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An Outsider's View: British Travel Writers and Representations of Slavery in South Africa and the West Indies: 1795-1838

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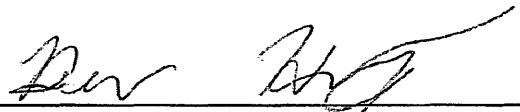

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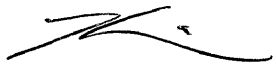

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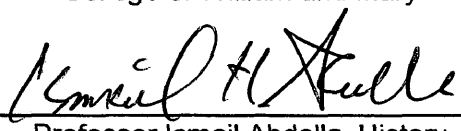

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ABSTRACT PAGE

For centuries, the British public relied on the work of travel writers to inform them about distant people and places. As the debate over slavery and abolition raged during the early nineteenth-century, British travel writers in South Africa and the West Indies provided influential accounts of slavery in the British colonies. In the Cape Colony, which had recently been taken from the Dutch, British travel writers generally condemned slavery and favored immediate emancipation. But in the Caribbean, where there was a long history of British occupation, travel writers were more likely to support the continuation of slavery. To investigate this discrepancy, I have researched a number of travel narratives written by British travelers to the Cape Colony and to the West Indian colonies between 1795 and 1838. These dates correspond to the first British occupation of the Cape and the enforcement of abolition throughout the British colonies, respectively.

I have found that in South Africa, British travel writers condemned slavery in part because of their antipathy toward the Dutch settler population. For a variety of reasons, the Dutch settlers at the Cape had been villified as barbaric and cruel. As most slaveholders at the Cape were Dutch, the institution of slavery was similarly condemned. In the West Indies, travel writers encountered British slaveholders who shared their class and culture. Many travelers sympathized with the concerns of West Indian planters; they described the colonies pleasantly, and downplayed the horrors of slavery. Furthermore, British travelers were concerned about the economic effects of abolition on the colonies and the empire as a whole. For these reasons, many travelers to the West Indies argued for the continuation of slavery.

These travel narratives have greatly influenced the historiography of both South Africa and the West Indies, and they are still widely used by social historians. But In order to use these accounts effectively, one must understand the circumstances under which they were written. It is important to note that the depictions of slavery within these narratives were influenced by factors outside of the authors' morality.

Acknowledgements

I first became interested in this project after visiting the Cape myself. Living amidst remnants of the old slave society: the Castle of Good Hope, the Slave Lodge, and Groot Constantia, I was fascinated by the unfamiliar system of slavery which had flourished there. The people of the Cape and the creole Afrikaans language that they spoke were constant reminders of slavery's legacy. As an outsider myself, I was naturally drawn to the writings of other travelers.

I am indebted to my advisor, Professor Robert Vinson. First, his undergraduate course spurred me to undertake my semester abroad, without which this thesis would never have been written. Second, as my advisor he proved to be an indispensable font of knowledge as well as a helpful guide at every step of the research process.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Professors Kris Lane and Ismail Abdalla. Their insight and input into this project greatly broadened the scope of the thesis.

I would like to thank Jim and Bruce Murray for their generous contributions toward my education. Their help and support throughout my college career has given me so many wonderful opportunities.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, my friends and family, Dan Cristol, the Swem Library Staff and all of the William and Mary History Department Faculty. All of these people were essential to this project and it could not have been completed without their support.

"All stood together on the deck, for a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes, that in the Moon did glitter.
The pang, the curse, with which they died, had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs, nor turn them up to pray."

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Introduction

The doomed ship in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* conjures imagery of the Middle Passage. An abolitionist, he had made public declarations against slavery as well as thinly veiled attacks in his fiction. In the age of the great abolition debate, literature was a primary weapon on both sides of the argument. Most Europeans never witnessed slavery first-hand, and instead they relied on the writings of others to form their opinions. In Britain, as in other European countries, people received much of their knowledge about slave societies through the work of travel writers.

Sedentary reading publics have always been entranced by the writings of travelers. In the European tradition, travel literature dates to the times of Marco Polo and earlier, but peaked in significance during the imperial era. Mary Louise Pratt has studied the effects of travel writing on empire formation, and specifically how travel literature helped to formalize ideas of race and ethnicity in Europe. For readers at home, travel books provided a sense of familiarity with faraway places that they would surely never visit. They also provided Europeans with confidence in their knowledge of, and superiority to, foreign lands and peoples. As a tool of imperialism, travel literature promoted a feeling of connection between the home country and the peripheral colonies.[1]

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[1] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*: *Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2008), 3-4.

Nineteenth century European travel writing developed out of two seemingly divergent literary traditions: scientific naturalism and sentimental romanticism. Scientific nature writing traces its origin to Linnaeus, the father of classification. Linnaeus' style may seem pedantic – attempting to organize all species by order, phylum and genus. But in reality, his system reflects enlightenment idealism. First and foremost, his system was meant to further the cause of scientific knowledge – by using Latin, Linnaeus transcended national barriers, creating a system used throughout the European scientific community even today. Linnaeus' system also reflected ideas of natural order – each living thing in his universe occupied a position within larger ranks of related species. Linnaeus presented the world in concrete terms, which greatly increased the accepted authority of the scientific community and their writing.[2] Nineteenth-century travel writers devoted much of their work to naturalistic descriptions of the flora, fauna and landscape of the places they visited.

Popular travel narratives were also influenced by traditions of sentimental pleasure writing. In fiction, eighteenth century novelists like Daniel Defoe relied on tales of adventure and survival to entrance audiences. Early travel narratives often relied on similar illustrations of excitement and exoticism. Narratives like that of Le Vaillant in South Africa and Mungo Park along the Niger were harrowing and highly dramatized accounts, full of danger and distress.[3]

The resulting travel literature which developed in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a significant source of information for the British reading public at home. While these narratives were highly stylized and designed

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[2] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 25-30.
[3] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 84.

for entertainment, they were also accepted as veritable academic studies. In light of modern scholarship, the truthfulness of these narratives is extremely questionable. It may be more appropriate to say that much of their content has been proven to be a farce. Yet they are of immense historical value. The readership that these narratives reached did not have the advantage of our hindsight; they were limited in their knowledge about foreign cultures, and they were subject to the same biases as the authors.

Beyond naturalistic descriptions of people and places, these narratives offer opinions about slavery and about Black people generally. In both South Africa and the West Indies, British travel writers formulated arguments either in support or condemnation of slavery. They evaluated moral arguments surrounding the institution as a whole, but also considered slavery within a specific colonial context. The Cape Colony and the West Indian Islands served very different roles in the British Imperial economy, and they supported very different systems of slavery. As a result, British travelers judged slavery and emancipation differently in the two regions.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Cape Colony was only a recent British acquisition. For the previous one hundred and fifty years, the Southern tip of Africa had been ruled by the Dutch East India Company. While the harbors near Cape Town were of great strategic importance, the semi-arid climate of the Cape region limited agricultural productivity. Livestock grazing and some grain production succeeded, but the products were almost entirely marketed within the colony. The only major export at this time was wine, and even this was less profitable than hoped as Europeans generally did not prefer Cape wines. Cape Town and the surrounding colony survived, in part, by provisioning sailors who stopped while rounding the Cape of Good Hope. But the Cape Colony never

developed a successful export economy, and most agricultural products continued to be sold internally.[4]

Although there was never an export driven plantation economy at the Cape, slavery was firmly rooted there. The first slaves were imported to the Cape in 1658, only six years after the Colony's first settlement had been established. Over the next 150 years slaves were legally imported – mostly from East Africa, Madagascar, South India, and Indonesia.[5] Through importation and natural reproduction, the Cape's slave population gradually surpassed the free White population. While figures vary, slaves certainly formed the majority of the population by the time of the first English occupation in 1795.[6] The ratio of slaves to settlers, however, was far lower than in the Caribbean Islands, Brazil, or the American South. Despite the relatively low slave: settler ratio, slavery pervaded nearly every walk of life in Dutch South Africa. Domestic slaves were common in Cape Town, and slaves could be found doing hard labor on most wine and livestock farms. Over time slaveholding became more concentrated among wealthier individuals, but it remained commonplace for settlers to hold some number of slaves, even in the arid grazing districts of the frontier.[7]

Thus when the British acquired the Cape Colony it was certainly a slave society, with a White, Dutch-speaking master class. During the British occupation, most slaves continued to be owned by Dutchmen, or 'Boers' as they were commonly called. English

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[4] Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 19.
[5] Robert Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1994), 41-42.
[6] Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 448; Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 53: Shell estimates that the slave population in 1795 was over 20,000. Worden's estimate is slightly lower, but still above the free burgher population.
[7] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 34.

settlers and visitors at the Cape viewed slavery as a Dutch institution, from which the British felt themselves removed.

