"Passage to More Than India": American Attitudes toward British Imperialism in the 1850s

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"Passage to more than India":
American Attitudes toward British Imperialism in the 1850s

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The Faculty of the Department of History
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Elizabeth Kelly Gray
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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In honor of
May Gray Etlar
and
in loving memory of
Mae Allen McNeish
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to use American reactions to the Indian Uprising of 1857 to explain American attitudes toward imperialism before the United States acquired an empire of its own. On May 10, 1857, native soldiers in Britain's Indian army rose up against their colonial rulers. The uprising sparked a full-scale rebellion that lasted for more than a year, before the British successfully suppressed it. During the war, the British and American publics read accounts of the war and stories of Indian atrocities. Only toward the end did readers learn that many of the stories were British fabrications.

Many Americans were interested in the events and expressed their attitudes toward the war in diaries, poems, plays, journal articles, and speeches. Attention to the commentaries of "ordinary Americans" -- those who did not work for the government -- reveals the breadth of American reactions to the rebellion specifically -- and imperialism in general -- and the reasons for their opinions. These people could express and explain their attitudes toward the rebellion with a candor that policy makers were denied.

There was strong American support for empire. Most white Americans sympathized with the British because of their shared attitudes toward race, religion, and gender. The dominant classes in both Great Britain and the United States believed in the superiority of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and had little faith in a people whose religion and traditions were so different from their own. Most Americans considered British rule to have been a blessing for India, and some encouraged American imperialism. Some Americans criticized the British for mismanaging their empire, but few suggested that imperialism was inherently wrong.

But other Americans had interest-driven concerns that challenged support for imperialism. Catholic Americans with Irish sympathies, for example, opposed the British. And many Americans saw the Indian Uprising as akin to a slave rebellion and developed their attitudes accordingly. For this reason, Northerners were more likely than Southerners to sympathize with the Indians. Also, both Brits and Americans had strong but unfounded fears that, respectively, Indian and slave men were possessed of the urge to rape white women, and responded violently to this perceived threat. The extent to which Americans connected slavery with imperialism -- consciously or unconsciously -- indicates the potential usefulness of applying postcolonial theory to American history.
"Passage to more than India"¹:
American Attitudes toward British Imperialism in the 1850s

¹ Walt Whitman, "A Passage to India," line 224.
CHAPTER ONE. AMERICAN CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM

In 1858, writers for *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Gazette*, out of Boston, marveled at the accomplishments of the British East India Company, which was ending its 160-year tenure in India, as control of the colony moved to the British Crown. The writers deemed the Company a "most stupendous commercial institution" and believed that the United States should follow the British example. "One small island in the seas, or one small colony abroad," they suggested, "would create more trade and business than fifty times the same extent at home." South America, they believed, should become "an East Indies to the United States."\(^1\)

The writers' comments reveal that some Americans, long before their nation had an empire of its own, supported imperialism and encouraged the conscious pursuit of colonies. These comments challenge the suggestion of many historians that American imperialism in the 1890s was an ideological departure for a nation that traditionally opposed empire. They also demonstrate the existence of strong pro-imperial sentiment in nineteenth-century America, a find that helps to justify Amy Kaplan's emphasis on the importance of studying American culture and imperialism in conjunction. In her introduction to the 1993 collection of essays *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Kaplan noted that historians continue to deny the existence of American empire. She attributed

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the perpetuation of the myth to "the absence of empire in the study of American culture" and also to the absence of the United States in postcolonial studies. Several scholars have connected imperialism with British culture. Christopher Herbert and Anne McClintock, for example, have noted that nineteenth-century middle-class Britons regarded impoverished and working-class Brits in much the same way that they regarded nonwhite subjects of the British empire. Nigel Leask and Edward W. Said have demonstrated the strong influence that the British empire exerted on that nation's culture, especially its literature. And Mary Louise Pratt has noted that Eurocentric travel writings appealed to the literate public, even though such expansion financially benefited only "the very few." Americanists can use colonial theory in order to gain a greater understanding of American culture including significant American support for imperialism long before the United States acquired a formal empire. Although

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2 Amy Kaplan, "Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, N. C., 1993), 11. Edward P. Crapol also noted historians' continual reluctance to acknowledge American empire in "Coming to Terms with Empire: The Historiography of Late-Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History*, 16 (Fall 1992), 573-97. Anna Kasten Nelson suggested that historians probe American allegiances by paying attention to the "relationship between adventurer, entrepreneur, and politician" -- and to their economic ties -- and by going "beyond conventional diplomatic sources" to do so. And Kinley Brauer has demonstrated that antebellum American merchants, planters, and manufacturers were interested in commercial expansion. They perceived the British as following a "well-conceived imperial strategy" to seize markets and feared that this would hurt their own potential for international trade. But attention to economics would not complete the picture, nor would attention to all non-state actors who took part in such events. (Anna Kasten Nelson, "Destiny and Diplomacy, 1840-1865," in *American Foreign Relations: A Historiographical Review*, eds. Gerald K. Haines and J. Samuel Walker [Westport, Conn., 1981], 56-57; Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-1860," *Diplomatic History*, 12 [Winter 1988], 24.)


little scholarship has explicitly connected American culture with imperialism -- especially in the period before 1898 -- allusions to the importance of such study are manifest. Much of colonial theory involves the control of whites over nonwhites, and one could argue that both slavery and white Americans' treatment of Native Americans have constituted imperial relationships. The resemblance was not lost on Americans at the time. The Haitian revolt against French imperialism in the 1790s, for example, intensified Americans' fears of a slave rebellion and caused Southerners to dread "the contagion of Haiti and Santo Domingo." Walter L. Williams and James Gump have found strong similarities between American treatment of Native Americans and formal imperial rule such as the United States in the Philippines and the British in South Africa. And in 1978, the same year that Edward Said referred to "The Orient" as "almost a European invention," Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., referred to

5 There are, of course, many studies of American attitudes toward race in the nineteenth century, including William Stanton's *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago, 1960) and Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). Although Stanton and Horsman connect American attitudes toward race more with American expansion than with American attitudes toward imperialism, this scholarship contributes to studies of American empire. First of all, as Crapol noted in his essay, the difference between expansion and imperialism was largely semantic (Crapol, 586-89). Also, to a large extent white Americans and Britons shared their attitudes toward a racial hierarchy with Anglo-Saxons at the top. Race therefore facilitated American support for British imperialism, as will be shown below.


7 Walter L. Williams noted the strong similarities between American policy toward Native Americans in the 1830s and toward Filipinos in the 1890s; the American government treated both peoples as citizens of "domestic, dependent nations." (Walter L. Williams, "United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism," *Journal of American History*, 66 [March 1980], 810-31.) James Gump demonstrated the great degree to which American relations with Native Americans resembled those of the British with native South Africans in *The Dust Rose Like Smoke: The Subjugation of the Zulu and the Sioux* (Lincoln, Neb., 1994).
"the image of the Indian" as "a White invention." Said acknowledged the power of the discourse of Orientalism, which assisted Europeans in "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Berkhofer did not make as strong a case for the power of discourse, but he did acknowledge that "Common concepts" such as that of the Indian "reinforced the general impression of the deficiency of primitives everywhere." In both America and Asia constructions of the Other served whites in their subjugation of nonwhites, whether or not the relationship was formally imperialistic.8

Colonial theorists have also alluded to the potential applications of their work to the United States, even in the antebellum era. Ashis Nandy has noted the "homology between sexual and political dominance" that appeared "invariably" in Western colonialism, in which men and masculinity dominated women and femininity. Nandy considered American slavery to have been its "best documented" example.9 For Pratt, colonialism and slavery were similar in that both were "contact zones," that is, social spaces in which disparate cultures "grapple with each other" although one is clearly dominant.10 David Spurr acknowledged that Americans, Britons, and the French all used the Rhetoric of Empire. He focused his study of America's use of imperial rhetoric on its 1890s acquisition of the Philippines and its struggle in the Vietnam War, but acknowledged the existence of the colonizing mindset as early as 1846, when

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10 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, 4. Pratt focuses on slavery in chapter 5, specifically sexual relations between Scotsman John Stedman and the mestizo slave Joanna in 1770s Dutch Surinam, and British Anna Maria Falconbridge's 1802 description of the similarities between slavery and marriage.
Herman Melville wrote *Typee*. And Robert J. C. Young noted that colonial rebellions and American slavery caused nineteenth-century Europeans and Americans to take refuge in "apparently authoritative scientific laws." More importantly, Young noted the influence of American racial attitudes on British attitudes toward race and colonialism. Polygenesis gained popularity in the 1840s as Americans sought to justify slavery in a nation in which "all men are created equal." Americans' sharp dichotomy of black and white "became the dominant theoretical model for all the relations of the white to the non-white world," with whiteness as the standard, thus replacing the spectrum along which the British had previously differentiated races. Both Britons and Americans recognized the similarity of their situations.

