduction of Chinese and Indian indentured laborers to the Americas with the abolition of the slave trade, and moreover, to reckon with how the figure of Asian labor was used to buttress promises of freedom that remained out of reach for enslaved and indentured peoples alike, even following abolition. We require new ways to interpret India Office, Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and Parliamentary Papers together with literature and culture, as we elaborate the convergence of liberal abolition with new imperial experiments, linking older methods of territorial colonialism with new forms of sovereignty enacted through the governance of trade and movement, in treaty ports and across the seas.

What we know of these links and intimacies is shaped by existing fields and by our methods of disciplinary study. Europe is rarely studied in relation to the Caribbean or Latin America, and U.S. history is more often separated from studies of the larger Americas. Work on comparative U.S. racial formation is still at odds with American history, which disconnects the study of slavery from immigration studies of Asians and Latinos; the histories of gender, sexuality, and women is often separated from the study of race. Native Caribbeans have been rendered invisible by both the histories that tell of their extermination in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent racial classifications in which their survival is occluded.¹¹⁹ While anthropological studies have focused on ethnic mixings of Asian and African peoples in the Caribbean, historians are just beginning

to explore the braided relations of indenture, slavery, and independence among these groups.¹²⁰ Scholars of the Black diaspora have undertaken the histories of both forcible and voluntary African dispersion as means for understanding the longer global past of new world modernity. Eric Williams, Walter Rodney, C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Cedric Robinson all observed the centrality of Black labor to the development of modern global capitalism, which exactly depended on the resources of African slaves just as Europeans moved from agrarian to factory work. Later studies like Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* illuminated the circuits between Europe and the "new world"; others bring to light the connections among Yoruban Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African Americans.¹²¹ Robin D. G. Kelley emphasizes that the significance of Black diaspora projects to the field of U.S. history may be precisely their capacity to chart *more* than Black identities and political movements, what he calls "other streams of internationalism not limited to the black world."¹²²

Robin Kelley's call to investigate "other streams of internationalism not limited to the black world" is suggestive with respect to imagining a global past in which Asia and Asian labor signifies both within and independently of Anglo-American empire built on settler colonialism and African slavery. Like "the intimacies of four continents," Kelley's "other streams of internationalism" require new investigations that uncover and interpret connections and relation, but it also means that we must reckon with how the selection of a single historical actor may be precisely a modality of "forgetting" these crucial connections. While we might suspect that Chinese indentured labor in the early Americas has been "lost" because of indenture's ambiguous status with respect to freedom and slavery, dialectical terms central to narratives of modernity, it is important not to treat this as the particular exclusion of the Chinese. Rather, this "forgetting" attests to the more extensive erasure of colonial connections that include but are not limited to indentureship: that implicate the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the settler logics of appropriation, forced removal, and assimilation that are repeated in contemporary land seizures, militarized counter-insurgency at home and abroad, and varieties of nationalism in our present moment; that allude to the ubiquitous transnational migrations within neoliberal globalization of which

Chinese emigrant labor is but one instance. Moreover, the forgetting reveals the politics of memory itself, and is a reminder that the constitution of knowledge often obscures the conditions of its own making.¹²³ In this sense, my interest in Chinese emigrant labor is not to pursue a single, particularist cultural identity, not to fill in a gap or add on another transoceanic group, but to explain *the politics of our lack of knowledge*, and to be more specific about what I would term the economy of affirmation and forgetting that characterizes liberal humanist understanding.

Colonized peoples created the conditions for liberal humanism, despite the disavowal of these conditions in the European political philosophy on which it is largely based. Racial classifications and an international division of labor emerged coterminously as parts of a genealogy that were not exceptional to, but were constitutive of, that humanism. "Freedom" was constituted through a narrative dialectic that rested simultaneously on a spatialization of the "unfree" as exteriority and a temporal subsuming of that unfreedom as internal difference or contradiction. The "overcoming" of internal contradiction resolves in "freedom" within the modern Western political sphere through displacement and elision of the coeval conditions of settler dispossession, slavery, and indentureship in the Americas. In this sense, modern liberal humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom. The differentiations of "race" or "nation," the geopolitical map of "south," "north," "east," and "west," or the modernization discourse of stages of development—these are *traces* of liberal forgetting. They reside within, and are constitutive of, the modern narrative of freedom but are neither fully determined nor exhausted by its ends. They are the remainders of the formalism of affirmation and forgetting.

We might pursue the observation that liberal humanism is a formalism that translates through affirmation and forgetting in a variety of ways. Some have recovered lost or hidden histories, to provide historical narratives for the "people without history," those forgotten in the modern tales of national development, or have challenged existing historiography with new studies of the political economy of British imperialism in nineteenth-century China and India that produced the impoverishment that led to the emigration of Asian laborers. In new ethnographies

interpreting the syncretic cultures of Caribbean “*créolité*,” “*mestizaje*,” and “*métissage*,” anthropologists Aisha Khan and Viranjini Munasinghe have found other versions of person and society, beginning and end, life and death, quite different remnants of the earlier affirmation and forgetting.¹²⁴ We could study representations of the rise and fall of the plantation complex in the Americas in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean literature, or its recasting in the twentieth century by Alejo Carpentier, Jean Rhys, or Maryse Condé.¹²⁵ We could look at how the problem of forgotten intimacies is thematized in recent Caribbean diasporic or postcolonial literature: Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda* (1999), for example, imagines the coexistence of Chinese and Indian immigrants, Afro-Caribbeans, whites, and creoles in nineteenth-century Jamaica; Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003) imagines the union of an escaped Chinese indentured laborer and the slavewoman he buys and frees, and follows their Afro-Chinese-Cuban descendants from China to Cuba to the United States and Vietnam. Each and all, rich and worthy directions to pursue.

In this book, however, I do not move immediately toward recovery and recuperation, but rather pause to reflect on what it means to supplement forgetting with new narratives of affirmation and presence. There is an ethics and politics in struggling to comprehend the particular absence of the intimacies of four continents, to engage slavery, genocide, indenture, and liberalism, as a conjunction, as an actively acknowledged loss within the present. David Eng and David Kazanjian describe a “politics of mourning” that would “investigate the political, economic and cultural dimensions of *how* loss is apprehended and history is named—how that apprehension and naming produce the phenomenon of ‘what remains.’”¹²⁶ Historian of the seventeenth-century Atlantic slave trade Stephanie Smallwood has put it this way: “I do not seek to create—out of the remnants of ledgers and ships’ logs, walls and chains—‘the way it really was’ for the newly arrived slave waiting to be sold. I try to interpret, from the slave trader’s disinterest in the slave’s pain, those social conditions within which there was no possible political resolution to that pain. I try to imagine what could have been.”¹²⁷ The *past conditional temporality* of the “what could have been,” symbolizes apply the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene

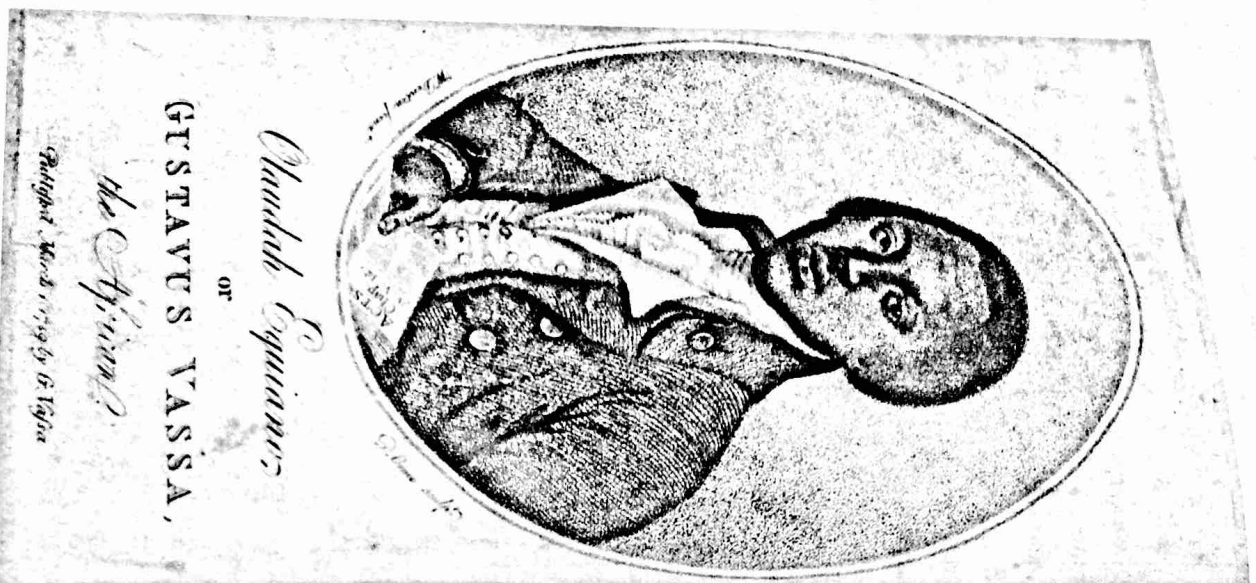
of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, and also the matters absent, entangled, and unavailable by its methods. I suggest that understanding the relation of the intimacy of the possessive individual to the intimacies of four continents requires a *past conditional temporality* in order to reckon with the violence of affirmation and forgetting, in order to recognize that this particular violence continues to be reproduced in liberal humanist institutions, discourses, and practices today. However, in doing so, we do not escape the inhabiting of our present, and the irony that many of the struggles we would wish to engage are not only carried out in the languages of liberty, equality, reason, progress, and human rights—almost without exception, they must be translated into the political and juridical spaces of this tradition. We must reckon that present contests over the life and death of the “human” are often only legible in terms of those spaces still authorized by liberal political humanism.

CHAPTER 2

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OUT OF EMPIRE

In 1807, as Britain passed the Slave Trade Act to abolish the transatlantic African slave trade in the empire, Secretary of State Lord Hobart secretly dispatched Kenneth MacQueen to captain a ship named *Fortitude* from Bengal bound for Trinidad, carrying a cargo of Chinese workers and East India Company goods. When MacQueen's ship and the goods and people aboard were seized for a possible breach of laws relating to the Plantation Trade, there was an investigation, which later established that the voyage had been conducted under the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government. In other words, what surfaces in the historical record as the first British shipment of Chinese to the West Indies owes its appearance in the state archives to the ambiguous status of the voyage: the smuggled cargo was suspected of constituting a violation of the normative laws of maritime trade, suggesting the degree to which, in this period, the seas were an open, uncharted, and yet undetermined domain for mercantile expansion and imperial experiments beyond the nation-state.¹ In the late eighteenth century, as Britain sought to stabilize its place within a balance of power on the European continent, it also innovated new means to compete with transcolonial rivals France and Spain in the Americas, Asia, and the West Indies. From maps to travel narratives to literature like *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver's Travels*, cultural representations of the transoceanic voyage mediated the imagined possibility and peril of a new *nomos* figured by the open seas.² The Chinese aboard the *Fortitude*



2.1 Olaudah Equiano. Illustration by W. Denton and D. Orme. Frontispiece from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, originally published in London, 1789. Courtesy of the British Library.

shared the seas with Royal Navy men-o-war, mercantile trading ships, privateer ships, and vessels manned by merchant seamen, deserters, and escaped slaves.

Papers from MacQueen's hearing are collected and archived in the Colonial Office Correspondence at the National Archives in London. During the proceedings, the Solicitor-General G. L. Tuckett appealed MacQueen's case by stating British hopes that the "Trinidad experiment" to import Chinese "will eventually supercede the continuance of the Slave Trade in the West Indies."³ Evidence presented in the MacQueen Memorandum from the Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the East India Company, in which administrators outlined the plan to import Chinese workers in order to resolve problems in the current system of slavery. Other documents included MacQueen's letter accepting the commission, in which MacQueen characterized the Chinese as "an industrious, sober, orderly people," and the statement by Attorney-General Archibald Gloster, who praised the plan to introduce Chinese into Trinidad by suggesting that, as a supplement to slave labor and the existing colonial social order, the Chinese would deter a possible insurrection of African slaves, and moreover, would form a racial "barrier" between the British and the "Negroes." In discussing the 1803 Memorandum in chapter 1, I suggested the instrumental use of the Chinese in the Colonial Office decision to employ liberal political discourse to reform a system of colonial labor that had been based on settler colonialism and slavery for over two centuries, and I observed that the representation of the Chinese as a "free race" belied the foreclosure of freedom and self-possession for the indigenous, the enslaved, and the indentured alike.

In this chapter, I turn to examine the form, genre, and significance of the eighteenth-century narrative of freedom overcoming slavery, even and especially when promised freedoms were not borne out in practice. The Colonial Office description of the Chinese as "free" suggests first that this abstract notion of "freedom" not only denied the coercion through which Chinese laborers were brought to the Americas, but it also masked the ongoing settler appropriation and slavery that were the conditions for the colonial plantations into which the Chinese were

brought. Furthermore, the representation of the Chinese as "free" suggests the degree to which promised freedoms—both as political rights and free wage labor—were crucial concepts not only in the discussion of the abolition and emancipation in the colonies, but were significant to the management and discipline of laborers in England, as well. At the turn of the nineteenth century, definitions of free wage labor in England were deeply implicated in debates about the abolition of slavery in the West Indian and North American colonies. In his study of the end of the transatlantic slave trade, historian David Eltis observes that despite the large gap between the two labor systems—enslaved African labor in the colonies and wage labor in England—abolition was a central piece of a utilitarian experiment in social engineering being conducted in both locations.⁴

The liberal reformers, who addressed conditions for wage labor in England by introducing legislation concerning a ten-hour day and restrictions on child labor, were among the same groups who advocated for the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. English Whigs argued that the termination of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery would lead to a "free wage" relationship between master and slave, and saw the end of slavery as necessary to the implementation of liberal utilitarian *laissez-faire* principles of the work ethic, industry, civilization, and greater productivity in England. Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill at the *Westminster Review* argued that free trade and a free market economy were necessary solvents both to destroy paternalistic controls, and to overcome the remnants of slavery.⁵ Paradoxically, the liberal arguments to end slavery contributed to the ideology of free wage labor that was necessary to buttress industrialization at home, even while coerced labor remained highly profitable in the colonies. The proposal of Chinese, and soon after Indian, indentured labor in the colonies presented an intermediary "solution" to this dilemma. While antislavery ideas prevailed in Britain, indentured labor in the colonies could be represented as part of a system of free labor that appeared commensurate with ideas of free labor at home.

One aim of this book is to understand the role of liberal freedoms of wages, rights, and trade, and their literary and cultural forms in Europe and North America, within the broader historical context of colonial labor

and production that linked transatlantic African slavery and Asian indenture in the Americas and throughout the emerging Anglo-American empire. Many social and economic historians have characterized this period as the “transition from slavery to free labor.” The very notion of “transition” conveys the sense of progressive development from one stage to another, implying that the system of slavery was gradually superseded by a new system of free wage labor, and by the granting of political enfranchisement.⁶ I am arguing, to the contrary, for a quite different understanding of the relationship between “slavery” and “freedom.” Rather than presuming a linear understanding of historical progress, in which the slavery of the past was overcome and replaced by modern freedoms, I emphasize instead that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the narrative of freedom overcoming slavery was canonized in British and European political and economic spheres, in discourses of citizenship, free labor, and free trade. The desire for promised freedoms came to discipline and organize varieties of social subjects, those enfranchised and those not or never to be, working in conditions of coercion and exploitation, in Europe and North America, and throughout the colonized world. As Britain moved from mercantilist plantation production toward command of an expanded international trade in manufactured goods, the Chinese indentured worker appears in British colonial and parliamentary papers as a figure for this emerging “transition” to “freedom,” referring to a modern mode of administering and dividing laboring groups through the liberal promise of freedom that would commence with the end of slavery. In this chapter and the next, I inquire into the relationship between liberalism and colonialism by suggesting that literary and cultural *genres* emerged alongside liberal economics and political philosophy, and that autobiography and the novel did some of the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions.