British writers judged Dutch settlers based on a number of popular stereotypes, about Boers at the Cape and also about the Dutch more generally. Paradoxically, it was the Dutch success in commerce which maligned them in the minds of many Europeans. The trading ports of Holland displayed the most opulence of all Europe, and the easy lifestyle that this wealth afforded was both envied and decried by others. Dutch success was sometimes attributed to industriousness and skill, but alternatively to greed and cruelty. [8] Elites in Britain and elsewhere struggled to reconcile stereotypes of Dutch coarseness with the fact of their amazing wealth.[9] The long history of conflict between Great Britain and Holland spurred many attacks on the Dutch character. During the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1650's and 1660's, popular pamphlets labeled Holland as the "indigested vomit of the sea" and claimed that Dutchmen were "Descended from a Horse-Turd which Was Enclosed in a Butter Box."[10] At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Dutch stereotype was once again negatively tinged due to conflicts with Great Britain. England and Holland had fought a vicious naval war in the 1780's, and in the wake of the French Revolution, the two nations again found themselves on opposite sides.

The Boers at the Cape were criticized for their supposedly backward and uncivilized manners. British travelers; scientists, soldiers and statesmen alike, looked

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[8] Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches, An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 22-23: For centuries, travelers to Holland had remarked upon the "drowning cell," a uniquely Dutch punishment which forced prisoners to pump water from their cell or face drowning. This practice was seen as both clever and cruel.

[9] Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 258: Schama writes that "the unavoidable fact of Dutch wealth was only supportable when it was linked to the consoling stereotype of niggardly avarice."

[10] Ibid., 263.

down on them for their lack of educational and social institutions. They were said to be ignorant, unsociable, and idle; moreover, they were derided for their poverty. Though masters in a social sense, Boers in the countryside supposedly built crude houses, wore shabby clothes, and ate filthy meals.

The Cape Colony, as a whole, was considered backward and a failure by many Britons. At this early date, the Colony could only support a small population (both settler and slave), much of which was scattered over a vast frontier. Its export industries were minimal and often unprofitable. The Dutch Government was tacitly willing to let go of its claim to the Cape, and many Britons were equally pessimistic about the prospects of their new acquisition.[11] The Cape's strategic location allowed the British Navy to control traffic between Europe and the Indies. But to the population at home, the Cape Colony was a remote and unfamiliar place populated mostly by outsiders. Most Britons had little interest or investment (emotional or commercial) in its success.

The colonial context of the British West Indies was very different. Though slavery had existed in the American colonies since their settlement, it was the introduction of sugar that transformed the Caribbean Islands. The lucrative and labor intensive sugar industry spawned new forms of plantation slavery that were highly organized and required vast numbers of slaves. In this new system, slaves were organized into gangs and work continued around the clock during the long (six or seven month) harvesting season. The grueling regimen meant that mortality rates remained very high while fertility rates remained very low - this obviously meant that a large, constant supply

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[11] William Freund in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1800* (Cape Town: Longman, 1979), 213: Following the second British Invasion of 1806, the Batavian commission J.A. de Mist and his colleague Janssens recommended that no effort should be made to re-establish Dutch rule.

of slave imports was necessary to maintain production.[12] The slave trade to the British sugar islands dwarfed that of the Cape. By the turn of the eighteenth century, more than 250,000 African slaves had reached the British Caribbean; by the turn of the nineteenth, it was more than 2,500,000.[13]

Slavery was not only widespread in the West Indies, it was extremely profitable. By 1770, the profits from sugar production in the British Caribbean totaled £2,500,000, with £800,000 produced in Jamaica alone.[14] Aside from raw sugar production, the plantation system's subsidiary industries contributed substantial profits. British merchants earned hundreds of thousands of pounds each year from exports to the West Indies – cloth, tools and other manufactured goods were necessary to maintain the plantations. The slave trade itself was a profitable venture; British slave traders were netting a surplus of about £100,000 per year by the late 1700's.[15]

In the context of South Africa, the idea of abolition posed little risk to the British. The Cape contained few slaves as well as few colonists (with very few British Colonists). The product of Cape slavery was small, and its impact on the British economy was minimal. Most importantly, many of the slaveholders who stood to lose from abolition were foreigners. Few Englishmen had invested heavily in slaves, and the British could safely claim that slavery at the Cape was a Dutch institution.

In the West Indies, the British had much to lose through emancipation. Colonists warned that without the institution, the economy would languish. Without an intensive and controlled labor system, they argued, sugar harvests would rot and fields would go

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[12] Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (New York:Verso, 1998), 260.
[13] The Slave Trade Database, www.slavevoyages.org: Search of all Africans disembarked in "British Caribbean" region.
[14] Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 536.
[15] Ibid., 537.

fallow. This would spell disaster for the islands, and deal a tremendous blow to British trade. Moreover, Englishmen at home worried about the fate of Caribbean Colonists who felt sure that abolition would culminate in their massacre at the hands of free Blacks. Even as the anti-slavery movement grew throughout Britain, economic and cultural ties to the Caribbean colonies ensured that emancipation would be a difficult process.

Chapter I: The Cape

British visitors at the Cape were universal in their condemnation of slavery under the Dutch. They saw the system as cruel, unnatural, and unnecessary. In its practical application, it was seen as detrimental to the slave, the master, and the colony as a whole. Only the most conciliatory writers recommended anything beside prompt emancipation. Those who favored a gradual abolition did so only out of logistical concerns, not out of moral support.

Most writers contended that slavery under Dutch rule had been extremely cruel, but that great improvements had taken place since the beginning of British rule.[16] All seemed to view the former Dutch government as inept or tyrannical.[17] In addition to the flaws of the Dutch administration, they blamed the cruelty of Cape slavery on the character of Dutch settlers. The Dutch were characterized as boorish, unsociable and greedy. Beyond this, they were depicted as terribly cruel people who would calmly flog their slaves, ceasing only to fix another pipe of tobacco.[18] Some attributed this cruelty to the national character of the Dutch, who were inherently greedy and unfeeling. Others blamed the system of slavery itself, arguing that it fostered laziness and cruelty in those that had been raised in its operation.

Conversely, travel writers portrayed the British as a moral and progressive force in the Colony. They constantly cited the British laws designed to ameliorate the condition

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[16] Grant Warden, *Considerations on the state of the colonial currency and foreign exchanges at the Cape of Good Hope: comprehending also some statements relative to the population, agriculture, commerce, and statistics of the colony* (Cape Town: Bridekirk, 1825), 113: "Whatever amelioration has taken place in the condition of the slaves and Hottentots, is entirely owing to the exertions of the British Government."

[17] John Barrow criticized poor city planning by the Dutch, as well their inability to impose order in the Colony. Warden felt that Dutch taxation was so heavy as to ruin the economy.

[18] This particular anecdote is repeated by a number of writers, showing the common cultural mythology that they shared.

of slaves. And though slavery survived under British rule, most writers seemed confident that the system would eventually decline in favor of free labor.

Travelers generally drew a distinction between the nature of slavery in Cape Town and in the outlying areas. In town, where slaves were mostly kept as domestic house servants, work loads were relatively light and there was less incidence of extralegal abuse. The worst cases of abuse were always reported on the frontiers, where Dutch farmers remained distant from British influence. On farms and pasturelands, slaves were known to be chronically overworked and ill-treated. They were deprived of all legal rights and subject to frequent sadistic punishment.

In the words of one traveler, rural slaves were "numbered among the live-stock of the family."[19] These slaves were put to work from early morning to dusk without respite; under the beating sun their skin blistered and they were commonly stricken with deadly bilious fevers.[20] They were provided with inadequate food and clothing, which disgusted travelers. Visiting Europeans were often sickened by the thought of indigenous foods like sheep intestine and "Hottentot butter" (sheep's tail),[21] and were appalled by the fare provided to slaves. John Barrow was an envoy of the first British occupational government, sent to the eastern frontier to mediate land disputes between settlers and natives. On his trip, he was shocked by the treatment of slaves, and lamented that these

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[19] *Gleanings in Africa* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969. Originally published, 1806), 60.

[20] John Barrow, *An account of travels into the interior of southern Africa, in the years 1797 and 1798.(*New York: G.F. Hopkins, 1802), 41; Robert Percival. *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope.* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969. Originally published, 1804), 292.