Antebellum white Americans regarded imperialism abroad much as they regarded power relationships at home. For example, the native uprising in India in 1857, often referred to as the Great Mutiny, renewed American fears of a slave rebellion in the midst of a sectional crisis. A study of American attitudes toward this colonial episode, therefore, provides new insight into American racism and slavery. It also reveals significant American support for imperialism. British and American dominant culture both supported the notion of a racial hierarchy, with Anglo-Saxons at the top; belief in the superiority of Protestant Christianity; and belief that strength, courage, and protection of women characterized masculinity, and that moral purity characterized femininity. These shared values caused Americans largely to absorb imperial rhetoric about

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India, such as British notions of martial and non-martial races, their reports of Indian atrocities, the superiority of Anglo-Saxon government, goals of "uplifting" those who were lower on a racial hierarchy, Hindus' lack of "manliness," and Indians' alleged devilish lust for white women. Americans, however, did not simply accept British interpretations of events. Their domestic concerns also affected their attitudes; Americans have never been monolithic in their perspectives, and their reactions to the British handling of the Indian Uprising varied greatly. Given the Indian Uprising's resemblance to a slave rebellion, for example, American allegiances fell largely along sectional lines.

Also, British suppression of the Indian rebels forced Westerners to acknowledge the hostility that many Indians felt toward British control and put the lie to the British rhetoric of benevolence. Many Americans attributed the violence to British mismanagement of its empire, thus sidestepping the conclusion that imperialism was inherently wrong and tacitly suggesting that American empire would be more efficient and just. Others used gendered, racial, and religious justifications -- which they could also apply at home -- in order to explain their belief in the need for continued British control. Together, American reactions to the Indian Uprising reflected Americans' "imperial" attitudes toward their domestic situation.
CHAPTER TWO. THE UPRISING

The swell to rebellion in India began in January of 1857. That month, the British provided their native soldiers in the Bengal army with Enfield rifles to replace their Brown Besses, but many of the soldiers refused them. The Enfield rifles had a longer range and greater accuracy, but they required powder cartridges -- which were waterproofed with a coating of tallow and beeswax -- and soldiers had to bite the cartridges to open them. A false rumor spread that the coating was made of beef and pig fat. As American Consul to British India Charles Huffnagle explained in a letter to Secretary of State William Marcy, "to bite the cartridge the Hindoo would be defiled with the beef & the Mohammedan by the pork & . . . consequently their cast would be lost forever." The native soldiers -- or sepoys -- concluded, to their horror, that the new cartridges constituted a subversive British attack to destroy Indian religions and thus convert them to Christianity.

In Meerut, India, on April 24, the British court-martialed and convicted the eighty-five of the ninety members of the Third Light Cavalry who refused orders to take three cartridges apiece. On May 9, the British humiliated the convicted men by lining them up before the other troops, reading out their sentences of

14 Broehl, 49.
16 Ibid.
ten years' imprisonment with hard labor, stripping them of their uniforms, shackling their ankles, and ordering them to carry their boots. As they marched off, many of the convicted men called to the others to remember them and threw their boots at Colonel George Carmichael-Smyth, the man who had ordered them to accept the cartridges.  

At dusk the next day, members of the Eleventh and Twentieth Bengal Native Infantry regiments and the Third Light Cavalry began to fire on their officers, then burned the Europeans' bungalows and killed their inhabitants. By the time that European soldiers had assembled, the sepoys were heading toward Delhi, thirty miles away. The next day, they won over Delhi's three sepoy regiments and murdered or drove out the Europeans. In twenty-four hours, the sepoys had launched a full-scale political rebellion. The British were reluctant to trust any of the sepoys, and British reinforcements could not arrive for months.

Major General Sir Hugh Wheeler was in charge of Kanpur, a city in the northwest province of Oudh, and was a friend of Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Kanpur's last peshwa, or leader. But the Nana, who wanted a regime as the new peshwa, realized that he had more to gain as titular head of the Kanpur rebels than as a British ally. In late May, he and his forces occupied the Kanpur Treasury, and lay in wait for the surrender of British officers and their families, who were inside the Kanpur barracks. On the night of June 6, Nana

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18 Ibid., 79-80.
20 Stokes, 17.
21 Broehl, 137; Hibbert, 178.
23 Hibbert, 175-76.
Sahib's forces attacked the garrison. A week into the attack, the Nana offered safe passage to Britons who would lay down their arms, and boarded them onto forty boats on June 27, to send them to Allahabad. Once they were aboard, shots rang out, setting off an explosion of gunfire from the Nana's troops that killed many, including Wheeler. A boat that got away was captured down river. The sepoys then took the 125 survivors back to their camp, killed the sixty men among them, and imprisoned the women and children. On July 15, Nana Sahib learned that General Henry Havelock was approaching Kanpur to relieve the city and rescue the remaining prisoners. The Nana ordered the prisoners killed. When his troops refused, five "hangers-on" with swords performed the deed. They threw the corpses of the women and children into Kanpur's well.

Havelock's forces soundly defeated Nana Sahib's troops the next day outside of Kanpur; Havelock and his men recovered the city and found the mass British grave. This massacre outraged Britons more than any other episode in the war and became the focus of "the worst of the racist and bloodthirsty thinking." Havelock and General James Outram moved toward Lucknow to relieve the prisoners but became prisoners as well. On November 14, troops under Sir Colin Campbell attempted another rescue of the garrison's prisoners. Their arrival -- with bagpipe accompaniment -- raised the prisoners' spirits. Before freeing their countrymen, they successfully stormed the massive
enclosure that sheltered the rebels. On November 23, the British successfully relieved Lucknow, but Havelock died of dysentery.32

The war continued. Early in 1858, the British government sent a committee to relieve British sufferers in India, but the committee members could not confirm any of the horror stories that had reached the West. It appeared that many of the stories of Indian atrocities were British lies. In the meantime, the British had committed numerous retaliatory atrocities, including strapping condemned Indians to the mouths of cannons and then setting off the cannons.33 Before having other Indians hanged, Brigadier General J.G.S. Neill forced each of them to break his caste by licking clean a square foot of the bloodstained floor at the site of the Kanpur massacre, after it was moistened with water by members of the lowest caste.34 A writer for the American journal Albion excused Anglo-Indians' false reports of Indian crimes, as they were fighting for "life and honour and what is far dearer . . . their wives, and their families," but he did not encourage similar lenience for sepoys.35

It took more than a year for the British to put down the rebellion completely. The war made a hero of Sir Henry Havelock and a villain of Nana Sahib and propelled the story of Sir Colin Campbell's rescue of the Westerners at Lucknow into the realm of British folklore. In August of 1858, after the British suppressed the rebellion, the British Crown took over control of India from the East India Company.

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32 Ibid., 162, 164, 171.
34 Broehl, 146.
35 "Alleged Inhumanity of the British in India," Albion, April 10, 1858, 175.
Americans received their first news of the rebellion in June of 1857, and during the next year and a half remained eager to hear the latest word on its developments.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} This is demonstrated by editors' tendency to report when European ships brought "nothing further" with regard to Indian events, as seen in "Two Days Later From Europe," \textit{Columbus [Georgia] Enquirer}, Nov. 10, 1857, 2 and "Four Days Later From Europe: Arrival of the Atlantic off Sandy Hook," \textit{Boston Evening Transcript}, Jan. 6, 1858, 2.
CHAPTER THREE. THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RESPONSE

American policy makers strongly supported the British. The uprising occurred at a time when President James Buchanan was trying to maintain rapprochement with British leaders; this is only the most obvious reason for his support. The British protectorate over Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast had caused some Anglo-American tension, and American policy makers were angered by British attempts to recruit Americans to fight in the Crimean War. But in a letter to Lord Clarendon, Buchanan assured the British foreign secretary that he was "very much gratified at the tone of public sentiment on the East Indian Insurrection." He noted that the Americans wished the British "success in putting down" the uprising and added his belief that their "power, energy, & resources as a nation will speedily accomplish this object."37

The president admitted, however, a belief of his that many pro-British Americans shared: that the East India Company had governed India poorly. He reflected on his years as American minister to England, during which time he had decided that British policy in India "might be improved; but your system is so ancient, so complicated, & so many vested rights are involved that I consider it would be presumption in me even to make suggestions."38 American criticism of Company government does not signify American opposition to imperialism. On the contrary, in blaming the Company government, Buchanan avoided suggesting that imperialism was inherently wrong. Instead, the uprising became

38 Ibid.
an example of imperialism gone awry. One could believe that the Company had governed poorly, and maintain that other governments and other countries -- perhaps even the United States -- could control other peoples, and govern them well.