Commensurate with political philosophy’s affirmation of the individual’s passage to freedom through economic industry and political emancipation, the *autobiography* served as a particularly powerful genre for the individual achievement of liberty through ethical education and civilization. In a sense, the autobiography is the liberal genre par excellence. It is the modern narrative expression of the individual subject providing evidence of not only the imperatives and privileges of liberal

subjects, but also its aesthetic form. Attention to the autobiography’s form, as well as to narrative contradictions and contesting voices, suggests methods for reading the subjugated histories that inhabit the narratives of individual rights and democratic freedoms. Considering Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), in relation to various literary conventions, and other paradigmatic narratives, such as Ottobah Cugoana’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787) or the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1793), both illuminates features of this liberal genre and calls attention to the tensions and inconsistencies that arise when the genre of liberty shapes the story of a former slave.

The Interesting Narrative states that Equiano was born in Essaka, a province of Eboe in the West African kingdom of Benin in 1745, and it recounts his capture into slavery as a young boy, being separated from his kin, and moved from slave ship to plantation, from master to master. Acquiring the skills of sailing a ship, learning to write, measure, and do arithmetic, Equiano serves in battles, works commercial ships, and gradually earns and saves enough to purchase his own freedom. He recounts formerly having been cargo in the Atlantic market in people, and how he came to participate in the transatlantic commerce within which he and others like him had been mere property.⁷ As a literate Christian man, he abhors the brutality of West Indian slavery in the words of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and savors his freedom with allusions to the books of Acts, Kings, and Exodus from the Old Testament. Equiano’s accomplishment of freedom refers allegorically to Dante’s journeys, the trials of Jesus, the travels of Gulliver, and the adventures of Robinson Crusoe. In addition to these allusions, the autobiographer marks his humanity sentimentally in expressions of interiority and feeling, legally by his papers of manumission, and economically by his industry as a merchant marine, after which the sea that was once the traumatic site across which he was cruelly taken becomes the body he now commands. He seeks appointment as an Anglican missionary with the Sierra Leone Resettlement and favors the development of commerce and trade between Europe and Africa. In 1792, the author proudly added to later editions of *The Interesting Narrative* that Equiano married and had two daughters. In this sense,

Equiano's self-narration circumnavigates from Africa to the Americas to England as the tale moves from Eboe childhood to modern commercial bourgeois man and father. As Houston Baker Jr. observed, Equiano "masters the rudiments of economics that condition his very life."⁸ Yet even as Equiano's text has been taken to epitomize the most eloquent narration of individual redemption through modern liberal institutions, upholding the theological, political, and economic arguments made by British abolitionists, like later slave narratives from *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) to *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* contains important digressions and ruptions that mark the limits of the genre for containing and resolving the contradictions of colonial slavery.

Equiano's passage to liberty expressed the "structure of feeling" of what scholars have termed the "Atlantic world" or "global eighteenth century," encompassing the height of the transatlantic slave trade, antislavery movements, formal abolition of the trade, and the collective upheavals expressed in revolutions in France, the United States, and Saint-Domingue.⁹ Like Kenneth MacQueen, the captain charged by the British Colonial Office and East India Company to import Chinese workers, Equiano was also a seaman, more at home on a ship than settled in a particular nation. His narrative of liberty gained through Atlantic crossing is similar to what Laura Doyle observes of the "Atlantic novel," a tradition of Anglo-Atlantic and African Atlantic writing in which a "liberty plot" crosses the Atlantic Ocean to enact a dialectic of freedom and empire. While MacQueen and Equiano could be considered members of the "new world Atlantic" working class made up of sailors, slaves, and commoners elaborated by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *Mary-Headed Hydra*, the autobiography made evident that even as a freed man, Equiano's relationship to transatlantic commerce would be haunted by his former enslavement. As Cathy Davidson aptly observes, Equiano's autobiography portrayed "a man who is free enough to sail virtually all the seven seas yet who ever remains one step away from recapture and return into slavery."¹⁰ His narrative stylized the so-called transition from slavery to freedom and dramatized a conversion from chattel to liberal subject that at once negotiated the voices of abolition and slave resistance, and mediated the logics of coloniality in which

trade in people and goods connected Africa, plantation Virginia, the colonial West Indies, and metropolitan England. It exemplified a fluency in the languages for defining and delimiting humanity, from liberal political philosophy and Christian theology, to the mathematical reason necessary for economy, trade, and navigation. Yet the achievement of Equiano's "freedom" was ever tenuous; kidnapped, traded, and captured, he is transferred from one owner to another; once his manumission is purchased, his life as a freed man is continuously threatened by the possibility of forcible abduction and reenslavement.

The historical man named Olaudah Equiano appears in parliamentary records as an important figure in the British abolition movement, and his autobiography was also a central artifact in the efforts to end the slave trade. *The Interesting Narrative* gained the attention of Equiano's contemporaries, the abolitionists William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, John Wesley, and Thomas Clarkson, who opposed slavery as an immoral, corrupting influence on English and Africans alike; as Christians, they were anxious to demonstrate that Africans were members of the brotherhood of man under God, with human qualities that made them deserving of freedom. Wilberforce, in his 1789 speech on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, spoke of the transit of slaves to the West Indies: "This, I confess, in my opinion is the most wretched part of the whole subject. So *much misery condensed in so little room*, is more than the human imagination had ever before conceived. . . . Let anyone imagine to himself, 6 or 700 of these wretches chained two and two, surrounded with every object that is nauseous and disgusting, diseased, and struggling under every kind of wretchedness!—How can we bear to think of such a scene as this?"¹¹ As if the rejoinder to his appeal to imagine the inconceivable, Wilberforce presented Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* along with petitions to end the slave trade to Parliament. Wilberforce praised it not only as a treatise against the slave trade, but for its eloquence as an autobiography written by an African with memories of a West African childhood, the Middle Passage, and the tortures and abuses of slaves in the West Indies, whose education, religion, and exceptional determination culminated in earned freedom.¹² Generations of critics since then have heralded the autobiography as *the* singular narrative demonstrating the overcoming of slavery and fitness for freedom.

The canonization of Equiano's text as the first autobiography in English by an enslaved African produces a structural paradox in which its elevation as a paradigm for liberal freedom world on which that of the more complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that of the more complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that of the more complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that of freedom rests. The intense social value accorded the autobiographical genre illustrates how liberal emancipation required a literary narrative of the self-authoring autonomous individual to be distilled out of the heterogeneous collective subjectivity of colonial slavery. This is as much a literary critical question of how the autobiography is interpreted—whether we read it as a fluid story of a unitary author's successful development of reason, sentiment, industry, and freedom, or whether we read for the ellipses, interruptions, contradictory shifts in voice or tempo that surround particular episodes—as it is a historiographical matter of which archives, events, temporalities and geographies will be privileged in the siting of Equiano's story. Moreover, it asks us to consider how liberalism requires mediation through an aesthetic form that encourages readers to understand the emancipation of the individual *as if it were* a collective emancipation. As the autobiographical subject writes his life, and comes to possess the meaning of slavery as his own "past," the genre does the work of subjugating the history of the collective enslaved within a regulative temporality in which slavery is only legible as a distant origin out of which the free modern subject can emerge. As such, autobiography, a genre of liberal political narrative that affirms individual right, may precisely contribute to the "forgetting" of the collective subject of colonial slavery, a heterogeneous subaltern collectivity necessary to colonial slavery and its abolition. When abolitionists like Wilberforce promoted Equiano's tale of individual liberty as *the* representative slave narrative, the exemplary qualities selected to illustrate the humanity of the slave may have subsumed the persistence of slavery, for those still in bondage at the time of the autobiography, as well as for those who would be "emancipated" in the aftermath. The exemplary tale of individual freedom had the power to defer the larger scale transformation of slavery as a collective condition in the empire.