[21] Peter Kolb, *The present state of the Cape of Good-Hope* (London: Inyss and Manby, 1738), 174. "For the dregs and the filthy parts of it they make their servants and slaves eat"

people who labor all day in the fields should have to subsist on "black sandy bread, and the offals of butchers' meat."[22]

Adding to their regrettable condition was the constant threat of violence from their Dutch masters. To fight, smoke a pipe or barter one's possessions provided legal grounds for a flogging.[23] This, of course, was the case prior to English amelioration laws, but in the distant rural regions, there was little authority to check the power of the farmers. The master was free to lash his slaves for as long as he saw fit, and the severity of these beatings was legendary. The Boers were said to mete out floggings that lasted as long as it took to smoke a certain number of pipes; more severe crimes were punished with several pipe-worth of lashings.[24] The slave had no redress to this sort of abuse during the Dutch period. They were not provided with the right to a trial before punishment, and were unable to provide evidence in a court of law. Even after the British reform laws, a slave could only testify under oath if they were properly instructed in Christianity.[25]

While the depiction of slavery in Cape Town itself was milder, it was still wholly negative, and often repulsive. The shortage of wood near the city meant that many urban slaves were forced to haul timber daily from surrounding areas. It took them the entire day to retrieve the large bundles of wood, subsisting only on meager portions of sheep tail or salt fish.[26] If a town slave was accused of criminal activity, punishment was generally swift and cruel. Torture was often used to elicit confessions, which were

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[22] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior*, 41.
[23] Rev. William Wright, *Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope.* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969. Originally published 1831), 26.
[24] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 293; Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 138.
[25] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 10-24.
[26] *Gleanings in Africa*, 59.

necessary under Dutch law. While this fate could also befall company servants, it was mostly used on slaves.[27] If convicted of a capital offense, slaves in town faced a horrible array of execution methods. Aside from frequent hangings, convicts were vanquished on the breaking wheel and the gibbet up until the British Occupation. These gruesome public displays were almost wholly reserved for slaves and were rarely performed on White settlers. [28] It was said that the moldering bodies of black slaves were hung up on the wagon road leading out of town as a cruel warning and a sign of white power.[29]

In many travel narratives there is an implied or explicit suggestion of inherent Dutch cruelty. In an extended diatribe against Holland, Robert Percival lambasted Dutchmen as "dead to all sense of public interest, and to every generous sentiment of the soul." He concluded that their greed and endless quest for self aggrandizement was responsible for their lack of humanity or sense of shame.[30] Percival was a British officer who had fought against the Dutch during the first conquest of the Cape. He abhorred the Dutch for their supposed betrayal of England, their ally of "unbounded and unwearied generosity."[31] By their ingratitude toward the British and their acceptance of French tyranny, the Dutch had shown themselves to be a wretched people.[32] Apparently those Dutch that settled at the Cape simply carried these ugly traits with them. Percival was explicit in drawing this connection, asserting that the sort of greed exhibited by the Cape

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[27] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 41. Also covered by Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 117: Discusses testimony of Mentzel and others.
[28] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 41-42: 33 executed in last eight years, "these were chiefly slaves." *Gleanings in Africa*, 65: "There has hardly ever been an instance of the public execution of a colonist." Also Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 117.
[29] *Gleanings in Africa*, 65.
[30] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 233.
[31] Ibid., 234.
[32] Ibid., 237.

Dutch was responsible for the descent of their mother country.[33] Barrow too was struck by the Dutch obsession with money and trade, which seemed to occupy all of their thoughts, leaving no time for more honorable pursuits.[34]

The Lady Anne Barnard was offended by the natural inclination toward racism which characterized the Dutch at the Cape. Lady Anne's husband was an assistant to the colony's governor, Lord Macartney, during the first British occupation (1795-1803). Her detailed diaries reflect everyday life in Cape Town, especially her social interactions with fellow Britons, Dutch settlers and coloured slaves. She generally found the Dutch to be unsociable and of a harsh disposition. She regretted that the races could not mix socially because the Hollanders were "so disposed to disdain any one in whose blood there was a drop of the slave." Lady Anne owned slaves, and her diary is laden with negative stereotypes about people of color. But she maintains that, compared to the Cape Dutch, English men and women like herself were much more accepting of other races.[35]

The cruel nature of the Dutch is peppered throughout these narratives in subtle but deliberate anecdotes which shape the reader's judgment of these people. For example, Percival mentions several occasions on which he witnessed Dutchmen treating their animals cruelly. If an animal was lazy or simply unable to do the work expected of it, a Dutchman would "not hesitate to draw out his great knife and score their flesh, or even cut slices off without mercy." Percival was apparently so struck by this punishment that he responded with "not only compassion but horror."[36] He also noted that the Dutch allowed their calves an insufficient amount of milk. This foul he attributed to "the avarice

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[33] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 232-33.
[34] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 45.
[35] Lady Anne Barnard, Margaret Lenta ed. *Lady Anne Barnard's Cape Diaries*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001), 88. June 4, 1799.
[36] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 58.

of these boors... so eager are they to make butter, and turn it into ready money."[37] Through these short but frequent encounters, he affixes the Dutch settlers' reputation for cruelty and greed toward man and animal alike.

The vocabulary that these travelers use to portray the Dutch is remarkably uniform. Certain adjectives appear constantly: indolent, unfeeling, corpulent, and unsociable; avarice and cruelty are about the only qualities attributed to them. In some of these narratives, entire stories are nearly replicated from earlier accounts. John Barrow's account, published in 1802, references the practice of "flogging by pipes," in which a slave is beaten for a length of time determined by the process of smoking a pipe. In other words, if a crime was deemed worthy of one pipe's punishment, the master would load his pipe, light it, and then flog the slave until his pipe was exhausted. When Percival published his account four years later, he included an identical story which was equally grisly and condemnatory. While Barrow described Dutchmen torturing slaves with a "coolness and tranquility... [which] is highly ridiculous," Percival opted for "the greatest sang-froid imaginable."[38] While it is possible that both men witnessed such a similar scene, it is equally possible that they were relating the same legend (albeit one that may have had some truth to it). It is likely that Percival was familiar with Barrow's work, as these narratives were widely circulated among literary circles.

In many of the nineteenth-century narratives, there are references to the writings of earlier travelers like Peter Kolb and Anders Sparrman. These men relayed the stories of harsh torture and punishment which were so oft-repeated by the later British travelers. Kolb, a German writer who visited in the early eighteenth century, provided detailed and

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[37] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 210.
[38] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 138; Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 293.

gruesome descriptions of slave executions. He spared nothing in his tales of men being broken on the wheel, or burned alive in the public square.[39] But he did not pass judgment on the Dutch for their actions, and never questioned the morality of slavery and torture. Sparrman, a naturalist and student of Linnaeus, was just as explicit about what he saw on his trips to the gallows, the breaking wheel, and the impaling stake.[40] But he exceeded Kolb by critically assessing the Dutch and their actions. An ardent opponent of slavery, Sparrman reported that slaves were often beaten severely, sometimes even to death.[41] Most importantly, he was ruthless in addressing many of the Dutch character flaws that are present in the writings of later British travelers. The Boers that Sparrman encountered were arrogant, uncultured and rarely zealous. They were lazy and allowed the slovenly deterioration of their homes and churches.[42] Furthermore, they were unspeakably cruel. He accused them of "deliberately and in cold blood... not only flaying, for a trifling neglect, both the backs and limbs of their slaves... but likewise... throw salt and pepper over the wounds."[43] Most British travelers did not witness Dutch cruelty firsthand; many of them were never in the colony during Dutch rule. But from exposure to the popular travel writings of the eighteenth century it is likely that these Englishmen developed a schema for slavery under the Dutch yoke.

The detrimental effect of slavery reached far beyond physical hardship and punishment. During the Dutch period, there had been no system of slave education, and no laws requiring it. The British Proclamation of 1823 mandated that slave children

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[39] Kolb, *Cape of Good Hope*, 363-366.
[40] Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (New York: Johnson, 1971. Originally Published, 1779), 52, 53 and 340.
[41] Ibid., 70-71.
[42] Ibid., 58, 68, 69.
[43] Ibid., 338-339.

attend school, but it was rarely followed or enforced.[44] Without access to education, slaves became dull and unmotivated. Many believed that this deprivation of education led to a state of mental slavery among those in bondage.[45] Travelers, both missionary and otherwise, showed great concern for the religious education provided to slaves. They were troubled by the apparent moral depravity and lack of Christian observance among slave communities, and blamed Dutch slaveholders and the slave system in general for this tragedy.