But American policy makers were on the Brits' side in India, and their gendered and racial beliefs strengthened their Anglophilia. America's consul in Calcutta also believed in the Britons' superiority. Charles Huffnagle asserted that "India must be reconquered . . . & when reconquered must be held by a large European force." To Huffnagle, Indian atrocities against women made Western control mandatory and justified violent retribution. As he explained to Secretary of State Lewis Cass in December of 1857, "a war of extermination must follow" atrocities such as "English ladies hanging naked by their hair from the ceilings while the miscreants tore off their flesh piecemeal, -- or suspended by their hands, or feet & treated in the same way until death relieved them."39 American Minister to England George Dallas admired the "extraordinary" East India Company, which, he noted, had "begun as a few enterprising merchants" and grown into "a magnificent empire teeming with wealth of every description."40 In February of 1858, he agreed with Lord Stratford de Redcliffe that Britain's chance of keeping India was founded on "the resistless superiority of civilized intellect over an almost incurable barbarism."41

40 Diary of George Mifflin Dallas, While United States Minister to Russia 1837 to 1839, and to England 1856 to 1861, ed. Susan Dallas (Philadelphia, 1892), 220, 238.
41 Dallas, 236.
Policy makers' remarks, however, provide only a glimpse of the influences that molded American attitudes toward this imperial episode. Americans who were not engaged in diplomacy and who recorded their attitudes toward the uprising and its suppression were more candid, and could explain their opinions at length. For the few Americans who had a concrete financial stake in India at the time, economic concerns were paramount. But most Americans who commented on the events regarded them through their racial, religious, and gendered prejudices or perceived the event as akin to the suppression of a slave rebellion. Many, however, admitted their disapproval of the way in which the British handled their empire.

The Indian Uprising hurt some Americans economically. American trade with India had flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but fell off during the War of 1812 and remained dormant for forty years. In the 1850s, however, American trade with India resumed, partially due to the greater availability of money and credit. The 1853 European crop failure and the Crimean War also widened the India market for Americans.\(^{42}\) Between 1850 and 1856, American exports to Calcutta tripled, to 166,000 tons, and between 1852 and 1857, the value of American imports from India increased more than 350 percent, to almost twelve million dollars.\(^{43}\) America's customers in India were mainly Westerners who lived on the subcontinent. Important American

\(^{42}\) Bhagat, 111.
\(^{43}\) Huffnagle to Marcy, Jan. 7, 1857; Bhagat, 111.
commodities included kerosene and coal, although the top two imports were cotton and ice.\textsuperscript{44} Ice ships, in fact, were assured "the best berth in the harbor."\textsuperscript{45}

In 1857, Boston had about three-fourths of America's trade with the British East Indies; New York had the rest.\textsuperscript{46} Boston's East-India merchants, anticipating the uprising and a subsequent cessation of trade, glutted the Boston market with Indian goods. When economic depression hit the nation in September, however, their advance planning heightened their losses. Prices were cut by as much as fifty percent, and ship owners did not plan additional excursions.\textsuperscript{47} In 1858, the trade that had been thriving all decade fell off. And on September 27, 1857, American trader George Wendell wrote his father from Liverpool that he was planning on turning his attentions to China because "Business in India looks anything but good."\textsuperscript{48}

In April of 1858, writers for \textit{Hunt's Merchants' Magazine} noted that Europe's and America's depression would have a more permanent effect on the cotton market than would the rebellion.\textsuperscript{49} The rebellion did lessen the trade by limiting Indian productivity.\textsuperscript{50} Although the depression had lessened demand in America, a dearth of Indian cotton was cause for concern. In September of

\textsuperscript{44} Report on the External Commerce of Bengal for the Year 1858-1859 (Calcutta, 1860), noted in Bhagat, 176.


\textsuperscript{46} Boston Board of Trade, \textit{Fourth Annual Report} (1858), 85, cited in Samuel Eliot Morison, \textit{The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860} (Boston, 1921), 376.

\textsuperscript{47} Morison, 368.

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Bhagat, 111.

\textsuperscript{49} "Supply and Consumption of Cotton in 1858," \textit{Hunt's Merchants' Magazine}, 38 (April 1858), 514; Bhagat, 111, ix.

1857, Hunt's writers lamented that an extended "India war" would raise cotton prices to a level that "may sadly interfere with the machinery of Europe and America." Textile production demanded a cotton supply, and India was one of Britain's best hopes to provide it, although the rebellion put off British attempts to improve transportation in the colony. George McHenry, however, did not fear that the United States would lose its edge in the international cotton markets to India. In his 1863 study of The Cotton Trade, he insisted that "one well-fed negro slave comfortably cared for... [and] managed by the intelligence of the American planters" was more effective than "five uncertain Hindoos, with their poor diet, and still poorer agricultural skill."

The rebellion altered Hunt's attitudes toward the British East India Company. In August of 1857, one writer quoted the Bombay Times's description of India's great wealth and asserted that "The world has never before seen a conquered empire governed with the wisdom and the honesty which characterized the English rule in India." That November, however, Hunt's writers attributed India's "trouble and bloodshed" to Company rule, asserted that the East India Company was one of "two great monopolies in England which will have to be done away with," and lamented the sad situation of merchants in India who were not part of the empire. But as noted above, Hunt's writers recognized the enormous benefits of empire to trade. This helped to make them

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ardent imperialists, and they recommended that the British resume the colony's productivity by ending the prevailing "mutinous spirit" and providing "more enlightened" rule. The writers believed that imperialism could benefit both sides, as they regarded commerce as "a handmaid of religion, of civilization, of philanthropy, of the arts, and of every good influence." 

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57 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR. "MARTIAL RACES" AND RELIGION

In his travel journal *Following the Equator*, Mark Twain noted that "the average man is profoundly ignorant of countries that lie remote from his own," and could perhaps associate only "one or two facts and maybe a couple of names" with a given country. Americans had long heard and believed fantastic stories of India, and during the rebellion those stories helped them to believe that Indians auctioned off British women in bazaars and forced British men to become cannibals. In the meantime, white Americans' commercial and cultural connections with Great Britain strengthened their Anglophilia, and they tended to accept British perceptions. Their shared feelings of cultural, racial, and religious superiority inclined them also to accept British news. It is noteworthy that Twain's examples of words that came to Americans' minds upon mention of India were all British, or British-related: "Clive, Hastings, the Mutiny, Kipling, and a number of other great events."

In order to understand the uprising, Americans adopted British myths of racial differentiation in India. The members of Britain's Peel Commission had tried to determine the cause of the uprising and concluded that "various Indian ethnic groups" possessed "true martial attributes." Brahmins -- "whose high caste made them scheming and dishonest" -- had begun the rebellion, because British domination of the Bengal army had interfered with the traditional Indian

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59 Letters of Major James Bailie, collection of Mr. Jack P. Mackie, quoted in Hibbert, 213.
60 Twain, *Following the Equator*, vol. 2, 218.
social structure. This explained why the Bengal uprising had occurred and why
the Gurkhas, Sikhs, Marathas, and Rajputs had remained loyal. The British
revised the notion of martiality to include components of loyalty and honor, and
dubbed these latter four groups India's true martial peoples.61

From the beginning, Brits had needed to simplify India's ethnic diversity
in order to understand it and did so in ways that would benefit the Raj.62
Company officials developed the notion of Bengalis as effeminate to justify their
own presence; India needed a stern, masculine presence, they claimed, to
"impose on her the discipline she is too feckless to impose on herself."63
Because Muslims had ruled Hindus for centuries before the East India
Company arrived, most sources described Muslims as bellicose and Hindus as
peace-loving. By the time of the Uprising, many Americans had adopted and
tried to apply British theories of race. Rather than seeing the battle as British
versus Indian, many Brits and Americans saw it as British versus Muslim, for
control of the Hindu population, whose members, in the words of one American,
were "content to serve."64 When explaining the Uprising, British historians often
ignored episodes that contradicted their theories, such as reports of Muslim
servants' disloyalty or clashes in the supposedly "silent" Punjab region.65 The
distinction between "hard-fighting, masculine, Indian men from the north and
west -- usually Muslims -- and weak, effeminate Hindus from the South and

61 Pradeep Barua, "Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races," Historian, 58
(Autumn 1995), 110-11, 115.
62 Ibid., 107.
63 Richard Cronin, Imagining India (New York, 1989), 148, also quoted in Andrew J.
64 American Presbyterian, reprinted in "Explanations of the Revolt in India," Advocate of Peace, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1858), 17.
Bengal" became widely accepted. A Princeton Review writer noted that mainly Muslims had rebelled, whereas Hindus "had taken but little part" in the rebellion and had themselves "been plundered in many instances by the revolted troops." In 1858, an American Presbyterian writer suggested that "the Hindoo is not given to rebellion, he is content to serve." With Muslims, on the other hand, there was

an actual hatred of British sovereignty. . . . Being of a more warlike temper than the true Hindoos, the Sepoys are largely drawn from their ranks, especially in Northern India, where the present revolt has taken place.