Inasmuch as a comparison between MacQueen and Equiano underscores the distinction between the seafaring captain and the seaman who had been property, so too does drawing a contrast between Equiano's

autobiography and, for example, that of his transatlantic contemporary, Benjamin Franklin. The contrast reveals the limits to the former slave's access to writing, print, and the public sphere of politics in England and the United States. Franklin's autobiography is widely heralded as a portrait of the life of the philosopher-statesman as representative of the moral qualities of the new American nation; the *bildung* of Franklin's development from self-educated youth to civic maturity expressed an emerging American exceptionalism, the notion that the new nation, founded on democratic egalitarian principles, was different than that of older European empires. Like Equiano's, Franklin's exceptional life emerged out of transatlantic conditions; the first two parts of Franklin's *Autobiography* were written in Europe, the first in England in 1771, the second in France in 1784. The narrative of the singular man embodied the values of hard work, moderation, sobriety, self-improvement, and civic responsibility, as he participated in the rebellion of the American colonies, the Constitutional Convention, and the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Franklin was a printer by trade, a dedicated public servant who founded libraries and utilities and made contributions to science; his printing mediated the formation of the public sphere in the early republic, and scholars note how Franklin used the medium of letters and print culture to frame his individual life as a representation of American national destiny.¹³ Franklin's *Autobiography* made evident many of the formal features that later established the autobiography as the predominant genre for narration of the liberal life: the accomplishment of exemplary freedom of person and nation through industry, moral regeneration, and civic duty. Yet while Equiano's autobiography also exemplified reason, probity, humility, and thrift, the narrative of the self-taught former slave is marked, again and again, by the limits to his attainment of freedom.

The Interesting Narrative drew from and contributed to various literary traditions, forms of knowledge, and social discourses, which illuminate its significance, as well. Equiano's autobiography took up the "noble savage" trope established in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), which thematized Britain's "new world" colonial encounters in the figure of the African prince; it exemplified the sentimentalism that characterized later British Romantic representations of slavery, from Robert Burns's *The Slave's Lament* to William Blake's *Little Black Boy* and William Cowper's

The Negro's Complaint; and it was a Black Atlantic forerunner of the African American slave narrative. In Behn's heroic romance, Oroonoko, the grandson of an African king, falls in love with Imoinda, and their love is thwarted when both are sold into slavery, until the two lovers are reunited in Surinam. Oroonoko organizes a slave revolt, which is defeated by military forces led by an English deputy who also desires Imoinda. To protect Imoinda from violation by enemies after his death, the two lovers plan that Oroonoko should take her life first. Mourning Imoinda, Oroonoko is captured and executed by gruesome public dismemberment. Oroonoko is a romantic hero suffering with grace in love and battle, governed by a code of honor. From the narrator's opening description, we see the logic of coloniality at work: the figuration of Oroonoko as a "royal African" acknowledges colonial slavery by granting the exemplary African a nobility that is conveyed through the comparison to the European aristocracy: "His Nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat;" and "he had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature, but in all Points address'd himself, as if his Education had been in some *European Court*."¹⁴

The "royal slave" is not merely a displacement of the unrepresentable trade in African slaves, but the figure condenses a variety of global practices. Chi-ming Yang, for example, suggests that the figure of Oroonoko romanticizes the African slave trade through a particular form of commodification, that of early modern orientalism; that is, both Imoinda's "japanned" skin and Oroonoko's "Polished Jet" blackness of "statuary" proportions render them aestheticized as if they are lacquer figures, ornamental chinoiserie, referencing the porcelains, silk embroideries, and wallpapers that were part of the already burgeoning Asian trades.¹⁵ Srivinas Aravamudan invents the term *oroonokoism* to capture this particular orientalist domestication of the African prince as "pet"; the exceptional prince simultaneously represents and occludes the violent historical conditions of colonial encounters.¹⁶ The English female narrator's sympathy for the suffering African prince sentimentalizes colonial slavery and trade, even as it habituates the metropolitan English community to it. Oroonoko's honorable feeling "humanizes" him, as the narrator and reader are likewise humanized by their benevolent and sentimental identification with him. The narrative first models and then man-

ages the tenderness that Oroonoko himself will display as he mourns his beloved, recalling Adam Smith's formulation that "moral sentiment" is that we "place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him."¹⁷ The trope of the "royal slave" unjustly chained, and ultimately destroyed for leading the rebellion that is the inevitable consequence of slavery, opens the way for Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, as well as for the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition that became a staple of Anglophone antislavery narratives and liberal republicanism in Britain and the United States for the next century and a half.¹⁸ Equiano's autobiography mastered and deftly employed these sentimental rhetorics that pleaded for the slaves' humanity by giving voice to the enslaved and that aimed at stirring the reader into action. Yet however much sentimentalism gave voice to the slaves' suffering and instructed the English reader to sympathize, sentimental identification did not innocently humanize or civilize the slave, as it often reworked the violence of slavery as a resource for the reading public's moral position.¹⁹ If sentimentalism defines humanity through emotion and governs its transfer from the feeling human subject to the abject thing, this is nowhere clearer than in Thomas Bicknell and John Day's 1773 poem, *The Dying Negro*, well known and famously celebrated by British abolitionists.²⁰ Bicknell and Day's inspiration for the poem was a newspaper account of an African slave who, upon being returned to the ship from which he had fled to marry a white fellow servant, killed himself rather than be captured and returned to slavery in the West Indies. Like other abolitionist poems that "gave voice" to the slave's lament, *The Dying Negro* expresses the anguish of the man who sought death rather than be condemned to it by slave masters. Through poems such as this, abolitionists aimed to inspire the pity of the responsive reader, to engage them in the antislavery cause. Yet as the sentimental poem converted the violent conditions of slavery into occasions for English benevolence, it performed what Lynn Festa calls an act of "affective piracy" in which the liberal poet made sentimental value of the other's plight.²¹

In Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, the use of sentimentalism is rendered more complex through the generic conceit in which the narrator tells the story of his life as if it is unfolding, balancing the perspectives of

the slave he was, with that of the literate freed man he has become. Thus, the moment that the autobiographer cites at length a full stanza of Bicknell and Day's poem *The Dying Negro* is significant, for it emphasizes the cleaving of the narrative subject, and it marks the point at which the former author portrays his former self and others as abject slaves. In the first four chapters, the autobiography recounts the plight of Equiano as a young boy, abducted, traded, and enslaved. When he is brought to the first slave ship, he represents his understanding of slavery through a process in which he sees himself in the enslaved condition of the "multitude": "[As I saw] a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate."²² He is transported from Africa to the West Indies to England and back to the West Indies again; he received various names, including "Gustavus Vassa" from a captain aboard one of the many ships. In chapter 5, when the young narrator believes himself to be on the threshold of manumission, he is suddenly seized, sold again, and returned to slavery in the West Indies, which he describes as being "plunged . . . in a new slavery," with miseries that are "tenfold" what he knew earlier (70). He recounts young Vassa's horror at witnessing the cruel rape of female slaves and children, men staked to the ground, mutilated, burned, caged, branded, hung, muzzled, and flogged, all of which not only indicate the cruel inhumanity of the slave system, but also emphasize that the young slave was unaware then of what the adult author would realize later, that "slavery" was, in a metaphorical sense, a state of unknowing to be overcome by the power to know oneself, expressed in self-authorship. The narratologist Gerard Genette famously elaborated the trope of *metalepsis* to discuss the moments in a narrative when there is an interruption of one time by another, when there is a transgression of boundaries between "the world in which one tells and the world of which one tells."²³ Throughout Equiano's autobiography, the separation of these two levels remains mostly invisible, and the diegetic narrative largely subsumes the former in order to showcase the latter. Yet when the narrative breaks off and the autobiographer cites Bicknell and Day's poem, the perspectives of the later freed man and the slave he once was are foregrounded and emphasized. The narrator evokes his former feelings as a young slave through the words of the poem's "Dying Negro,"

who calls on death to relieve him from horror and dread of recapture, punishment, and enslavement. He asks that he might be in that place:

Where slaves are free, and men oppress no more,
Fool that I was, inur'd so long to pain,
To trust to hope, or dream of joy again.