Surprisingly, travelers did not blame the Dutch Reformed Church (the prevailing church at the Cape) for the moral failings of the colony. The Rev. William Wright was a missionary to the Cape and a strong abolitionist who criticized both British and Dutch slaveholders. But he did not blame the Dutch Reformed Church, believing their clergy were well intentioned, but simply lacked the resources to deal with the vastness of the territory.[46] In fact, the Dutch Reformed Church had long been working toward spiritual enlightenment and freedom for the slaves. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church did not organize an aggressive missionary system for converting the heathen. But at the Council of Dordt in 1617-18, the Church declared that slaveholders were personally responsible for baptizing their slaves and educating them in Christianity. Otherwise, the planters would be sinning by preventing the slaves from achieving salvation.[47]

While the bible only ambiguously addresses slavery, it had become unacceptable for Christians to hold other Christians as slaves. This doctrine was borrowed in the

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[44] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 5.
[45] Warden, *Considerations on the State*, 117. He spoke of the need to "emancipate the intellects of the community."
[46] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 7-8.
[47] Giliomee and Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007), 57.

middle ages from longstanding Muslim tradition.[48] Still, Portuguese and Spanish slavers were content to baptize captives en masse and yet to retain them as slaves. The Catholic Church, along with most protestant churches, kept mum about the dubious implications of holding Christians as slaves. But the Dutch Reformed Church was fairly clear in their condemnation of the practice, and this filtered down into Dutch colonial law. After 1770, slaves that were baptized as Christians in the Cape colony could legally obtain their freedom if they had means to purchase it. Furthermore, as Christians they could never again be sold into slavery.[49]

This created a dilemma for the Dutch slaveholder. According to their religion, they were morally obligated to make their slaves Christian, and subsequently obligated to emancipate them. British travelers explain that in reality, the choice was an easy one, and most planters protected their economic interests over their morality. Percival noted that few slaves converted to Christianity, and he alleged that their masters often actively prevented them from being baptized. If slaves remained heathen, the planters' dominion over them was considered more legitimate.[50] As slaves were discouraged from Christianity, some of them were attracted to Islam, which was propagated by East Indian slaves and free blacks. As a missionary, the Rev. Wright was obviously concerned that souls were being lost to a rival faith.[51] But other travelers noted the diligence with which these Muslim slaves, especially the Malays, observed their religion. This suggested that

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[48] Robin Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 49.
[49] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 97.
[50] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 274-275.
[51] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 4.

they could have potentially become good Christians, if only they had been welcomed to the flock.[52]

To a nineteenth century Christian, preventing someone from baptism, and thus denying them salvation, was among the most terrible of offenses. But beyond this, there were other important moral damages caused by slavery. Slave marriages were not recognized until the proclamation of 1823, and even then they remained rare. In the minds of many Christians, certainly the missionary community, unofficial marriages were not considered legitimate and the slave community was regarded as imprudent.[53]

The imperfect morality of slaves was at least partially attributed to their subjugation. Many travelers reported violent acts at the hands of slaves, reflecting the desperation of their situation. On a visit to a rural plantation, Sparrman recounted having to sleep in a locked room with a loaded gun for fear of the slaves. George Thompson, who visited the Cape in 1827, mentioned the frequency of slave violence as one of his arguments for emancipation.[54] Lady Anne Barnard spoke of many slaves "who in general disliking their masters would be ready to cut their throats if the idea was put into their head."[55] John Barrow related a particularly macabre tale of slave violence. In order to spite his master, a Malay slave killed his friend and fellow slave, and then turned himself in to the police. In this way, by robbing his master of two slaves rather than just one, the Malay doubled the injury to his hated tyrant.[56]

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[52] *Gleanings in Africa,* 247-248.
[53] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 14.
[54] GeorgeThompson, *Travels and adventures in Southern Africa: comprising a view of the present state of the Cape colony : with observations on the progress and prospects of British emigrants. 2nd ed Vol. 1* (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), 410.
[55] Barnard, *Cape Diaries*, 124.
[56] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 44.

Petty crimes and delinquency were presumed to be rampant among the slaves as well. Thompson summarized slavery as a "fertile source of misery and crime,"[57] and asserted that slaves in all places must naturally be unhappy, debased and dangerous.[58] The vices of the slave community were legendary, as they were said to pollute the Sabbath day with cockfighting, gambling, drinking and prostitution.[59] The Lady Anne Barnard, who prided herself for her tolerance toward coloured people, repeatedly remarked on the moral lacking of slaves. Among her most definite judgments was that "there is no looking for principles, truth, honesty, sobriety, or chastity among the slaves."[60]

Slavery at the Cape was universally judged to be as injurious to the masters as it was to the coloured slaves. Aside from pre-existing flaws in the Dutch national character, it is clear that British travelers believed slavery was detrimental to the Dutch at the Cape. Some blamed Dutch cruelty on the congenital exposure to abuse of the Hottentots.[61] The indigenous Khoikhoi people, or Hottentots as they were called by Europeans, occupied an interesting legal status at the Cape. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were in many ways considered to be outside the realm of the Colonial Government, despite their frequent interactions with the settlers.[62]

The Khoikhoi were guaranteed many rights that were often not provided in reality. Khoikhoi were able to bring charges against whites, and their cases were heard by

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[57] Thompson, *Travels and Adventures Vol. II*, 138.
[58] Ibid., 231.
[59] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 283; *Gleanings in Africa*, 244-246.
[60] Barnard, *Cape Diaries*, 68: In later entries she states that slaves "love the pleasures of pilfered goods," 114, and expresses surprise that out of three new slaves, none appear to be thieves, 140.
[61] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 222: The "chief cause of the great depravity of the mind" among the Dutch, is the "cruelty and contempt with which they are accustomed to treat the Hottentots."
[62] Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, *Oxford History of* South Africa: Volume I South Africa to 1870 (London: Oxford, 1969), 215.

the courts. But the sentences delivered in these cases were heavily skewed in the favor of whites. If a white was convicted of murdering a Khoikhoi, he was punished with a fine or at most banishment from the Colony. But if a Khoikhoi murdered a white, it was considered a capital offence.[63] The Dutch East India Company (VOC) offered little protection to Khoikhoi lands and property, and both were increasingly taken at will by settlers in later years.[64] On the frontier of the Colony, the Khoikhoi were treated extremely harshly. Khoikhoi who worked on white farms were often beaten and sometimes even shot for transgressions.[65]

Much like the system of violence which characterized Khoikhoi-Settler relations at the Cape, slavery was said to harden the hearts of the Dutch who grew up in its midst. The prospect of lashing a slave was apparently ingrained in the Dutchman so deeply that he was not moved by the writhing torment of his victim. The Dutch were eager, or at least willing, to harm their slaves for even the slightest of offenses.[66]

Travelers found many of the Cape Dutch to be lazy, apathetic, fat and generally unpleasant. At least in part, these character flaws were attributed to a culture of slavery and the easy life that slavery afforded the masters. In the absence of work, the Dutch fell into customs of slovenly excess. Barrow lamented that young men in the colony "soon degenerate into the common routine of eating, smoking and sleeping," removed from all profitable pursuits.[67] Percival mirrored this opinion, asserting that "smoaking all the morning, and sleeping after dinner, constitute the great luxury of the boor."[68] The Dutch,

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[63] Giliomee, Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, 52.
[64] Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee ed. *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1820.* (Cape Town: Longman, 1979), 535.
[65] Ibid., 96
[66] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 293.
[67] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 48.
[68] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 205.

it seemed, had developed an aversion to work, thinking themselves above the laboring classes. Children were taught from an early age that work was for slaves, and as masters they were exempt from it. According to Barrow "even the lower classes of people object to their children going out as servants, or being bound to learn useful trades."[69] Dutch settlers, regardless of their social status, considered themselves to be extremely important and entitled. One British officer of the first occupation found that the resident planters "assume an air of consequence... and affect an ostentatious parade."[70]

Britons noted that the Cape Dutch lifestyle was detrimental to their health and physical fitness. One British Officer claimed that "the unwieldy size of the human body among the Dutch at the Cape has frequently been remarked;" he attributed this extreme corpulence to a combination of heat, national predisposition, and dietary concerns.[71] In the grazing lands outside of Cape Town, Boers subsisted largely on meat, and prepared meals which were offensive to the British palate. Percival described the usual cuisine as "indifferent bread and vegetables, stewed in sheep's fat." As for their meat course, he described gross quantities of mutton being devoured, "as some of our porters would for a wager."[72] The Dutch manner of eating was thus portrayed as unsophisticated and gluttonous, showing no concern for finery or moderation.