A writer for the New Englander noted in November of 1857 that the Rajputana district, which was "full of rebels," contained "the most war-like race in India, with perhaps the exception of the Sikhs."

But Americans did not have to accept British explanations as they received them. Some Americans dismissed all Indians as warmongers. A writer for the Princeton Review expressed his belief that the uprising would end Europeans' notion of Hindus as "mild and nearly perfect," and a writer for the Christian Examiner suggested that the rebellion demonstrated the superficiality of the idea that Hindus were "gentle even to effeminacy." Despite these aberrations, the rebellion escalated racist attitudes and increased British emphasis on security. After the rebellion, Parliament forbade high-caste Bengalis to join the Indian army. Instead, the Raj relied on the "martial" Sikh and

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66 Rotter, 526.
68 American Presbyterian, reprinted in "Explanations of the Revolt in India," Advocate of Peace, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1858), 17.
71 Barua, 109.
Gurkha races, due to favorable stereotypes of their personalities and physical stature, and Anglo-Indians' incorrect belief that these groups "had no pretensions of caste."\textsuperscript{72}

Although most Americans did not oppose imperialism per se, many -- especially in the Northeast -- criticized British rule, and held the Christian and more "civilized" British to a higher standard than they did their Indian subjects. Reports from India emphasized aspects of Indian culture that Westerners found strange and horrible, such as the caste system and sati -- Hindu widows' immolation of themselves atop their late husbands' funeral pyres -- or that were untrue, such as one missionary's description of India as a land where "people revolt because their government will not let them roast their mothers, choke their fathers, and strangle their daughters."\textsuperscript{73} Nineteenth-century Americans often saw the world's religions as competing rather than complementary, and few of them read works about Eastern beliefs that dealt with the subject in a respectful and open-minded fashion. For these reasons, most believed in the superiority of Protestant Christianity over Eastern religions.\textsuperscript{74} With such beliefs in place, some members of America's religious community saw the war as the quintessential struggle between Christianity and false religions, and therefore ardently supported the British. Indian religions' apparent threat to Christianity caused a writer for Philadelphia's \textit{Princeton Review} to implore Christians to rally for the British. "Not only are they our brethren in the flesh and in the faith," he insisted,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{72} Rotter, 527; Barua, 111. \\
\textsuperscript{73} "The Present State of India," \textit{Princeton Review}, 30 (July 1858), 461. \\
\end{flushright}
but it is patent to all men, that the outbreak in India is the rising of the powers of darkness against the kingdom of light. It is heathenism against Christianity. It is Belial against Christ. It is Satan against God.\textsuperscript{75}

A similar belief in the war's critical religious importance came from Rev. J. Johnston Walsh, the only survivor of the Fatehgarh mission. Walsh saw the uprising as the beginning of the collapse of Islam, which had been predicted "in the prophecy of the Apocalypse," and saw the duel as God's way of preparing India for mass conversion, by making the "heathen meek, humble, and holy."\textsuperscript{76}

After the Brits successfully suppressed the Indians, some Americans declared victory for Christianity. Missionary William Reed recalled his time in "the dark, cold shadow of Pagan civilization," as was found in "what we may hope to be the ruins of Hindu or Mohammedan superstition."\textsuperscript{77}

But members of America's religious community who did not see the war in such apocalyptic terms criticized Britain's abusive practices, especially as many saw British behavior as "unchristian." Writers for Boston's journal the 
\textit{Advocate of Peace} did not excuse Indian violence, but one ridiculed Britain's tone of "mingled astonishment and indignation." What other reaction, he mused, could the British expect from people who had been converted into "mere machines for murder" and were governed "\textit{for purely selfish purposes}?\textsuperscript{78}

Writers for the \textit{Christian Examiner}, also out of Boston, advocated treating all religions "with tenderness and respect, as well as races and complexions," and supported the East India Company's policy against Christianizing the Indians. "Fancy a number of Mussulman Imams preaching the rottenness of Christianity."

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 452.
\textsuperscript{76} Rev. J. Johnston Walsh, \textit{A Memorial of the Futtehgurh Mission and her Martyred Missionaries} (Philadelphia, 1859), 309, 322, quoted in Stern, 43, 44.
\textsuperscript{77} "American Missionaries and Thanksgiving Day," \textit{Godey's Lady's Book}, 59 (Aug. 1859), 177-78.
\textsuperscript{78} "Causes of the Indian Rebellion," \textit{Advocate of Peace}, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1858), 15.
on Easter Sunday," they suggested early in 1858. "What do you suppose the feeling of the people would be?" 79

Most Catholic Americans stalwartly opposed the British. In July of 1857, a writer for the pro-British Albion noted that New York Herald writers wrote down to the "intelligence and [the] prejudices" of "Irish servants" when they described "the wrongs perpetrated by the Britons upon the Hindoos" and "chuckle[d] over these disastrous occurrences." 80 Other Protestant sources also noted Catholics' happiness with the Anglo-Indian war. When the British held a day of fasting and prayer for British casualties in the war, a writer for New Haven, Connecticut's Church Review observed that Roman Catholics "not only refused to recognize the day, but have fairly gloated over the hellish scenes of violence, carnage, and lust." 81

Antipathy to Britain sometimes pushed Catholic critics to deny the benefits of empire. Writers for Brownson's Quarterly Review, a Catholic journal published in New York, accepted Indian violence as retaliation for the Brits' "century of bad faith, misrule, oppression, and torture." 82 Brownson's writers acknowledged that British loss of India would hurt American trade, but they suggested that "no nation is really enriched by trade" and that land and labor were the only true sources of wealth. 83 But as they themselves acknowledged, few -- especially in Washington -- would find their argument persuasive. They

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80 "The Sepoy Revolt in Bengal," Albion, July 18, 1857, 343.
feared that Britain would emerge from the rebellion stronger than ever, but hoped that the rebellion would topple the imperial power.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 552.
"It strikes us," a writer for the abolitionist *National Era* asserted in July of 1857, "that journals which defend Slavery of any kind, should sympathize everywhere, *not* with the oppressed, but with the oppressor." apparent similarities between imperialism and slavery would suggest that American attitudes toward the rebellion fell along sectional lines, with Northerners supporting the insurgents and Southerners siding with the British. The correlation is far from exact, but additional evidence exists to support such a thesis. Some Southerners used the Indian events to assert the need to keep African Americans in bondage, while a writer for the Confederate *Index* alluded to the Indian massacre of Britons and thus played on British fears of "another Cawnpore" to encourage British support for the American South during the Civil War. In the *Southern Literary Messenger*, James Holcombe asserted that subcontinent Indians were more civilized than African slaves, but that the violence of the uprising demonstrated the need for British rule. Holcombe rued the chaos that emancipation of American slaves would cause, and thus justified the need to maintain slavery as well. "Are the relations of England to India so anomalous," he asked in November of 1858, "that it would be unsafe to accept generalizations drawn from the experience of other communities?"

Are the Hindoos unfit for liberty? Not more so than the African. Is despotism necessary in India, because it is problematical whether [order

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could be maintained] under more liberal institutions? The danger of license and anarchy would be far more imminent, from an emancipation of our slaves.87

However stringent conditions were in India, Holcombe asserted, Southern conditions must be moreso. Like other Southerners, Holcombe used the fact that the British did not proselytize among the Indians, while Southerners were transforming "the African savage into the Christian slave," to assert that slavery was better than imperialism.88

Some Southern women also supported the British. Eliza Clitherall of Wilmington, North Carolina, was horrified at reports of Indian atrocities. On December 1, 1859, she recorded that she had read some "excellent remarks" in the pro-British journal Albion about "the Hindoo War -- The tragic cruelties, upon defenceless women & Innocent children," and added that such crimes "surpass the most thrilling accounts, History has presented."89 South Carolinian Mary Boykin Chesnut repeatedly referred to the Uprising in her diary. She also feared a slave uprising. In July of 1862, Chesnut finished reading Edward Money's The Wife and the Ward, which was set at the siege of Kanpur, and mused "Who knows what similar horrors may lie in wait for us!" She had recently seen a play about the rebellion, called The Siege of Lucknow, at a small theater in Washington D. C., and recalled her "thrill of terror" when the Indians "jump[ed] over the parapets." They reminded her of slaves -- "These faces were like so many of the same sort at home" -- and she acknowledged that America's slaves

87 James P. Holcombe, "Is Slavery Consistent with Natural Laws?" Southern Literary Messenger, 27 (Dec. 1858), 405.
88 Ibid.
would probably one day also rise, although they had not yet. "John Brown had failed to fire their hearts, and they saw no cause to rise and burn and murder us all -- like the women and children were treated in the Indian Mutiny," she wrote. "But how long would they resist the seductive and irresistible call 'only rise, kill, and be free'?"90