Now *draggd* once more beyond the western main,
To groan beneath some dastard planter's *chain*;
Where my poor countrymen in *bondage* wait
The long enfranchisement of *ling'ring fate*:
Hard *ling'ring fate!* While, ere the dawn of day,
Rous'd by the *lash* they go their cheerless way;
And as their souls with *shame* and anguish burn,
Salute with groans *unwelcome morn*'s return,
And, *chiding* ev'ry hour the slow-pac'd sun,
Pursue their *toils* till all his race is run.
No eye to mark their *suff'rings* with a tear;
No friend to comfort, and *no hope* to cheer:
Then, like the dull unpy'd brutes, a repair
To stalls as wretched, and as coarse a fare;
Thank heaven one day of *mis'ry* was o'er,
Then sink to sleep, and wish to wake no more.
(73, emphasis mine)

To convey the relief that death would bring to the slave, each line of the verse names a form of bondage—from "chains" and "fate" to "lash" and "toil"—to enlist the readers' pity for the "Negro" forcibly kept enslaved. But the autobiographical narrator's citation of the poem also dramatizes the very operations through which subject cleaves from object, through which the perspective of the individual "Negro" is educed out of the collective subject of "my poor countrymen" and "dull unpy'd brutes." This process that differentiates the autobiographer from the collective enslaved is repeated in Equiano's performance of his initial identification with, and then distinction from, the "multitude," and then again, in his disappearance into the "voice" of Bicknell and Day. The extensive citation not only makes evident how well "Equiano" understood sentimental literature

as the vehicle for establishing sympathy as the sign of the human, and its centrality to moral arguments against slavery; but in “giving voice” to the young slave’s suffering in the words of Bicknell and Day, the autobiography permits “Equiano,” and the “multitude,” to be “spoken for” by the English abolitionists. At the same time, by enlisting sentimental identification to bestow a voice and consciousness to the young slave he was, the autobiographer paradoxically inhabits and displaces the position occupied by Bicknell and Day. As *The Interesting Narrative* performs literary sentimentalism to define free humanity over against the abject slaves, it precisely cites the sentimental poem as *the* literary convention established for this operation, and in the process foregrounds Equiano’s difference as formerly racialized property, implying the “limits” of man-umitted “freedom,” and the impossibility that the former slave could ever be Bicknell and Day.

The Interesting Narrative also contributed to a large, diverse body of literature and knowledge attesting to the inhumanity of slavery from the perspective of African slaves. In alluding to other Black Atlantic narratives such as *The Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosow, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1770), the *Narrative of the Lords Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* (1785), and fellow ex-slave Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787), it provided first-person narrative descriptions of the conditions of slavery and attested to the proximity of freed Blacks to recapture and return to enslavement.²⁴ These Black Atlantic accounts not only represented the terrors of captivity and the enslaved man’s resolve to be free, but they recorded travel across land and sea and were also informal botanical, oceanographic, and anthropological resources on nature, custom, and terrain of the African Gold Coast, the West Indies, England, and North America, which constituted a vernacular knowledge counter to the colonial taxonomies of Linnaeus and others, whose natural history served as a parallel discourse of colonial domestication.²⁵

Cugoano’s 1787 *Thoughts and Sentiments* was a richly polemical argument against the slave trade, which recorded his kidnapping, captivity on the slave ship, slavery itself, and experiences in England.²⁶ Unlike *The Interesting Narrative*, however, Cugoano’s text does not present his life as a

developmental ascent from slavery to freedom but emphasizes that he was “brought from a state of innocence and freedom, and, in a barbarous and cruel manner, conveyed to a state of horror and slavery” and maintains that “the extreme bitterness of grief and woe, that no language can describe” remains “though my fears and tears have long since subsided” (95). If Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* fluently recites the narrative of freedom overcoming slavery, one of the means through which the text attests to the unremediated condition of slavery is through its references to and resonances with Cugoano’s more polemical, and less compromising, anti-slavery text. Equiano’s descriptions of the capture and treatment of slaves often echo those of his contemporary Cugoano. Together, with other Black Atlantic writers, their works constituted and shaped a virtual inventory of the tropes, patterns of expression, and references whose recitation came to authorize later slave narratives.²⁷ Not only did they establish stories of brutal captivity, the transatlantic crossing, and religious conversion and deliverance, and invert the associations of white civilization and black barbarism; they also made recognizable to diverse publics the cruel commonplaces of slavery. Equiano’s descriptions of the “multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow” (Equiano, 39) recall Cugoano’s “rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men” (Cugoano, 9). The repeated mention of “chains,” whips, “groans,” and “cries” works like a haunting and horrifying refrain, with immediately recognizable references to the body of knowledge about slavery. Moreover, both Equiano and Cugoano allude repeatedly to the slaves’ appeal to death as a release from the horrendous captivity of enslavement. Yet Cugoano’s repeated use of “we” conveys his identification with the collective enslaved for whom “death was more preferable than life” (Cugoano, 10), while Equiano’s narrative more often assumes the sentimental attitude of the abolitionist, and rhetorically individualizes himself while contemplating the suffering of slaves as a “multitude” or as “poor creatures”: “Is it surprising that usage like this should drive the poor creatures to despair, and make them seek a refuge in death from those evils which render their lives intolerable” (Equiano, 80).

Difference of genre provides a clear way to distinguish the two narratives. As autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative* exemplifies the liberal imperative that the “life” emplot the transition from slavery to freedom,

and in this way, it attests to the power of political emancipation, and Christian redemption. Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* was not an autobiography, but a treatise against slavery; it testifies instead to the autoethnography of the enslaved in the face of slavery's excesses to this imperative: in a perpetual present tense, it testifies instead to the persistent human anguish of the slaves. Cugoano represents his and the systemic dehumanization of the slaves. Christianity, not as deliverance, but as circumstances that permit the deepening of his struggles against slavery; the "groans and cries of the murdered" (58) continue unabated within Cugoano's text. In this sense, when Equiano's autobiography echoes Cugoano's account, it evokes this longer, unmediated collective condition of inhuman cruelty and survival. British abolitionists read Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* as a life that fulfilled Christian redemption and liberal economy. Yet slaves, ex-slaves, and others could "listen" to the complex tones of Equiano's narrative, and hear the "otherness" embedded within the text. They might recognize the allusions to death as deliverance from slavery, the double voicing one hears if listening to the lower frequencies, what Fred Moten calls the "freedom drive" dissonant to commodification and objectification, heard beneath and through a dominant genre.²⁸ Likewise, inasmuch as the "freedom" of the second half of the autobiography may work to redeem the "enslavement" of the first half, the narrative form cannot overcome the most profound offenses with which *The Interesting Narrative* begins: the slave traders' indifference to the sufferings of men, women, and children captured and chained, the terror and claustrophobia of the Middle Passage, the inhuman trade in human beings. Although *The Interesting Narrative* formally declares the conditions of slavery transcended by his individual liberty, their residues remain after the formal translation of colonial slavery into the conventions of the liberal autobiographical genre.

Perhaps equally important, Equiano has held a significant place in African American letters, and in the slave narrative tradition that followed him, heralded as a forerunner of the nineteenth-century African American slave narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and others.²⁹ *The Interesting Narrative* exemplified crucial features of the antebellum slave narratives, which, as Frances Smith Foster has observed, drew on the Judeo-Christian structure of mortification, conversion, struggle, and

jubilation; the captivity narrative; and the spiritual autobiography; as well as the rhetorics of liberalism.³⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr. famously identified the powerful trope of the "Talking Book" in Equiano's eighteenth-century slave narrative, and the thematic importance of literacy to Black humanity.³¹ The contradictions of Equiano's split voice—at one moment speaking as part of an enslaved collectivity, at another as the individual apart—can be explained in terms of the conditions for Black autobiography discussed by William Andrews: "From the outset of black autobiography in America, the presupposition reign[ed] that a black narrator needs a white reader to complete his text, to build a hierarchy of abstract significance on the mere matter of his facts, to supply a presence where there was only 'Negro,' only a dark absence."³² Robert Stepto discussed this as a conflict between the slave's "tale" and the white abolitionists' "guarantee," which John Sekora called the "black message" in the "white envelope."³³ Critics have found in the aesthetic density of the antebellum slave narrative voices vying for control of different meanings and readerships.³⁴ Whether they have termed these rhetorical strategies "signifying," "riffing," "improvising" or "mo'ning," scholars of Black aesthetics have identified strategies that recode, double, and turn dominant meanings through indirection, parody, allusion, and association.³⁵