Travelers were appalled at Dutch obesity and described it in an almost hyperbolic manner. Barrow called the Dutchmen "clumsy in their shape, awkward in their carriage;"[73] to Percival they were, "clumsy, stout made, morose."[74] One traveler warned

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[69] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 44.
[70] *Gleanings in Africa*, 210.
[71] *Gleanings in Africa*, 211-212.
[72] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 204-205.
[73] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 47.
[74] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 206.

that one "need not be surprised at the several instances of corpulence which are here to be met with, - a thousand *Sir John Falstaffs* may be seen in one day."[75] Dutch women were similarly afflicted by their easy and indulgent existence. While Barrow found the Cape women to be pretty, he was rather alone in this favorable judgment.[76] Percival described the average Dutch farmwife as bare-footed and ignorant, rarely boasting of beauty, and displaying "little of female delicacy."[77] One unknown British Officer claimed to have "beheld female figures from the country enveloped in such a mass of flesh, as naturally excites astonishment." He related a fantastic story of an enormous woman who was attacked in her home by revolting Africans. She attempted to flee through the outside doorway, but was thwarted in her attempt when her swollen body "stuck fast in the attempt." The poor lummox was unceremoniously slaughtered by her attackers.[78] Through tales such as this and through general physical descriptions, the Dutch were shown to be gluttonous, primitive and revolting.

Aside from physical ugliness, the Dutch were accused of carrying a generally unsociable and unpleasant disposition. Barrow attributed a "phlegmatic character" to the Dutchmen, while another writer spoke of their tendency to "affect an ostentatious parade."[79] Percival wrote of the general hospitality provided by Boers in the country, but he dismissed this tendency as only a sign of "ostentation rather than from any real generosity of heart."[80]

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[75] *Gleanings in Africa,* 212.
[76] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 46.
[77] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 205.
[78] *Gleanings in Africa*, 212.
[79] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 46; *Gleanings in Africa*, 210.
[80] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 226.

While some travel writers spared Dutch women from moral criticism, others were direct in their condemnation of the 'fair sex.'[81] Percival was almost sympathetic when he considered the position of women at the Cape. Ignored by their husbands, they occupied a lowly social status and were expected to be completely servile. They were discouraged from all forms of social intercourse and as a result they remained ignorant and unanimated.[82] But he also implied that it was in part their own fault that so many Cape women led a "lazy, listless and inactive life" and exuded "little of female delicacy."[83] Another writer complained that Dutch women were incompetent in domestic affairs, on account of constant attention from their slaves. Of the ladies in Cape Town, it was said that "they no sooner begin to move, than they find they are not allowed to assist themselves."[84]

It was also implied that Cape women were morally corrupted by their exposure to slavery. Extramarital affairs between white planters and female slaves were known to all visitors at the Cape; the coloured race was (and is) a testament to these relationships. The same slave women who were engaged in sex with their masters were often employed in raising their masters' daughters, and this was seen as unacceptable by many Britons. What could be more dangerous to impressionable young girls than the libertine morality of the female slaves who were always in their company? Certainly their conversations led the Dutch girls toward indelicate and inappropriate manners.[85] The moral corruption that slavery brought about in the enslaved was inevitably reflected on the masters as well. Percival was appalled at the audacity of country women who had their feet washed by

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[81] This term was used by many male writers of the period
[82] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 253-254.
[83] Ibid., 205.
[84] *Gleanings in Africa*, 258.
[85] Ibid., 64.

male slaves. These shameless wives even allowed the practice to be performed in the presence of strangers.[86]

One hallmark of slavery which seemed extremely corrupting to the female character was the slave sale. When slave cargoes arrived at the Cape, the mercilessly commercial element of the system was viewed in full. Slaves were made to stand naked in front of the crowd of prospective buyers and inspected as if they were cattle; those who appeared strong or of a calm disposition might draw a higher price. Travelers noted in disgust that the Dutch actually enjoyed these spectacles, counting them among their chief amusements.[87] Most appalling was the presence of women at these events. The curious Lady Anne Barnard strongly wished to witness a sale, but she was discouraged by her delicate sensibilities. The prospect of seeing the male slaves unclothed during their examination was much too scandalous for a proper lady.[88] In contrast, Dutch ladies allowed themselves to view the poor slaves in a state of nudity, and even enjoyed the cruel exposition. The result was degradation of the entire feminine spirit. In the words of one traveler: "accustoming themselves to such barbarous spectacles, must in some manner tend to eradicate those finer feelings of our nature so peculiarly apposite and becoming the female character."[89]

Beyond their moral failings, Britons lamented the dearth of artistic and intellectual pursuits among the Dutch. Percival was appalled by the ignorance of the people in both town and country, attesting that "no books, but a Bible and hymn book, are to be found amongst them." This was partially attributed to the ancestry of the Boers,

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[86] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 205.
[87] *Gleanings in Africa*, 61.
[88] Barnard, *Cape Diaries*, 58: March 11, 1799.
[89] *Gleanings in Africa*, 61.

supposedly drawn from the uneducated and undignified men of Europe. But the VOC was also to blame for its failure to promote learning. When Percival wrote in 1804, the only printing press in the colony was said to be that which printed rix-dollars. It was his impression that the government had proved either incapable or unwilling to provide any sort of education system.[90] John Barrow, among others, attributed Dutch intellectual failings to their greedy nature. It was his observation that "the minds of every class... were wholly bent on trade," with conversations dominated by "money-matters and merchandize."[91] Another traveler joked that "should the Dutch be again put in possession of the Cape, they will probably convert the Cape Drury into pakhuises for commercial purposes."[92] This obsession with commerce left little time or interest for more cultured or enlightened pursuits. Few Dutchmen fostered a taste for reading, and none worked toward the cultivation of the arts. With no public amusements available and no culture of intellectualism, men at the Cape were known to "soon degenerate into the common routine of eating, smoking and sleeping."[93]

At least one traveler attributed Dutch ignorance to the system of Cape slavery. Grant Warden was an economic advisor when he visited the cape in 1825. A strong proponent of free labor, he believed that both slave and master were degraded by slavery and caused to be less industrious. He furthermore felt that by association, the surrounding freemen were similarly degraded.[94] Warden believed that this process led to the retardation of all intellectual and cultural pursuits, not only at the Cape, but wherever

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[90] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 230: The Rix-dollar was the common currency under the Dutch government.
[91] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 45.
[92] *Gleanings in Africa*, 259.
[93] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 48.
[94] Warden, *Considerations on the State,* 114: "the slave and master, says he, are both degraded beings, incapable of approximating to the perfection of industry, and by their contagion degrading the industry of the freeman"

slavery has existed. He appealed to the writings of fellow travelers, who "consider all progress in the arts in Brazil and other settlements of America, as utterly hopeless, while slavery shall continue to be tolerated."[95] Thus it was slavery itself which led to the cultural impoverishment of the masters at the Cape.

Slavery was seen as detrimental to the master, and it was certainly a burden and barrier to the slave; thus the effect of slavery on the colony was predictably berated. Warden, whose arguments favored the rational rather than sentimental, was explicit in condemning the societal effects of slavery. To him, the institution was deplorable not "so much on account of the bondage it imposes on its victims," but for its "pernicious effects on the habits and feelings of society."[96] A true capitalist and defender of property rights, Warden could not support the forcible emancipation of slaves, which he viewed as legally acquired assets. But he found it most unfortunate that the Dutch had so unwisely invested their capital in slave-holding.[97]

Britons like Warden believed that slavery was an inefficient system which limited the success of the colony. In comparison to free labor, slave labor was seen as less purposeful and lacking motivation. Slaves at work were described as slow moving and dejected – motivated only by fear of the master. If left to their own devices, slaves quickly dropped whatever task was at hand.[98] George Thompson, who argued strongly for English immigration to the Colony, concluded that slaveholding is "a hazardous and unprofitable investment of property," which could easily be outperformed by self-

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[95] Warden, *Considerations on the State*, 114: he continues that "those states in North America which have proscribed slavery are making the largest strides towards national prosperity."
[96] Ibid., 115.
[97] Ibid.,
[98] *Gleanings in Africa*, 263.

fulfilling free labor.[99] He observed that slave-holders throughout the colony received poor returns on their labor investment; in the more distant regions, slave-holding often resulted in an economic loss.[100] Unfortunately, the Cape Colony had relied so heavily on slavery during the Dutch period that it was difficult for planters to adopt a free labor system. The price of slaves skyrocketed after the abolition of trading in 1808, but free laborers remained too scarce to provide an alternative labor source.[101] British travelers understood that continuing the unprofitable and unpromising enterprise of slavery could only lead to economic hardship at the Cape.

In contrast to their treatment of the Dutch, British travelers were very complementary toward British rule at the Cape. They felt that the British had done a better job of managing the colony in all respects, including the issue of slavery. While slavery was not abolished in the British colonies until 1834, travelers agreed that slavery under the British government was much more humane and restricted than it had been under the Dutch.