Most anti-British sentiment came from the Northeast; Boston was the richest source, but New York provided some as well. The New-York Daily Tribune denounced imperialism thoroughly. The paper's editor, Horace Greeley, was a socialist, and the Tribune tended to attract those who held "varieties of socialist thought."91 Managing editor Charles A. Dana was a former resident of the Transcendentalists' commune of Brook Farm and had met Karl Marx in Europe in 1848. Although Dana did not advocate radical social change -- partially because of the unsuccessful European upheavals of that year -- Marx impressed him.92 In 1851, an impoverished Marx became the Tribune's European correspondent. Friedrich Engels assisted him, often anonymously, and the two wrote dozens of columns about the Indian Uprising, many of which appeared as leading articles in the paper.93 They emphasized Indian successes that few other sources reported, noted British military missteps, and asserted as late as June of 1858 that the war was far from over.94 They also

90 Mary Chesnut's Civil War, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven, Conn., 1981), 409.
92 Janet E. Steele, The Sun Shines for All: Journalism and Ideology in the Life of Charles A. Dana (Syracuse, N. Y., 1993), 25.
93 Steele, 35. The New-York Daily Tribune is the only American source that I found that thoroughly condemned imperialism when commenting on the Indian Uprising and its suppression. Marx and Engels were not American, and Greeley and Dana both found Marx's beliefs extreme; but the fact that they published the writings demonstrates at least some American opposition to imperialism. (Steele, 35; Borden, 461.)
94 E.g., Karl Marx, "The Revolt in India," New-York Daily Tribune, Sept. 15, 1857, 1, reprinted in K. Marx and F. Engels, The First Indian War of Independence, 1857-1859 (Moscow,
elaborated on the liabilities of imperialism. They criticized British appropriation of Indian lands when the British condemned any European power that took another's territory. They described the East India Company as a hindrance to the British government, which repeatedly loaned the Company money to rescue it from bankruptcy. Profits in India went only to individuals such as the Company's stockholders, private traders, and British civil and military servants. Marx and Engels also described British torture to explain why the Indians were right "to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects."

Several Boston editors also allowed for defense of the Indians. In addition to the criticism from Boston's Advocate of Peace and the Christian Examiner, as noted above, a writer for the Boston Advertiser stated that "however favorably [Company rule] may compare with the tyrannies it displaced," it had been "itself a tyranny, hard, inexorable, and often abusive." Another writer for the Christian Examiner noted the horror of Indian crimes but reminded his readers that "it was maddening too to the Hindoos to think of the wrongs and insults of ages" upon them. "The Hindoo side we have not heard, and may never hear." And a writer for Boston's North American Review reminded his readers that Hindu civilization predated that of the West, and that

98 Boston Advertiser, quoted in "Explanations of the Revolt in India," Advocate of Peace, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1858), 17.
Warren Hastings’s trial sixty-five years earlier had shown the whole world "that no people on earth were worse treated than the Hindoos... Yet what was done to relieve them?" he asked. "Was not the same policy pursued by Hastings’s successors?"100

But the correlation was not so neat as the above evidence suggests. A person could support slavery and oppose imperialism, or vice versa. Southerner Mary Chesnut staunchly opposed the Indians’ violence, but she was also put off by British atrocities. Chesnut reflected on the British retribution -- which included shooting India's princes after the British had secured them as prisoners -- and admitted to being "puzzled" over what "the best of Christians do... when they are soldiers."101 A writer for the pro-slavery Richmond South opposed what he considered to be British tyranny in India, although a writer for the abolitionist National Era criticized the South’s writer for supporting tyranny abroad while perpetuating it at home. "Are the native Indians defrauded of their wages?" the writer asked. "Are they ill fed, are they at the mercy of their Anglo-Saxon lords? How is it with the negro slaves in and around Richmond?"102

The prevalent notion of a racial hierarchy caused Northern sympathies to be inconsistent as well. Northerners in the 1850s no longer had the institutional racism of slavery, but many were racist. New Yorker John Ireland supported the British, partially because he believed in white superiority. While in India in 1854, he had noted that "British 'pluck' is proverbial, and no one need be prouder of it than an American -- for we are all of the same blood, descending from the conqueror or conquered at Hastings." Those descendants, he continued, "are

101 Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, 261.
the civilizing pioneers of the world."\textsuperscript{103} Many white Northerners definitely felt racially superior to African Americans, and were attracted to stereotyped images that dramatizations of imperialism and slavery provided. As will be elaborated below, Northern audiences in 1858 enthusiastically received a play about the Indian Uprising that vilified Indians and portrayed Brits as purely heroic. Antebellum Northerners also enjoyed minstrel shows, which featured stereotyped images of slaves such as "Jim Crow" Rice. According to John Blair, spectators in the 1830s used the shows not only to validate "racism at home and Western imperialism around the world, but as a release for anxieties associated with ambition and fears of social failure."\textsuperscript{104} That is, white Americans, North and South, bolstered their confidence by taking refuge in images that asserted their racial superiority.

American abolitionists' opinions of the Indian Uprising varied, and not even African-American abolitionists necessarily supported the Indians -- or verbalized their support. Frederick Douglass counted revolutionary insurrectionists Joseph Cinque, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Madison Washington among his heroes, and he held Toussaint Louverture -- to Douglass, the epitome of a "self-made man" -- in particularly high esteem.\textsuperscript{105} Early in January of 1860, he described Toussaint to an English audience as "the noble liberator and law giver of his brave and dauntless people."\textsuperscript{106} As Toussaint's Haitian revolution had in the 1790s, the Indian Uprising served for

\textsuperscript{103} John Ireland, \textit{From Wall Street to Cashmere: Five Years in Asia, Africa, and Europe} (New York, 1859), 519.
\textsuperscript{105} "Toussaint L'Ouverture," Douglass Papers (LC), r19, copy 1, p. 16, quoted in Waldo E. Martin, Jr., \textit{The Mind of Frederick Douglass} (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1984), 271.
this generation of American Southerners to inspire fear of slave revolts in America. While the Haitian revolution caused Southerners to limit the importation of slaves into the region -- and almost to abolish the importation of West Indian slaves\textsuperscript{107} -- the Indian Uprising fell into the domestic sectional debate. One cannot assume, however, that Douglass approved of the sepoys' uprising; Americans both north and south admired Toussaint's success in restoring order after the revolution, but reports from India never suggested any moderation or control on the Indians' part.

Unless Douglass saw great differences between the oppressions of slavery and imperialism, his comments regarding the Indian Uprising simply reflected his understanding that the sepoys' violence had vilified the rebels in Western eyes and that a demonstration of support for them would be politically damaging. Douglass distanced the events in India from slavery as much as he could, as any comparison would summon images of violence that would make American emancipation less appealing to his audiences. Instead, Douglass used the events to criticize notions of a racial hierarchy -- a more common ill than proslavery sentiment -- and to contrast Indian violence with Americans' peaceful pursuit of abolitionism. Douglass opposed the "class of abolitionists" -- whom he termed "Garrisonians" after William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the abolitionist newspaper \textit{The Liberator} -- that took pride in their "Anglo-Saxon blood, as flippantly as those who profess to believe in the natural inferiority of races." In a speech at the City Hall in Glasgow, Scotland, the same month that he praised Toussaint, Douglass asserted that John Brown's plan in occupying

\textsuperscript{107} Hunt, 107-46.
Harpers Ferry "was not to shed blood or destroy property, as the insurrectionists in India had done," but simply, and peacefully, to help slaves to escape.\(^{108}\)

Douglass resented the fact that the American public praised white liberators while their attitude toward black liberators was disinterested if not hostile.\(^{109}\) Douglass used the image of India's military -- a few white officers governing a large number of nonwhite sepoys -- to describe the subordination of black abolitionists to white abolitionists. "We may fight," he told a New York audience in August of 1857, "but we must fight like the Seapoys of India, under white officers."\(^{110}\) When reading the quote in context, one realizes that Douglass's gripe carried a clear threat to his white listeners. At that time, the bloody saga of the sepoys' uprising against their white rulers was front-page news in America. Against the stories of carnage and chaos and with the implied threat of a violent uprising of black abolitionists, his words must have sent chills up the spines of "Garrisonians."