Hazel Carby urges us to read Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* as neither strictly African nor European, but as a "new transatlantic Black autobiographical tradition," expressing the "geopolitics of encounter."³⁶ In a similar manner, Srinivas Aravamudan reads the autobiography as multiple, complex voices alternately jostling for characterization and narrativization as "Christian," "African," and "literate," while Christine Levecq observes Equiano's "unique black internationalism" that moves through "multiple anchorings."³⁷ In this sense, while Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* established the genre of autobiography for the Black subject's passage from slavery to freedom, his text has always been profoundly complex and contradictory; alternately voiced as slave narrative, seafaring tale, protoanthropology, sentimental literature, religious conversion, and abolitionist treatise, it is a hybrid, multivocal collaboration that enlisted and mediated the contradictions of the age to create its first-person autobiographical narrative.³⁸ Some readings celebrate Equiano's triumph over slavery, while others condemn its assimilation of commercial and

colonial projects.³⁹ Carby writes: “Equiano speaks as a composite subject, a subject inhabiting multiple differences, as African, as black, as British, as Christian, as a diasporic and transnational citizen of the world, and in the process offers his readers the possibility of imagining a more complex cultural and national identity for themselves.”⁴⁰ Aravamudan discusses Equiano as undergoing a “tropical baptism by English literary history and emerging as a sailor and a writer.”⁴¹

Narrative temporality is itself a powerful vehicle of liberal progress, as evidenced in the employment of slave emancipation, in which the slave subject develops in time, constituting a story of an enslaved past that culminates in freedom achieved in the present. Just as we might read the multivocality of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* as an interruption of the singular voice required by the autobiographical genre, its uses of temporal digression also destabilize the generic conventions of linear progressive development. Recent scholars have criticized the singular, secular temporality often employed in histories of slavery that subordinate many contending and converging “times”; they counter that the slave trade and slavery constituted other ways of “being in time.” Historian Walter Johnson, for example, notes that the slaves’ journeys began in the interior of Africa, and thus that a “First Passage” before the treacherous crossing of the “Middle Passage” is obscured by the narrative histories that presume the history of slavery begins with the European slave traders’ encounter with Africa. In contrast, Equiano’s autobiography layers and intertwines a constellation of “times”: from the Christian time of an afterlife of eternity, to the African time of past and present events rather than strict sequence directed toward a future.⁴² In her history of the conversion of captive people into commodities, Stephanie Smallwood juxtaposes the time of the slave trader, registered in ships’ logs that marked time in terms of weather, disease, and slave mortality, with the time of men, women, and children chained in the holds of ships, seized by the “saltwater horror” of the Middle Passage, an “experience of motion without discernible direction or destination.”⁴³ Saidiya Hartman conceives the “time of slavery” as a continuous relation between the past and the present, in which the present is *still* the “time of slavery,” an aftermath in which slavery has not ended, but infuses the conditions, memories, and possibilities of the present.⁴⁴ This conception of the “time of slavery,” in

which “then and now coexist,” negates the idea of “progress” and stresses the irreparable and unredeemable nature of the event of slavery; it insists that the liberal remedy of emancipation has not resolved the injustices of slavery and its subsequent inequalities. Hartman writes: “For the distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath. How might we understand mourning, when the event has yet to end?” Hartman’s concept of the “time of slavery” belies the liberal narrative of development in time and asserts that emancipation from the violence of captivity, loss of homeland, expropriation of labor, and obliteration of kin and family has not yet occurred, is still yet to come.⁴⁵

There are several key moments from the autobiography that dramatize colonial slavery as the limit to the promises of liberal economy, political emancipation, and Christian redemption. Though Equiano condemned slavery as inhuman commerce, he asserted that British civilization and laws of economic exchange would benefit Africans. Through these laws, Equiano sold his labor for a wage, permitting him to accumulate enough money to purchase and own himself. In describing his “disgust” at the West Indies, Equiano named as barbaric not only the inhuman torture of slaves, but the mode of production itself: a slavery system in which unwaged labor is forcibly stolen through terror and punishment. Over and over again, *The Interesting Narrative* exposed the historically specific relationship between racial slavery and capitalism, and yet Equiano’s story suggests that he might achieve political freedom through the mastery of that economy: Equiano claimed his individual productivity out of the barbarism of unwaged slavery, proposing in a Lockean manner to sell the fruits of his “free labor” to become Smith’s economic man. Vincent Carretta notes that Equiano, in a sense, commodified himself through his successful narrative autobiography; he retained copyright and kept most of the profits of the nine editions published between 1789 and 1974, earning an amount of British sterling equivalent to \$120,000.⁴⁶ The Black autobiographer mastered the seas, the liberal public, and the symbolic economy of colonial slavery. The autobiography ends with an affirmation of the importance of expanding free enterprise and commerce between Britain and Africa. Yet inasmuch as the *Narrative* conforms to the autobiography of the liberal political economic subject,

we can also see Equiano's journey as one of continual transgressions—across boundaries of nation, of property and subject, land and sea. As David Kazanjian observes, Equiano's movements cross the “ambiguously national space of the Atlantic” and reach “racial-national limits” that open up contradictions that cannot be contained by the liberal formalism of the autobiography.⁴⁷

Three particular moments in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* stand out as instances in which the autobiography foregrounds the tensions and contradictions of liberal emancipation. One occurs shortly after his manumission, when Equiano finds himself aboard a ship with a new captain boasting of his skill by steering a dangerous new course. In the middle of the night, stormy seas cause the ship to crash against rocks, and the captain immediately orders the hatches to be nailed down on the twenty slaves in the hold, sacrificing the slaves to save the Englishmen who will fit in the small escape boat. Equiano writes of realizing that the captain's calculus valued English lives over those of African slaves: it “rushed upon my mind that instant with such violence, that it quite overpowered me. . . . I could no longer restrain my emotion, and I told him he deserved drowning for not knowing how to navigate the vessel” (113). Equiano works quickly with the “black and creole” sailors on board to save the ship, defying the rational economic logic that privileged wage labor as individual property that he had otherwise promoted. Equiano's accession to bourgeois manhood takes the form of becoming a merchant marine, a seaman much like Kenneth MacQueen, the smuggler of Chinese “coolies” commissioned in the 1803 “Secret Memorandum” discussed earlier. Like Kenneth MacQueen, Equiano becomes a liberal cosmopolitan subject of globalization, a mobile world citizen at home at sea. Yet his race is the remainder of the colonial slavery that was not dissolved by legal emancipation, constituting the limit and critique of national enfranchisement; and unlike a MacQueen, in the midst of a storm threatening life and death, Equiano recognizes race, as a historical residue of colonial labor, in his expressed solidarity with the Black and creole workers and slaves onboard.

In a second scene, the manumitted Equiano bids farewell to his former master Robert King. King tells him that in a short time he will “have land and slaves of [your] own” (123) and pronounces the model of im-

perial subjectivity into which the former master instructs Equiano to aspire. In this sense, his education in arithmetic, navigation, accounting, and trading are critical parts of an imperial formation whose ultimate resolution is property ownership, and the imperial surveillance and management of others. The former slave is continuously interpellated by this imperial formation throughout the autobiography—from the initial chapter in which Equiano provides a protoethnographic description of African village life, to an account of Equiano's encounter with Indians on the Mosquito coast—yet inasmuch as he is hailed to assume an imperial subjectivity, the narrative simultaneously discloses its impossibility.