In fact, the British did make significant slave reforms after their occupation of the Cape. Torture was abolished quickly after the first British occupation, and a number of other measures were taken to protect slaves. In the first thirty years of British rule, work hours for slaves were reduced as were the maximum number of lashes allowed in punishing slaves.[102] In 1823, a number of reforms known as the Trinidadian orders of council went into effect throughout the British Empire. These orders led to the expansion of slave rights at the Cape. The orders of council legalized slave marriages, prohibited the

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[99] Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 184: Arguing for the prudence and morality of English free labor
[100] Ibid., 128
[101] Ibid., 126-127
[102] Wright *Slavery at the Cape*, is very thorough in addressing the contents of the slave proclamations. See pages 24-27

separation of slave families, and provided education opportunities for slaves.[103] The importation of slaves was officially abolished in 1807, and total emancipation began in 1834.

Travelers were emphatic in crediting the British government and nation for these reforms. John Barrow visited the Cape in 1797, a mere two years after its initial occupation by the British, and he reported that the climate of slavery at the Cape had changed dramatically in that short time. The importation of slaves, which had previously been a lucrative free enterprise, was suddenly placed under tight control. Fewer slaves were imported, and those few that were imported were only allowed under special circumstances or as a result of smuggling.[104] Lady Anne Barnard writes of several slave cargoes being unloaded during the first occupation, but she also describes the substantial legal impediments. Slavers had a difficult time in landing their captives due to men like Lady Anne's husband, who tried to uphold the strict importation laws.[105]

The notorious public executions were done away with under British rule. The primary hangman in Cape Town allegedly hung himself in despair after learning of British mercy.[106] Barrow may have been joking with this anecdote, but he certainly believed that real changes had occurred immediately following the occupation. Percival agreed that the British presence at the Cape had improved the lot of the slave and that "the Dutch treated their slaves much more rigorously" before their arrival.[107] He further postulated that the improvements in slave treatment, combined with the stability brought

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[103] Wright, *Slavery at the Cape*, 5, 14 and 16.
[104] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 43.
[105] Barnard, *Cape Diaries*, 215: April 8, 1800.
[106] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 42.
[107] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 284.

by British troops, had greatly allayed the fears of a slave rebellion.[108] Grant Warden, writing after the adoption of the orders of council, confidently asserted "whatever amelioration has taken place in the condition of the slave and Hottentots, is entirely owing to the exertions of the British government."[109] Even the Reverend Wright, who was very critical of the British government, admitted that the occupation had improved the position of slaves.

Beyond amelioration for the slaves, travelers believed that British occupation and settlement presented a superior alternative: free labor. Classically liberal ideas of profit motivation guided the British in their preference for a free, competitive labor system. Unlike slaves, freemen stood to profit from their labors, and therefore had an incentive to work more efficiently. One British officer demonstrated this concept by contrasting the sluggish movements of the slave with the purposeful determination of the independent corn farmer.[110]

If the Dutch were supposed to have natural predispositions to greed, laziness and obesity, then the English were equally inclined to independent and purposeful labor. George Thompson was relatively lenient in his treatment of the Dutch at the Cape; he found them to be less indolent and depraved than others had alleged, and chalked up their failings to "the evil influence of slavery."[111] But he was explicit in tying the virtues of free labor to his native land and people. He argued for the investment of English capital, which would encourage English free labor – a system much "more pleasant and

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[108] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 285.
[109] Warden, *Considerations on the State*, 113.
[110] *Gleanings in Africa*, 263.
[111] Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 125 and 138.

profitable than the employment of slaves."[112] Thompson was confident that the hazardous and unprofitable system of slavery was one "which an Englishman, from prudential as well as moral considerations, would avoid."[113] Given their prevailing thoughts on slavery and English free labor, it is unsurprising that British travel writers were optimistic about a British Cape Colony.

Most travelers supported British slave policy, which they saw as much more restrictive than that of the Dutch. John Barrow applauded the constraints that had been placed on slave importation even within the first several years of occupation. According to Percival, the British intended to abolish slavery immediately but did not want to deprive the Dutch of what was considered to be their private property.[114] The protection of property rights continued to be an obstacle to abolition until 1834. Grant Warden, who considered slavery a "political evil,"[115] believed that the dangers of violating property rights were so great that they far outweighed the benefits of abolition.[116] While he credited the British government for all of their ameliorations, he was hesitant to support any "hasty, violent or ill-digested enactments for the condition of the slave."[117] Another writer believed that the British Parliament would gladly abolish the slave trade, if only it was safe and practicable."[118] He never fully elaborated on what exactly prevented the government from eradicating this "degeneration of humanity; a direct violation of the laws of nature."[119] George Thompson felt that in the 1820's slaveholding represented the only option for plantation owners, even if it was a "hazardous and unprofitable

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[112] Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 184.
[113] Ibid., 212.
[114] Percival, *An Account of the Cape*, 248.
[115] Warden, *Considerations on the State*, 117.
[116] Ibid., 115.
[117] Ibid., 113.
[118] *Gleanings in Africa*, 200.
[119] Ibid., 73.

investment of property."[120] That said, he was assured that English free labor would quickly destroy the slave system, which was a "fertile source of misery and crime."[121]

While travelers at the Cape forwarded varying prescriptions for solving the slave question, they were in unanimous agreement about the inevitable and desirable solution: total abolition. Universally, they accepted that slavery had been injurious to the slave, to the master, and to the colony as a whole. Slavery was in no way beneficial, nor was it necessary. Barrow claimed that "there is, perhaps, no part of the world, out of Europe, where the introduction of slavery was less necessary."[122] Even those who were most cautious in addressing abolition acknowledged the moral and political evil of slavery. These writers provided their readership with an image of Cape slavery as a cancerous system which harmed all while producing no good. The proponents of this system were wicked, decadent and depraved, or at best morally corrupted. The only option was to destroy it completely.

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[120] Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 212.
[121] Ibid., 138.
[122] Barrow, *Travels into the Interior,* 43.

Chapter II: The West Indies

In the British Empire, slavery was most prevalent in the West Indian colonies, where it was the dominant labor system of the plantation economy. British abolitionists focused their attacks against West Indian planters, portraying them as cruel and indolent. But among West Indian travel writers from this period, there were many who countered the abolitionist position. They did not characterize slavery as immoral, but as necessary. They sought to justify it and to defend its practice.

For many British travel writers there was an inherent racial justification for the enslavement of Africans. Stereotypes about the general character of Black people were widespread, and while these stereotypes varied widely, they were used to explain why it was necessary or ideal for Blacks to be in bondage.

First and foremost, Africans were portrayed as uncivilized and certainly less advanced than Europeans. When Henry Nelson Coleridge (cousin to Samuel Taylor Coleridge) was in Trinidad in 1825, he came across a party of contraband African slaves, who had been discovered and freed by the British government. He claimed that the "wretched creatures are for the most part so barbarous that it has been found almost impossible to induce them to engage in any regular work."[123]

George Pinckard traveled to the West Indies in 1801 as a doctor with a British Army detachment. His perceptions of slavery were often ambiguous and seemingly contradictory; while he often lamented the tragic position of slaves, Pinckard described Blacks as if they were animals. He was disgusted by the "wool of their head" which he

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[123] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies* (London: John Murray, 1826), 261-263: the author claimed that these 'damned Willyforce n_____s,' were supposedly looked down upon by all on the island.

claimed laid host to an abundance of 'vermin.'[124] He vividly related a story of a savage fight between two women of Black or mixed race. He described the "brutal and savage means" in which these women attempted to bite, pinch, scratch and gouge the other into submission "in the most cold and deliberate manner." Pinckard showed this fight as an animalistic contest, showcasing "the bitterness and cruelty of savage nature."[125]

Many Whites feared that the 'savage nature' of the African was still very much alive in the native-born slaves of the West Indies. Matthew Gregory Lewis was a playwright and absentee landowner who visited his Jamaica Plantation in 1815. While he found the character of his slaves to be generally pleasant and amusing, he also believed they were disposed to acts of unspeakable evil.[126] He was convinced that many slaves would enjoy cutting the throats of their masters, and would not think twice about the morality of the act.[127] Pinckard was struck by his encounters with the 'Bush Negroes' of Suriname – escaped Slaves who had formed maroon communities in the jungle and retained their autonomy from the Dutch. He characterized these Blacks, who he presumed had retained much of their African character, as "cruel, blood-thirsty and revengeful."[128]