William Lloyd Garrison apparently only recognized the resemblance between slavery and imperialism late in the game. Early in the Uprising, Garrison supported the British because of their opposition to slavery and did not question British accounts of the suppression.\(^{111}\) By October, however, Garrison and his colleagues recognized the apparent inconsistency between their pro-British stance and their goal of slave emancipation. Although most American newspapers described London's October mourning day for British casualties

\(^{108}\) Douglass Papers, vol. 3, 618. Mary Chesnut interpreted the connection to Harpers Ferry differently by insisting that "the Sepoys only did what they laud and magnify John Brown for trying to get the negroes to do here." (Mary Chesnut's Civil War, 440.)
\(^{109}\) Martin, 271.
\(^{110}\) Douglass Papers, vol. 3, 203.
sympathetically, the *Liberator* insisted that it was "little short of blasphemy for a people to subjugate nations, rob them, apply physical tortures, and goad them to insurrection, and then go over the solemn farce of Fast days and prayers."\(^{112}\) Garrison maintained an anti-British stance for the duration of the war, and quoted frequently from Irish newspapers, a rich source of anti-British diatribe. Neither the Irish nor the *Liberator* editors, however, challenged notions that Indians were "barbarian" or even "dehumanized."\(^{113}\) Opposition to acts of overt British aggression was far from indicating respect for Indian people and culture.

Poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, despite his strong and sincere interest in Indian culture, supported imperialism and praised the Scottish troops that relieved their European brethren in the Lucknow garrison in his poem "The Pipes of Lucknow." His poem was based on a letter written by M. de Banneroi, a French physician who was rescued at Lucknow on September 26, 1857.\(^{114}\) In the letter, de Banneroi described the Scots' arrival just as fellow prisoner Jessie Brown seemed to have gone delirious.\(^{115}\) The account was widely reprinted, and inspired Whittier's poem and many other forms of creative response. The poem read, in part:

> A burst of wild thanksgiving  
> Mingled woman's voice and man's;  
> "God be praised! -- the march of Havelock!  
> The piping of the clans!" . . .

> Round the silver domes of Lucknow,  
> Moslem mosque and Pagan shrine,  
> Breathed the air to Britons dearest,


\(^{114}\) "The Relief of Lucknow," *Liberator*, Jan. 22, 1858, 16.

The air of Auld Lang Syne.\footnote{116}

The poem appeared in the *National Era*, an abolitionist paper for which Whittier was corresponding editor. But how can we rectify Whittier's -- or, for that matter, the *National Era's* -- support for imperialism with his opposition to slavery? A column in the paper from July of 1857 clarifies this stance. "Unlike Slavery in this country," the columnist explained, "English rule in India gradually enlightens and improves the condition of the subject race." The author went on to express hope that someday a "partially Anglicised" India could become independent of "the country which gave her civilization and its benefits."\footnote{117} Abolitionists, therefore, could perceive slavery and imperialism as completely different institutions, and could abhor slavery while asserting the need for nonwhite peoples to remain under European tutelage until they had absorbed enough "Anglicization" and "civilization" to be independent.\footnote{118}

Americans did not tire of the story of the relief of Lucknow. Plays about the rebellion began to appear in late 1857, and in February of 1858 a play titled *Jessie Brown; or, the Relief of Lucknow*, by Dion Boucicault, debuted in New York.\footnote{119} The message of the mediocre drama was "British racial superiority and Indian inferiority," and Peter Thomson termed the Irishman's political

\footnotetext{116}{John Greenleaf Whittier's Poetry: An Appraisal and a Selection, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Minneapolis, 1971), 140-42.}

\footnotetext{117}{"The Rebellion in India," *National Era*, July 23, 1857, 118.}

\footnotetext{118}{This explanation is more convincing than that of Robert Penn Warren, who saw "The Pipes of Lucknow" as a metaphor for Whittier's awakening to the evils of slavery and thus to abolitionism. For Warren, the Scots' leaving home meant that they had "grown up"; despite adversity, they triumphed over the trials of adulthood. Warren considered the poem's "Indian tiger" and "jungle-serpent" to represent slaves, portrayed as evil because their suffering forced Whittier "from the daydreams and neurotic indulgences of his youth into the broad daylight of mature and objective action." ("Those poor slaves in Dixie . . . they were the enemy.") Warren termed the poem a "gentle little piece of nostalgia." But Whittier's support for the British and opposition to the Indians is so overt as to call into question any theory that does not simply admit his pro-imperial stance. (Warren, 39-41.)}

\footnotetext{119}{Brantlinger, 205; Robert Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault* (London, 1979),134.}
propaganda "too naive to be offensive."¹²⁰ In the play, the only reason that Boucicault gave for Nana Sahib's crimes was the Nana's wish to kidnap a British woman, Mrs. Campbell, for his harem.¹²¹ But Jessie Brown's popularity eclipsed that of all other rebellion plays, including those that were produced in Britain.¹²² Boucicault was living in New York City at the time, and he knew that the story of Jessie's courage and hope and of the prisoners' rescue at the eleventh hour would "excite and move" his audiences.¹²³ The popularity of Jessie Brown demonstrates Americans' interest in the events, their strongly pro-British stance, and the power of their perception of Nana Sahib as the quintessential inhuman Indian rebel. Earlier, a furious, Indian-hating London audience had pelted an actor playing the Nana in a similar play with "bottles, sticks, hats and even umbrellas," and the actor had to be whisked away to prevent further harm by the mob that had assembled outside the stage door. The reaction had nothing to do with the quality of the actor's performance, but with the character that he was playing. No New York actor would take the role in Jessie Brown, and so Boucicault himself played Nana Sahib.¹²⁴ It is noteworthy that New York actors feared similar violence from American audiences. Boucicault's wife, actress Agnes Robertson, played Jessie.¹²⁵

Current historians dispute Nana Sahib's role in the uprising, though no Brits or Americans in 1857 questioned his guilt.¹²⁶ The Nana was the adopted

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¹²⁰ Thomson, 220-21, 7; Brantlinger, 206.
¹²¹ Plays by Dion Boucicault, 112-13.
¹²² Brantlinger, 205-06.
¹²³ Dion Boucicault, The Dolmen Boucicault: with an essay by the Editor on the Theatre of Dion Boucicault, ed. David Krause (Ireland, 1965), 25; Fawkes, 98.
¹²⁵ Fawkes, 98.
¹²⁶ Thomson, 14, n. 9.
son of Kanpur's last leader, but the East India Company, in order to enlarge its holdings, asserted that only natural heirs could inherit kingdoms. Therefore, Nana Sahib inherited his father's wealth, but had no kingdom to rule.127 Nana Sahib rallied troops to take control of Kanpur, which led to the massacre of British women and children under his orders, on June 27, 1857. News of the massacre traveled quickly, and his name became known and hated. Brits and Americans reduced their perspective of the Indian subcontinent to an image of Nana Sahib, which in turn fueled racist ideas of Indians in general.128 Americans envisioned Nana Sahib as "bloodthirsty," a "fiend," and a "satan."129 They did not perceive him as a stupid beast who breathed fire and killed; writers asserted that he was a cold but rational murderer. This rational cruelty made him more dangerous, and denied him the pity that one could feel for a dumb brute. And all of this made him easier to hate.

With "his carcanet of brilliants, his rustling tunic, his walnut physiognomy, and a magnificent pair of mustachios," Dion Boucicault first stepped on to the stage as Nana Sahib at Wallack's Theater in New York on February 22, 1858.130 News of the massacre at Kanpur had only reached the United States a month or two before, and the public was still outraged at the events.131 Fortunately for Boucicault, members of the gallery threw nothing at him, and were reportedly awed by his appearance.132 New York audiences loved Jessie
The play was the hit of the season, but critics were not impressed. One critic observed that "whilst true genius starves, bunkum feasts in purple and fine linen." The play ran for six weeks in New York and ended only to keep an engagement in Boston. The troupe performed *Jessie Brown* in Philadelphia in May, and returned to New York in September.

Boucicault wanted his play to be popular with American audiences, and he worked with their knowledge of the events as gleaned from newspaper accounts and unfounded rumors. He played to his audiences' perceptions of Indians as weak, worshippers of a false god, and barbarian. In the play, Geordie the Scotsman asserted that Indians would only fight with a ratio of a thousand to one, and Jessie described the Lucknow mosque in which she and the others were trapped as "a church where they worship the deevil." And Boucicault's inhuman Nana Sahib ordered his assistant to "cut off the right hands of these prisoners, and let their bodies swing from the heights of this mosque." The playwright's willingness to portray Indians as treacherous reveals extensive American antagonism toward them. When necessary, Boucicault wrote much more diplomatically. In 1859, he wrote a play about slavery titled *The Octaroon; or, Life in Louisiana.* Actor Joseph Jefferson, who created the role of Salem Scudder in the play, considered the play's attitude toward slavery to be "non-committal." As he noted in his autobiography, "The dialogue and characters... made one feel for the South, but the action proclaimed against slavery, and

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133 Fawkes, 98, 99.
134 *Era*, March 21, 1858, quoted in Fawkes, 99.
135 Fawkes, 99, 100, 186.
136 Thomson, 7.
137 *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, 103, 104, 107, 118.
138 *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, 119.
139 Thomson, 8.
called loudly for its abolition."¹⁴⁰ When dealing with the Indian Uprising, Boucicault had not felt compelled to give both points of view.