The episode that portrays Equiano's efforts to Christianize the Mosquito Indian prince provides a vivid illustration of the contradictions of the liberal autobiography. It first expresses that Equiano's accession to “freedom” is signified by his imitation of the white colonial posture toward the native peoples, and it demonstrates the obstacles that render impossible Equiano's realization of this position. Furthermore, the episode demonstrates that the liberal narrative of freedom overcoming enslavement both builds upon and continues to erase the ongoing settler seizure of lands, Christianization, and subordination of indigenous Americans. The Mosquito Indians were described by cartographers and buccaneers as an indigenous people in Central America, living along the coast that extends from Honduras to Nicaragua.⁴⁸ Equiano writes of his missionary zeal to convert “heather” Indians to Christianity. When Equiano describes the Mosquito Indians as becoming “unruly” at a feast, he not only endorses corporal punishments for the native people, but Equiano identifies explicitly with the imperial explorer “Columbus”: “I was so enraged with [the eighteen-year-old son of the Mosquito king], that I could have wished to have seen him tied fast to a tree and flogged for his behavior. . . . Recollecting a passage I had read in the life of Columbus, when he was amongst the Indians in Mexico or Peru, where, on some occasion, he frightened them by telling them of certain events in the heavens, I had recourse to the same expedient” (157). The narrative portrays Equiano emulating the stance of the European explorer when he points to the heavens, and threatens the native Mosquito people that he will menacingly “tell God to make them dead.” Yet this conditional performance of identification is brief, for quite soon after, the autobiography

recounts that Equiano was recaptured by British merchants; and taken prisoner, he was subsequently abused terribly by them. When he is once again free, and is kindly received by Indians, he comments: "They acted towards me more like Christians than those whites I was amongst the last night, though they had been baptized" (162). This episode in which Equiano attempts to perform his "freedom" by occupying the Englishman's position with respect to the Mosquito suggests that the liberal promise of freedom overcoming slavery reproduced a settler colonial relationship to native peoples. It emphasizes that although the history of African slaves and Mosquito peoples is entwined—Mosquitos were occasionally captured along with African slaves and sold in Jamaica, while they too often raided and traded African slaves—the history of indigenous Central Americans is far from identical to the history of transatlantic African slavery. Equiano's fleeting adoption of an imperial position with respect to the native Indian people, however contradicted by his vulnerability to capture and return to slavery, is an allegory of the degree to which liberal abolition reiterates settler colonialism, erasing indigenous difference.⁴⁹

Finally, the contradiction between individual liberty and the persistence of collective slavery is most evident in the last episode of the autobiography, in which Equiano briefly recounts his participation in one of the first voyages to Sierra Leone, on behalf of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor to Resettle Poor Blacks and East Indians Living in England to Africa. Biographer Vincent Carretta suggests that the historical man named Equiano may have been the only person of African descent officially involved in the organization and administration of this actual historical project.⁵⁰ His stated wish to participate in this effort as a missionary who would convert Africans to Christianity would seem to conform to the colonial efforts to "bring civilization" to Africa, yet the narrator also reports feeling some reluctance and skepticism about the philanthropic nature of the project. Furthermore, his accusation of John Irwin, the agent in charge, of financial mismanagement and withholding provisions from the poor black settlers results in Equiano's immediate dismissal from his post and his return to England. He describes his journey to Sierra Leone as "an expedition, however unfortunate in the event . . . humane and politic in its design," but ultimately a "failure"

(173). The "failure" of the Sierra Leone project is often conflated with the career of the individual man, and interpreted in terms of its confirmation of the persistence of racial barriers to Equiano's achievement of liberty; for example, Christine Leveq observes that the rhetoric used by the white philanthropists who dismissed Equiano tended to racialize Equiano's difference and to vilify his dissent as inciting black rebellion, and Ronald Paul concludes that the episode exposed the "racist nature of the British state and the precarious situation in which Equiano remained as a Black man."⁵¹ Vincent Carretta mutates this "failure" by suggesting there is "little evidence supporting the contention that Equiano's dismissal was racially motivated" and gives his opinion that "Equiano and Irwin were both at fault," in that "Equiano did not go quietly."⁵² Carretta emphasizes Equiano's "vindication" when *The Interesting Narrative* is published in 1789, and employed in the abolitionist campaign that later "successfully" brought a formal end to the slave trade in 1807.

Yet I propose that if we shift the emphasis of the analysis away from terms that the liberal narrative autobiography would seem to dictate—that is, the success or failure of the individual subject Equiano—we can read the final "failure" as a quite necessary disclosure of the history of colonial slavery and empire. The declaration of "failure" marks a defining moment when historical contradictions break through the liberal genre of the individual's journey from slavery to freedom whose resolution would enact the suppression of ongoing colonial slavery. The "failure" is the very important sign that the genre of autobiography cannot resolve and contain the contradictions of slavery.

The Sierra Leone Resettlement of 1787–91, as envisioned by the abolitionist Granville Sharp, was a utopian experiment to bring "a community of free African settlers" to an outpost named the "Province of Freedom," in which they could be self-governing. Abolitionist Sharp had been known for having led the campaign that obtained the 1772 Mansfield ruling in the Somerset case, which established that former slave James Somerset, who had fled from America to Britain, was a free man, and could not be recaptured. The Somerset judgment, even if limited to prohibiting the forcible removal of slaves from England, established a precedent and was widely interpreted as outlawing slavery in England.⁵³ The Sierra Leone project expressed the abolitionists' desire to emancipate Blacks by means of

resettling them in an African homeland. The plans approval by Parliament may have also expressed a means to resettle the Blacks who had fought on the British side during the American Revolution as well as permitting slavery supporters to remove Blacks from Britain to an African colony secured in the British empire. Sharp declared in his *Short Sketch of Temporary Regulations for Sierra Leone*, "As soon as a slave shall set his foot within the bounds of the new settlement, he shall be deemed a *free man*."⁵⁴ Yet not only was the Province of Freedom short-lived—it lasted only four years from 1787 to 1791, but it "failed" in the larger sense that the vision of a state for emancipated Blacks in "free English territory in Africa" was far from fulfilled. In 1787, the time of the first expedition, reports disclosed insurmountable difficulties in the settlement—mortality, desertion, conflict—which continued once it came under the rule of the Sierra Leone Company from 1791 to 1807.⁵⁵ Sharp, Wilberforce, and Clarkson were the directors of the Sierra Leone Company, which governed and developed the colony populated by Blacks from Nova Scotia, the United States, and Jamaica, and Africans from the region; the first Reports of the Company Court of Directors detail disease, bad crops, great expenses, a war with France, and two insurrections by Nova Scotian Black settlers unhappy with the distribution of land. While participation in the slave trade was expressly forbidden by the Sierra Leone Company, not only did company employees engage in the slave trade, but many left company employment in order to become more engaged in the lucrative trade along the West African coast. Once the 1807 Slave Act abolished the trade throughout the empire, Sierra Leone became a Crown colony with a new critical role in the trade.⁵⁶

The Slave Act had enormous consequences for Sierra Leone. While making the trade illegal, the act provided that British naval vessels could capture slave ships and provided for the trials of owners and crews before a British court. Paradoxically, laws that abolished the trade gave rise to a proliferation of new means and practices for transporting and trading slaves. For expediency, there were British courts set up on the West African coast, rather than in England, and Sierra Leone became one site for these trials. Some rationalized the British takeover of Sierra Leone, making it a Crown colony in 1808, in relation to the need for these courts and the necessity of trying those involved in the "illegal

Traffick in Slaves"; possessing a harbor along the western coast of Africa, it was also a prime location for a British naval base as merchants sought to expand legitimate trades in ivory, palm oil, and cotton cloth. The British Navy policed the waters for illegal ships, and Vice Admiralty Courts were set up in Freetown, in Sierra Leone, to try offenders. The British Commissioners Gregory and Fitzgerald wrote to Foreign Secretary Canning in 1822 of the ongoing slave trade and reported "the range of Coast Southward from Sierra Leone to Cape Coast, the roads of Gallinas continue most prominently distinguished for constant and active Slave-trade . . . the total yearly export of about 3,000 slaves from Gallinas."⁵⁷ They detailed the cases adjudicated at Sierra Leone, the ships condemned, and slaves captured. The Gallinas country had been an important slave-trading center during the eighteenth century, reaching its peak in the second half. The abolition of the slave trade actually boosted the Gallinas trade, when the establishment of the Vice Admiralty Court made Freetown the center of the British Navy's suppression activities, and rendered Gallinas an attractive outpost.⁵⁸ The trade described by the British Commissioners might well have alluded to Pedro Blanco, a notorious Spanish slave trader based in Gallinas who began trading in African slaves in 1822, and who by 1839 controlled a network that imported slaves to work on Cuban plantations.⁵⁹ Blanco set up a *lomboko*, or a slave factory, a fortress stockade that consisted of several large holding depots or barracoons for slaves brought from the interior at the mouth of the Gallinas River, controlled by Spanish merchants within the then British colony; three thousand slaves a year were coming out of Gallinas River, with British observation and oversight, despite the fact that the trade was ostensibly illegal.