Stereotypes about Blacks suggested that they were incapable of taking care of themselves without White supervision. Pinckard stated that if left to their own devices, slaves built themselves homes that were "of a very coarse construction, and are dark, close, and smoky." He contrasted this with a slave yard which had been furnished by a planter, where "the huts are neat, and the whole premises wear an air of order, and of

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[124] George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 1* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806), 260-261
[125] Ibid.,
[126] Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a Residence Amongst the Negroes in the West Indies* (,London: John Murray, 1845), 92.
[127] Ibid., 115
[128] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 248.

cleanliness."[129] Pinckard saw Africa and African people as uncivilized, and he concluded that Blacks were better off as slaves on the islands then as freemen in the African heartland. While slaves lacked the freedoms of European peasants, they had "little cause to lament their removal from the wild woods of an opposite shore."[130] Matthew Lewis forced his slaves to gather provisions every week because he did not trust them to manage two weeks of provisions at the same time. He alleged that given the chance, they would sell all of their food or trade it away on rum, "for they are so thoughtless and improvident."[131]

In comparison to the supposedly brutal Dark Continent from which they had come, many British travel writers reported that West Indian slaves were happy and well treated. This depiction stood in stark contrast to abolitionist writings which had been circulating widely in Britain for many years. The horrors of slavery, which modern scholarship has painfully revealed, were known to the British public. Abolitionists like William Wilberforce had been actively publicizing the slave trade and slavery in the West Indies. Popular slave narratives like that of Mary Prince provided first-hand evidence for the torture, death and social destruction that characterized slavery. But even in light of this literature, many travelers continued to downplay the deprivations of slave life.

Coleridge stated that the fate of each slave bore "a pretty exact relation to the independence or indigence of his master," and that treatments ranged from the pampered domestic slave to the cruelly treated field slave of a crude farmer. But he felt confident

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[129] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies* Vol. 1, 288.
[130] Ibid.,
[131] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 41.

that seventy to eighty percent of slaves were well-treated on "respectable estates."[132] Matthew Lewis mirrored this sentiment. His account relates several gruesome tales of slave cruelty – a Mr. Bedward who left his sick slaves to die in a gully rather than nurse them; a Mr. Lutford who once shot and killed a slave for stealing coffee; and another master who was imprisoned for branding one of his slaves.[133] But for the most part, he felt that slaves were fairly treated, and that "instances of tyranny to negroes are now very rare."[134] Pinckard too thought there was a great deal of variance between the treatment of slaves, according to the "disposition and circumstances of the master."[135] It is likely that individual experiences did vary greatly, because masters were given such complete control over their slaves. Guidelines about acceptable treatment of slaves were vague, loosely interpreted, and difficult to enforce. What a planter did to his slaves on his own property was considered a private matter, as long as the punishment was not too extreme (again, open to interpretation). Surely, not every planter or overseer was a sadist willing to rape, torture or kill his slaves. But for those who were, there was little legal authority to stop them.

Many argued that the most oppressive owners were those of the lower and middling classes. Most travel writers were members of high society and well educated. Henry Coleridge and Matthew Lewis were both literary men, George Pinckard and Richard Madden were both medical doctors, and others were trained as clergymen or magistrates. Their upper class backgrounds led them to sympathize with the wealthiest and most educated planters who resided on 'respectable estates.' But in the Caribbean,

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[132] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies,* 238-241.
[133] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 142,143, and 148.
[134] Ibid., 60.
[135] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 108-9.

the lower classes, and sometimes even non-Whites, occasionally owned slaves. These people were almost universally despised and slandered in their character and conduct.

Coleridge was ashamed of the Barbados tenantry – a class of White immigrants required by law to reside on the plantations. He accused them of extreme laziness, to the point that they were sometimes found begging to slaves for subsistence.[136] Special magistrate Richard Madden discovered the same on his 1835 visit to Barbados, rating poor Whites as the worst class on the island.[137] Pinckard's Barbadian experience was remarkably similar. He found a White Creole class where "indolence and inaction prevails,"[138] and poor Whites lived in a condition that was barely above that of the Black slaves.[139] Pinckard believed that the slaves of this poor White class certainly had the worst lot; they were often subjected to "neglect and cruelty" as well as constant poverty.[140]

Even if poor White masters were well intentioned, their lack of resources hindered their ability to provide for themselves. On Anguilla, Coleridge encountered slaves who suffered from "want of certain and adequate provision." The masters, he argued, were not purposely withholding food; rather they simply could not afford it. Mismanagement of the island's plantations had made them unprofitable and left the planters with a dangerous lack of capital.[141]

Supporters of slavery countered abolitionists by arguing that in order to ameliorate the condition of the slaves, it was necessary to improve the planter class.

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[136] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 294.
[137] Richard Madden, *Twelve Months Residence*, 41.
[138] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 108.
[139] Ibid., 123.
[140] Ibid., 111.
[141] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 235.

Responsibility for the slaves' well-being rested most immediately with them, and more successful plantations would be more able to adequately provide for their slaves. Rather than wish ill on the planter class (as some abolitionists had done publicly) Coleridge told his audience to wish them success, as this was the only way slaves could lead comfortable Christian lives.[142] He argued that humanitarian efforts were most effective when directed toward the planter class – "I am convinced that one of the most effectual measures for bettering the slaves would be a thorough and humanizing education of the masters themselves."

In their attempts to justify the slave system, travelers described a relationship between master and slave which was more reciprocal than is imaginable. A passage from Coleridge illustrates this beautifully:

> "Really the slave is scarcely more the absolute property of his master than the master is of his slave. Of the relations between master and servant, of the pride of protecting and the gratitude of protection given, of the daily habits of intercourse, of the sense of mutual dependence, of natural affection and of natural kindness, of all those nameless and infinite emotions of fear, and hate, and love, which though light as air itself are strong as, yea stronger than, links of iron, of all these things which defeat the definition of slavery and make it to be an exact lie, the inhabitant of England knows nothing."[143]

Coleridge was a literary man, and perhaps his profession forgives some of his ridiculous and flowery language. But this romanticized vision of the master-slave relationship represents a very real and influential idea of paternalism in the West Indian slave system. Pinckard described a kind master, Mr. Dougan, who providing his slaves with a "high-degree of comfort and happiness... generously fosters them with a father's care." As a result, Dougan's slaves supposedly offered him devotion as well as their labor, looking

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[142] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indie,,* 236-7.
[143] Ibid., 311.

"to their revered master as a kind and affectionate parent."[144] Matthew Lewis claimed to have a great relationship with his slaves and others, who were appreciative of his kind treatment. He recounted manumitted slaves, some as old as 100, returning to his plantation for friendly visits – to sit and talk with those who had worked alongside them.[145] In Lewis' account, slaves routinely asked him for favors and services, much as they would a father or elder. On one occasion, slaves from a neighboring plantation sought refuge with Lewis, claiming that their master had been mistreating them. Lewis took the slaves in, even though he was "certain that [their claims] must be fictitious."[146] On another occasion, he provided shelter to two female slaves who had just been flogged, though he made it clear that he felt their punishment was completely legal.[147]

Lewis claimed that he was extremely reluctant to use corporal punishment against his slaves, while most of his neighbors urged its necessity. Eventually he gave in and began using the lash in response to what he deemed severe crimes.[148] Lewis never elaborated on the punishment given to his slaves (for obvious reasons) and he never characterized discipline as a form of domination. Rather he saw it as a system of conditioning to influence behavior. For example, he once chastised one of his male slaves for striking a woman.[149] While the way Lewis treated his slaves is degrading, it does not begin to tell the true story of punishment on his plantation. It is telling that Lewis never identifies which 'absolute crimes' elicited his use of the horsewhip.

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[144] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 204.
[145] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 56.
[146] Ibid., 73.
[147] Ibid., 69.
[148] Ibid., 150.
[149] Ibid., 67.

Alongside moral, religious and practical objections, abolitionists relied heavily on sentimental (if painfully accurate) descriptions of cruelty in the Caribbean. Perhaps more than anything, the public was struck by the horrific icons of slavery: the slave ship, the slave sale, the horse-whip. In order to make a successful argument against abolition, travel writers had to offer an alternative vision of slave life.

The resulting portrait was remarkably positive, and reflected little upon the actuality of slavery. Though Africans were often depicted as barbarous and crude, those enslaved on the British Islands were shown as friendly, care-free, and most importantly – happy. Coleridge found the slaves on Trinidad to be "good-humored" and alert, while those in Grenada were "all as good-humored, vivacious and impudent as the rest of their fellows wherever I have seen them."[150] Throughout his visit to Jamaica, Matthew Lewis was convinced that the slaves on his plantation enjoyed a pleasant existence. Within days of his arrival, he bore witness to the festival of John-Canoe, featuring song, dance, costumes and parades put on by the Island's slaves. Of these people, still enslaved, he wrote: "I never saw so many people who appeared to be so unaffectedly happy."[151] Even when Lewis offered his slaves a chance to air their grievances, they did not complain about their condition – "they all expressed themselves to be quite satisfied, and seemed to think that they could never say enough to mark their gratitude for my kindness."[152] Perhaps Lewis' 'kindness' obscured the fact that his slaves had little recourse for complaint, and that doing so could provoke punishment from the man who occasionally had them flogged.