CHAPTER SIX. RACE AND ACCUSATIONS OF RAPE IN INDIA AND THE OLD SOUTH

Nana Sahib's cruelty and lust for Englishwomen as portrayed in Jessie Brown leads to the subject of gendered attitudes, which united Americans and Brits against the Indians most of all. Gender here involves perceptions of crimes against women and children, crimes that no true "man" would commit. These crimes, almost always merely false accusations against Indians, made Western readers aghast and convinced them that the Britons' foes were inhuman and intolerable. A writer for the National Era asserted that Indians must "pay a terrible penalty for their cruelties." "Men who will in this age ravish and hack to pieces innocent women, and butcher little children," he continued, "should be swept from the face of the earth."141 American Consul Charles Huffnagle repeatedly noted that Indian atrocities were committed "especially toward the women,"142 and a writer for Hunt's Merchants' Magazine referred to the colony as "treacherous child-killing India."143

The episode that most horrified Brits and Americans was the Kanpur massacre. The Liberator's account in early October of 1857 was typical, with its lurid description of women "stripped naked, then beheaded and thrown into a well," and children being "hurled down alive upon their butchered mothers,

141 "The Condition of India," National Era, Sept. 24, 1857, 154. In many cases, violence was Americans' only reason for opposing the Indians. This contrasts well with the great admiration for Mahatma Gandhi eighty years later, when he emphasized nonviolence in his quest for Indian independence. At that point, it was the Britons' turn to look like brutes.


whose blood reeked on their mangled bodies." Not even writers for sources that were inclined to see the Indian perspective could excuse such deeds. The *National Era* carried the British report that "the women were slaughtered after being fiendishly outraged," while the *Independent* reported two months later that Nana Sahib had "barbarously murdered fifty ladies and children" since the massacre. And a writer for Boston's *Advocate of Peace* observed the horror "excited . . . throughout the civilized world" of "the abominable outrages inflicted by the Sepoys on helpless women and children."

It would be simplistic to read the importance of white women to Western men as strictly affectionate, or even chivalrous. To Britons and Americans, white women's purity was an important symbol of white male power. Claude Levi-Strauss has asserted that men use women as the verbs by which they communicate with one another, and that rape has been a way for men to communicate defeat to a conquered people. Period British writers support Levi-Strauss's theory. A writer for the London *Times* -- in an article that appeared in the *Liberator* -- interpreted the rebels' degradation of "women and unmarried girls" in the main thoroughfare of Delhi, in front of thousands of spectators, as having been done "of settled purpose, to degrade England, to degrade Europe, to degrade a Christian empire and a Christian Queen." And a writer for Britain's *Economist* -- whose article was reprinted in *Littell's Living Age*.

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Age, out of Boston -- blamed the Indian atrocities on "not lust, but an intellectual desire to revenge the sense of a race's long subordination."\(^{149}\)

Where crimes against white women were concerned, American compassion for the British in India was closer to empathy than sympathy. While the British had exaggerated fears that white women would be the prey of Indian men, American Southerners had an irrational fear that white women would be raped by male slaves. In both British India and the American South, white women were "untouchable property, the ultimate symbol of white male power."\(^{150}\) Nothing was a greater smite to white men than the sully of the women's purity, especially by a man of another race. As Peter Bardaglio observed in his study of rape cases in the Old South, in cultures that emphasized the purity of white female sexuality, "rape was less the violation of a woman's autonomous will than the theft of her honor." Rape dishonored the entire household, especially its male leader. This loss of honor challenged both slavery and the entire social order. For this reason, "Rape or attempted rape of a white woman by a bondsman demanded especially fierce retribution."\(^{151}\)

Some Indian men apparently also understood the subtext of honor that white women represented, and used images of dishonor as retribution. "I die contented," one Indian asserted before being executed, "having seen English ladies molested and torn to pieces in the public bazaar." He was not the only one to make such a dying declaration.\(^{152}\) Such comments were probably lies,


\(^{150}\) Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, ""The Mind that Burns in Each Body": Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," *Southern Exposure*, 12 (Nov./Dec. 1984), 64; British anger described in Broehl, 126.

\(^{151}\) Peter W. Bardaglio, "Rape and the Law in the Old South: 'Calculated to excite indignation in every heart,'" *Journal of Southern History*, 60 (Nov. 1994), 754-55.

\(^{152}\) Journals of Private Charles Quevillart, Norfolk County Record Office, quoted in Hibbert, 123. Indian rebels also tweaked British sensibilities by attacking their rulers while wearing
as the British commission suspected when they sought, unsuccessfully, to relieve British victims of Indian violence. A. M. Cocks, special commissioner at Aligarh after the rebellion, pursued reports of a rebel who, just before being executed, "boasted of having dishonoured an Englishwoman," but could not verify the incident or similar allegations and was instead assured that nothing of the kind had occurred in that town.153

British retribution on Indians in cases of alleged rape closely resembles the lynching of blacks in the American South. As with British suspicions of Indian men, white Southerners widely believed that black men "were obsessed with the desire to rape white women," and that such violation should be a capital offense.154 Although lynchings in America were most frequent in periods of social change -- such as Reconstruction -- Americans in the 1850s could identify with the British response.155 White anxiety due to changing social dynamics, allegations of rape of white women by black men, and the solution of vigilante execution all appear in the American South around this time. In 1855, citizens of Sumter County, Alabama, took a black prisoner from his cell, "chained him to a stake" at the spot where he had allegedly raped and murdered a white girl and burned him alive, rather than allow the trial to be moved to another county. In White County, Tennessee, in 1858, people broke their British uniforms and medals, using bugle calls that the British had taught them, and, to the Britons' great consternation, playing such tunes as "Cheer, Boys, Cheer," "The British Grenadiers," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and "God Save the Queen." (Charles John Griffiths, The Narrative of the Siege of Delhi with an Account of the Mutiny at Ferozepore in 1857, ed. Henry John Yonge [London, 1910], 63, 85; G. H. Hodson, ed., Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India: Being Extracts from the Letters of the late Major W.S.R. Hodson [1859]; General Sir Charles Reid, Extracts from Letters and Notes Written during the Siege of Delhi in 1857 [London, 1957], 41; and Arthur Owen, Recollections of a Veteran of the Days of the Great Mutiny [Lucknow, 1916], 54, quoted in Hibbert, 295 and 329.)

154 Bardaglio, 752-53.
155 Hall, 67.
into the jail and accosted a slave who had been charged with rape and murder and hanged him.\textsuperscript{156}

There are also period examples of vigilantism in times of turmoil in the United States. In 1858, in the wake of the Third Seminole War, Tampa, Florida, "was infested with gamblers, . . . burglars, thieves, robbers, and cut throats." Tampans lynched two suspected horse thieves; an anonymous writer explained to the Tampa \textit{Florida Peninsular} that the law "too often permitted guilty persons to go unpunished, and, therefore, justice required vigilante action."\textsuperscript{157} Two years later, Tampan "Regulators" lynched a slave convicted of murder when the Florida Supreme Court temporarily blocked the carrying out of the death sentence. The \textit{Peninsular}'s editor approved of the vigilante justice. Differentiating between "a mob" and "mature deliberation by the citizens," he insisted that even "in the best regulated state of society," there would be "circumstances calling forth the \textit{ultima ratio populi}."\textsuperscript{158}

Also, rape laws in both colonial Asia and the Old South were "race specific," with nonwhite male assault on white women being the only


\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Tampa Florida Peninsular}, May 1, 1858, quoted in Robert P. Ingalls, "Lynching and Establishment Violence in Tampa, 1858-1935," \textit{Journal of Southern History}, 53 (Nov. 1987), 616.