In their correspondence, the British Commissioners at Sierra Leone continually condemned the evils and treachery of the slave trade, but I read this correspondence *not* as evidence that the British legislation prohibiting the illegal trade actually stopped it, but to the contrary, that these documents and records about the prosecutions actually constitute evidence of the robust persistence and proliferation of the slave trade *after* 1807. That is, the 1807 Slave Act abolishing and prohibiting the trade did not bring the slave trade to an end, but rather its "illegality" actually elaborated the British forms of organization for regulating, documenting,

and engaging with the trade. Moreover, it provided the conditions for the British to populate the Sierra Leone colony with “recaptives,” the Africans “rescued” and “liberated” from illegal slave traders by the British.⁶⁰ Of the more than 100,000 African recaptives of diverse ethnic backgrounds “rescued” by the British Navy, over half were brought to Sierra Leone, baptized, and given Christian first and last names.⁶¹ The backgrounds “rescued” by the British Navy, over half were brought to Sierra Leone, baptized, and given Christian first and last names.⁶¹ The British colony of Sierra Leone, which included captured slaves of diverse ethnic groups, Nova Scotian and American Blacks, Nigerians, other Africans, and migrants from Trinidad, Jamaica, and other West Indian islands, was not an experiment in freedom, but an exercise in social engineering, where the British sought to “civilize” Blacks through the establishment of schools, Christian religion, and inculcating an ethic of rewards and penalties—far from the initial vision of a state of free Black self-government. In addition, the British project of sending Blacks in England to Africa, many of whom had never before lived there, should be seen in context of expatriation projects as “final solutions” for maintaining white “racial purity” by deporting Blacks “back” to Africa in lieu of granting equality with whites. Many abolitionists in the United States at this time could understand Black emancipation only as a prelude to exile from American society. Thomas Jefferson, for example, in his 1787 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, famously made the removal of Blacks from the United States an integral part of a gradual emancipation scheme of education, emancipation (after the age of forty-five, to repay the slaveholder’s investment), and expatriation to locations in Africa.⁶²

Ultimately, Equiano’s “failure” and his involvement with Sierra Leone’s history expressed the larger contradictions of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Atlantic world. The resettlement project promised to Black diaspora subjects the “return” to an Africa they had never known in order to secure some version of “freedom,” yet to do so meant becoming a subject or object of Western colonial conquest of the region. The slave trade died a very slow death over the course of the nineteenth century, and the numbers of slave exports remained high. The British Anti-Slave Trade Squadron and Vice Admiralty Court in Sierra Leone seized and prosecuted ships belonging not only to British and U.S. traders, but more frequently to French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch. Yet the anti-slave trade and antislavery agenda became a powerful pretext for the expansion

of Britain’s colonial interventions in Africa, accompanied by the shift to “legitimate” trades with African merchants. Ironically, Equiano became a most eloquent promoter of this economic thinking that advocated for trade with Africa, and indeed, *The Interesting Narrative* ends with Equiano’s recommendation that the best solution to the abolition of slavery is the expansion of trade between Britain and Africa:

A commercial intercourse with Africa opens an inexhaustible source of wealth to the manufacturing interests of Great Britain, and to all which the slave trade is an objection. . . .

I hope the slave trade will be abolished. I pray it may be an event at hand. The great body of manufacturers, uniting in the cause, will considerably facilitate and expedite it. . . . If the blacks were permitted to remain in their own country, they would double themselves every fifteen years. In proportion to such increase will be the demand for manufactures. Cotton and indigo grow spontaneously in most parts of Africa; a consideration this of no small consequence to the manufacturing towns of Great Britain. It opens a most immense, glorious, and happy prospect—the clothing, &c. of a continent ten thousand miles in circumference, and immensely rich in the production of every denomination in return for manufactures. (177–78)

The final words of the autobiography thus voice the convergence of abolition with new circuits of trade and express the imbrication of the desire for freedom with expanded commerce. Equiano’s “solution” to the struggle against the iniquities of slavery not only reiterates an understanding of Black emancipation as Black removal to Africa, but it anticipates precisely the British shift from eighteenth-century mercantilism and colonial slavery toward the new forms of empire that enabled the global expansion of trade in manufactured goods in the nineteenth century. Equiano names the conjunction of the abolition of slavery with the expansion of the British empire, and recommends that controlling circuits of worldwide commerce could be a more effective and profitable mode than the restricted gains of direct territorial conquest and colonial slavery. By connecting abolition with international “free trade,” Equiano outlined the design for a new era of capitalist empire that was perfectly commensurate with the vision of administrators in the British Colonial and Foreign Offices who

commissioned Kenneth MacQueen's 1807 voyage to China. In this sense, *The Interesting Narrative* mediated precisely the convergence of liberal abolition with imperial expansion into Asia and Africa, linking older geographies of conquest with new forms of sovereignty elaborated through commerce, trade, and movement across the seas. In the next chapters I discuss the stakes of the early nineteenth-century debate about "free trade" in relation to the British East India Company monopoly and argue that the "opening" of the trades in India and China provided the conditions for the innovation of new forms of liberal governance and imperial security. The opening of free trade inaugurated the vast expansion that founded the British empire and endured until the end of the century.

Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* was a transatlantic life "translated" through the languages and institutions of liberal freedom; his "model migration" from Africa to the Americas and exemplary assimilation into modern literature, politics, and economy affirmed liberal promises of freedom; such promises subsumed the transatlantic world whose peoples, lands, and labor were the conditions of possibility for that freedom. In effect, liberal genres, like the autobiography, reiterate a colonial division of humanity through this formalism of affirmation and forgetting, however much *race* is the remainder that continues to mark the limits to freedom for the subject of colonial slavery. In *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano's relationship to freedom is forever haunted by his former status as property within transatlantic social relations. His affirmation of the desire for political economic right exists simultaneously with the forgetting of the ongoing condition of collective enslavement. Yet even as the autobiographical genre develops the self-authoring individual out of the transatlantic conditions, the text's digressions, heterogeneity, and contradictions permit us to read "against the grain" of this development.

I began the discussion of Equiano's autobiography with Britain's introduction of Chinese contract laborers to the West Indies in order to situate the introduction of Asian labor and the East Indies trades as crucial elements in the history of abolition of the slave trade, Black emancipation, and colonialism in Africa. While some might consider Colonial Office documents on Chinese labor in the Americas an unlikely archive to read alongside Equiano's autobiography, the papers offer a unique window onto colonial administrators' developing ideas about the abolition

of African slavery within the limitations of mercantilism, and the expansion of free trade with markets beyond the West Indies that led to the extension of British colonialism in Africa. Likewise, the colonial papers on Sierra Leone might seem a distant, contiguous archive with little relevance to the East India Company trade with China and the opening of the "coolie" trade. Yet one can observe a relationship between the choice of Sierra Leone for a Crown colony in 1808, to and from whose port "recaptive" slaves were conveyed, and the considerations that led to the establishment of a Crown colony in Hong Kong in 1842 as a major point of arrival and departure for ships carrying Chinese workers around the world: the early command of trade through governing the port at Sierra Leone was a strategy greatly elaborated in the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century in Hong Kong and coastal China. In other words, to interpret Equiano's autobiography as a seamless narrative of slavery to freedom within the historical context of the British abolition of the slave trade is to radically restrict its scope and meaning, and to discipline it in terms of narrowly construed imperatives of the genre. It is to fix and bind the narrative in time and place, in the same manner that the imperial drive of the colonial archive would appear to regulate the meanings of the documents it contains. We might instead take generous "detours around proper knowledge" into the "territories of failure," by combining unlikely archives, reading Equiano in relation to the 1803 "Secret Memorandum," and by considering the Sierra Leone court prosecutions of illegal traffickers in relation to the Second Governor of Hong Kong's criminal laws against unregistered vagrants.⁶³ We might connect *The Interesting Narrative* not only to the seventeenth-century transatlantic African slave trade and the European colonial development of plantation production in the Americas, but also to the settlers' conquests of lands and wars with native peoples, and to the nineteenth-century "transition from slavery to free labor" in which Chinese and Indians were recruited to British, French, and Spanish colonies throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. The longevity of Equiano's autobiography is evidence of the resilience of desire for the representative individual story of the achievement of freedom, but let us dedicate our reading practices to connecting that individual story to the more extensive intimacies of four continents that gave rise to the modern narrative of the singular life.