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Tampa Florida Peninsular}, Jan. 21, 1860, quoted in Ingalls, 615-16. Political scientists H. Jon Rosenbaum and Peter C. Sederberg refer to vigilante activity such as lynching as "establishment violence," which they define as "the use of violence by established groups to preserve the status quo at times when the formal system of rule enforcement is viewed as ineffective or irrelevant." Their observation dovetails with Ann Laura Stoler's assertion that concern with protecting white women "intensified during real and perceived crises of control." That is, loss of social control has repeatedly inspired white men both to become more protective of white women and to use violence to protect them. (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, "Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence," in \textit{Vigilante Politics}, ed. Rosenbaum and Sederberg [Philadelphia, 1976], 17, also quoted in Ingalls, 614; Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," in \textit{Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge}, ed. Micaela di Leonardo [Berkeley, 1991], 68.)
permutation of concern. In colonial Asia no other configuration aroused much animosity and some -- such as white male assault on black women -- were not even illegal. Similarly, in the Old South, rape laws and antimiscegenation laws reflected legislators' and judges' interest in "preventing sexual relations between white women and black men, as well as keeping those two groups in their appropriate places in the social order." Antebellum appellate courts overturned convictions if there was no proof of a woman's race, because "the sexual violation of a black woman was usually not a crime."159

In both India and the American South, actual assault was unnecessary; whites perceived even the hint of racial and sexual transgression as a sexual threat.160 In both places, too, those who recounted the tales mythologized the man and woman; the rapist became a "monstrous beast, crazed with lust," while the white victim became young, blonde, and virginal. And in both India and the American South, their Anglo-Saxon avengers believed that "only swift, sure violence . . . could protect white women from sexual assault."161 These exaggerations accompanied sensationalizing of the few cases that did occur. Rapes or attempted rapes of white women by black men occurred rarely in the Old South, but "white fear of black sexual assault guaranteed that legal authorities would vigorously prosecute" any black men who were accused of the crime:162 Furthermore, the few rapes or attempted rapes that did occur were widely publicized, "far out of proportion to their statistical significance," and Anglo-Indians continued to believe that Indians must have raped British women,

159 Stoler, 68; Bardaglio, 750, 764.
160 Hall, 64; Stoler, 69.
161 Hall, 64.
162 Bardaglio, 760.
despite the absence of evidence, thus masking the largely mythical nature of the "black rapist."\footnote{163 Hall, 64; Andrew Ward, \textit{Our Bones Are Scattered: The Cawnpore Massacre and the Indian Mutiny of 1857} (New York, 1996), 506-10.}
CHAPTER SEVEN. BRITISH LIES

Early in 1858, the British government sent a committee to India to relieve British victims of the turmoil, and for six weeks the committee members traced tales of horror that had reached Great Britain, so that they could assist their beleaguered countrymen. Upon their return, they reported their findings to Member of Parliament Henry Rich. On March 18, 1858, Rich announced to the House of Commons that, although he detested the insurgents' "atrocious crimes," he feared that Brits in India were not above reproach. To a large extent, British vengeance had resulted from Britons' false stories of Indian crimes. The committee members did not doubt that atrocities "may have occurred," but they had been unable to verify "a single case." Rich went on to say that he could excuse crimes committed by Anglo-Indians who found themselves "beset by treachery and murder" and who therefore were defending "themselves and everything dear to them" but could not excuse those who gave "currency, on the platform and in the press, to extravagant tales of horror" -- including tales "of ladies and children, violated and mutilated" -- "for which they had no honest authority."

Rich expressed hope that stories of British retaliatory atrocities were also exaggerated and encouraged attention to the Indians' side of the story, because "justice, enlightened by facts and a due discrimination of guilt, . . . characterized

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civilized men." The next day, the London *Times* thoroughly reported Rich's comments; copies of that issue were put aboard the ship *America*, which left Liverpool on April 9 and arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, four days later.

Publications that had printed pro-British news bites of the events ignored Rich's findings, but Americans who had questioned the British role in India unleashed their anger. Writers for the *Advocate of Peace* condemned British vengeance, such as their soldiers' complaints when their leader forbade them to burn villages, and the British cry: "We must have blood . . . our men are MAD for revenge." A *Christian Examiner* writer wrote "God forbid" that they should "give way to that thirst for vengeance . . . which is now said . . . to fill the heart of every Englishman in India."

Many Americans complained that the Brits had ignored their *noblesse oblige*. Their violence against people who were lower on the racial hierarchy also degraded their own race and religion and thereby betrayed Christian and Anglo-Saxon Americans. William Lloyd Garrison related Rich's announcement that there were actually "no cases of rape or mutilation" and added that the British had "no prisoners of war," all of them "being regularly murdered." He added that it was especially difficult to excuse British cruelty because it was "practised by a professedly *Christian* nation upon those whom they regard as ignorant and uncivilized" and concluded that "words are powerless to express the loathing and scorn which such preeminent villany deserves." An *Atlantic Monthly* writer asserted that "The strength of English rule . . . must be in her

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166 *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. CXLIX, 348.
167 "British Retaliation in India," *Advocate of Peace*, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1858), 21, 22.
justice" and feared that revenge would "bring the English conquerors down to
the level of the conquered." And a writer for the *North American Review*
insisted that "he would be hopelessly stupid indeed" who could not see the
reason behind even the "most revolting scenes" of Indian rebellion. Although it
was easier to understand the British perspective, because "we cannot hear [the
Indians'] voice, in a strange language, over the broad ocean," the writer
admitted that Americans and Brits' largely shared heritage made him eager for
the British to mend their ways, "for the credit of Christianity and of our
civilization."171

Although many Americans criticized British rule, they doubted that Indians could
govern themselves and therefore believed that India would fare best under
continued British rule. Many writers coupled criticism and praise for the
Company. The East India Company's success dazzled Americans including
Minister to England George Dallas and writers for *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine.*
Writers for *Graham's Illustrated Magazine,* in Philadelphia, were sorry that
rebellion had been necessary to awaken the rulers to their imperial duties, but
insisted that "No romance could be conceived more full of exciting interest than
the simple narrative of the progress of the East India Company."172 In January of
1858, *Christian Examiner* writers admitted that "Governor-General, Directors,
Board of Control, are all at fault" for the revolt but went on to praise the British for
"show[ing] themselves admirable in their courage and constancy" and insisted

171 "The Rebellion in India," *North American Review,* 86 (April 1858), 491-93.
that "It makes us proud to claim kinship with such a race." They claimed not to understand the causes of the revolt but insisted that "The government of India . . . [has governed] the grandest foreign dependency the world has ever seen," and that India's government had far fewer faults than the British government itself.173

Other Americans also praised the Company. An *Atlantic Monthly* writer insisted that there had been "nothing like the rule of the English in India to be found in history" and noted that the Company had controlled more people than had the Roman empire.174 Americans were sometimes more impressed with the Company than were the British. Writers for New York's *Knickerbocker* noted *Punch*'s uncomplimentary 1858 obituary of the Company and admitted, "we can hardly find it in our hearts to rejoice over its grave." Instead, they recalled the Company members' "heroism, and genius, and sacrifice" and admitted that they had "always" seen the Company's work in India as "a grand monument to middle-class energy and enterprise."175

Americans rarely considered Indian independence. "There is neither virtue nor intelligence among them for self-government," insisted a writer for the *Princeton Review*, while a *Christian Examiner* writer maintained that Indians lacked the British knack for imperial and central government, and John Ireland was certain that the British government would assume control in India in order to "see the wonderful success of the brilliant scheme."176 And American praise for the British was often much more positive than their being merely the lesser of

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two evils. A writer for Washington D. C.'s *National Intelligencer* insisted that "the presence of Europeans in sufficient numbers gives the only guarantee for common right and justice," a *National Era* writer asserted that Indians were "vastly better off than they were before they were invaded by English civilization," and even a writer for the *Christian Examiner*, a publication that was often sympathetic to Indians, deemed British rule to have provided India with "the best government they have ever had."177

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CONCLUSION

In 1857, many white Americans supported slavery and many more believed in a racial hierarchy with themselves at the top. Slavery, racism, and imperialism were all power relationships, and white Americans used British imperial rhetoric to reassert their ascendancy at home. At the same time, antislavery Americans either rejected British rhetoric or drew a distinction between slavery and imperialism. Either way, many Americans defined their domestic power relationships on British imperial terms. At the same time, Americans' culture and domestic concerns molded their attitudes toward foreign affairs.178

Attention to American culture and attitudes toward empire reveals a previously unacknowledged complexity in American foreign relations. Many international events had a great impact on American culture but not on American diplomacy per se. Such episodes therefore have eluded historians of American foreign relations. Evidence of extensive American interest in the Indian Uprising, for example, exists almost in lieu of diplomatic sources; many Americans were passionate about the Uprising, even though the war's formal diplomatic importance was negligible. But attention to American culture enhances understanding of the interests and prejudices that influence diplomatic decision-making. American policy makers are aloof from neither

178 Expansionist capitalism is itself a cultural construct; one can look to sixteenth-century China's burning of its fleet to see that a people can turn their backs on the outside world completely (A William Appleman Williams Reader: Selections from His Major Historical Writings, ed. Henry W. Berger [Chicago, 1992], 376-84).
American culture nor from the American people; they cannot help but be imbued with the former, and cannot afford to be aloof from the latter's needs and concerns. American culture exerts a strong, if not completely conscious, influence on them; therefore, attention to American culture greatly enhances understanding of the way in which policy makers regard the world. Attention to culture is more revealing and valuable yet because non-state Americans who commented on international events could do so with a candor that politicians were denied.

Contrary to much of the scholarship on American attitudes toward empire, Americans did not allow ideological concerns to deny them imperialism's economic benefits. They largely borrowed their attitudes toward imperialism from Britain, but Americans made them their own. American culture was malleable enough to justify imperial expansion. And for those with other concerns, there was room to dwell on the seamier side of empire.
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