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[150] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 85 and 110.
[151] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 28.
[152] Ibid., 120.

Slaves were commonly allotted provision grounds on which to raise crops for their subsistence. In this way, they were self-sufficient, and masters were not burdened by having to provide meals to multitudes of slaves. Many travelers remarked on this system of provisioning, considering it a positive freedom enjoyed by the slaves.[153] Lewis wrote of his slaves' idyllic villages, lined with groves of oranges, palms and other trees for "ornament or luxury." A lover of theatre and a renowned playwright, Lewis wrote that he "never witnessed on the stage a scene so picturesque as a negro village."[154] They were allowed to gather provisions from their gardens every Monday, and in addition they were provided with rations of salt-fish and salt-pork. Lewis assured the reader that his slaves preferred their diet of yams and salt-meat to his usual fare of fresh fish, pineapples and shaddocks.[155] After observing a group of slaves in their "happy negro yard," Pinckard delighted in their apparently untroubled existence. He stated that "they know none of the anxious cares or difficulties of the world," and could not wish to exchange their condition for that of a European peasant.[156]

Thus slave life was characterized by its splendid isolation. Travel writers admitted that this isolation prevented the slave from many achievements. Most importantly, the slaves were often unable to receive a proper religious education. For this reason Coleridge urged every planter to instruct their slaves in the ways of the Anglican Church.[157] But in daily life, slaves were said to be much happier and more at peace than the European poor. They supposedly inhabited a world of ignorant bliss, where their lack

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[153] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 137: Coleridge noted that in Barbados, slaves are given ample time to cultivate their gardens, "and a dressed meal is always provided for them during the day."
[154] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 54-56.
[155] Ibid., 54-55.
[156] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 1*, 288-289.
[157] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 188: Argued that planters were "bound in conscience" to educate slaves, also that it was in their interest to build a moral connection.

of knowledge about freedom and responsibility ensured their happiness. It is ludicrous to think that plantation slaves, living amidst the extreme opulence of the White planter class, were ignorant of their degraded position. Rather, they were reminded of their domination on a daily basis. Yet this was rarely considered by travel writers attempting qualify slavery's bad reputation.

To counter prevalent notions about the horrors of the Middle Passage and the flogging and torture of slaves, some travel writers made explicit denials of these practices. Soon after his arrival at Barbados, Pinckard encountered an American slave ship, laden with captured Africans bound for slavery. While he regretted that these Africans had been torn from their home, he was "pleased to observe that an air of cheerfulness and contentment prevailed among them." He did not witness any of the supposed horrors that characterized the passage, and testified that the slaves were routinely given cold water for washing, provided with adequate provision, and encouraged to exercise.[158] In Pinckard's eyes, this was representative of most slave ships. He reported that a Liverpool slaver was of equally high standard,[159] and was later able to board and closely inspect the Venus, a slave ship out of London. Though the Venus seemed small, and its human cargo appeared crowded, Pinckard was "pleased to remark the excellence of the accommodation, and the great attention paid to the health and accommodation of the slaves." He reported that the crew and cargo had experienced no sickness during the passage and that every slave had survived the journey.[160] Pinckard

[158] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 1*, 229-232.
[159] Ibid., 237.
[160] Ibid., 446.

was so impressed at the health of the slave crew that he wished to learn from the Venus in order to improve the health of British naval crews.[161]

If Pinckard was being truthful in his account of the middle passage, then he must have visited several very lucky vessels. Slave mortality during the passage was an accepted fact of the slave trade. Slave traders were wary of death rates of fifteen percent or more and factored this into their business model. During the height of the British slave trade, between 1761 and 1790, mortality rates averaged about nine percent. If poor weather caused a voyage to be delayed or if diseases like smallpox found their way onboard, then much higher death rates could be expected. By Pinckard's time, advances in maritime technology and medicine had brought down on-ship mortality rates to between 3 and 5 percent. Even so, death at sea remained a common occurrence in the slave trade.[162]

Coleridge and Lewis both visited the Islands after the trans-Atlantic slave trade had been abolished and they reported that much had changed since then. The horrors of the Middle Passage, they claimed, were long gone and almost forgotten. Lewis admitted that in the days of the slave trade, slaves had committed suicide rather than leave their homes. But that tumultuous past was no more, and the West Indian born Blacks were now "beings who are always laughing and singing."[163] Without the dangers of the Middle Passage and the subsequent seasoning process, he argued that it was more appropriate to label Caribbean Blacks as servants rather than slaves.[164] In Antigua, Coleridge came face

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[161] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 9-10: Though slave vessels were much more crowded, Pinckard claimed he did not observe the same level of sickness and mortality which characterized military vessels.
[162] Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 392: Slave mortality rates were still higher than that of European migrants or Navy sailors; this contradicts Pinckard's claims.
[163] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 52.
[164] Ibid., 29.

to face with a boatload of Africans who had been illegally imported and then captured. They were made apprentices after their rescue, but Coleridge felt that they could better serve the island under closer supervision – basically as ordinary slaves.[165]

If British writers were tight-lipped about cruelty against slaves in the British colonies, they were more eager to elaborate about the practices in neighboring colonies. During his time in the Islands, Richard Madden disparaged French creoles for speaking about their Black population as monstrous creatures.[166] Coleridge mirrored this view upon arriving at Montserrat. He wrote that the slaves under the French there were "entirely disbarred from any mental instruction." The French had made no attempt at providing education – secular, moral, or religious and this was to blame for the 'barbarous' and 'rebellious' character of the slaves.[167]

Pinckard was sharply critical of the Dutch settlers whom he encountered in Guiana. While he was always treated hospitably by the planters he encountered, he illustrated stereotypes about the Dutch which were prevalent in Europe, and also reflected upon the Dutch in South Africa. They were said to be unemotional, methodical, pedantic and wholly commercial. Pinckard wrote of one Hollander: "he was a dull, heavy, slow and plodding Dutchman – frigid and inanimate as the most icy boor of his aquatic nation."[168] While this stereotype could be applied light-heartedly to the gluttony and insistent hospitality of the Dutch, it also suggested tendencies toward cruelty and sin.

Pinckard wrote that corporal punishment was so common in Guiana that the residents now witnessed it without reaction; in fact they sometimes considered it a form

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[165] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 261-265.
[166] Richard Madden, *A Twelvemonths' Residence in the West Indies, during the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1835), 104.
[167] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 184.
[168] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 58.

of entertainment. At one plantation, the lady of the house goaded her husband while he flogged a slave, apparently taking the punishment as a "matter of amusement."[169] At another house, a Dutch lady pointed Pinckard's party to where a slave was being flogged "as if it were a pleasant sight for strangers."[170] The punishments that Pinckard describes were not only frequent, but severe and sadistic. Though he detested the rebellious 'Bush Negroes,' Pinckard could not condone the punishment inflicted upon those who were captured. They were tortured as "ought never to have been tolerated in any state professing to be civilized, humanity shudders at the bare recital of it." Those tortures included breaking on the wheel, mutilation of the living, and burning at the stake.[171] While it is unclear that Pinckard actually witnessed these acts, their existence is confirmed through a number of contemporary accounts like that of John Stedman.

As travel writers at the Cape had done, Pinckard remarked on the Dutch affection for attending slave sales. On the day of the sale, all of the town's inhabitants turned out along with their children and slaves, all dressed in their finest clothes. Pinckard was "surprised to find it quite a holiday, or a kind of public affair... a day of fasting and hilarity, but to the poor Africans it was a period of heavy grief and affliction." He was "shocked" to find women and children witnessing the sad sight, but more appalled at the treatment of the human auction pieces. The sellers and bidders scurried around handling and inspecting the slaves, "as if they had been examining cattle in Smithfield market." [172]

Witnessing slave sales in Guiana was a heart-wrenching experience for Pinckard; he saw children taken from their parents and brother torn from brother, White men

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[169] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 192.
[170] Ibid., 201.
[171] Ibid.,, 243-250.
[172] Ibid., 326-328.

treating Black men like animals, and crowds of bystanders delighting in the misery of it all. This experience elicited his strongest condemnation of slavery – "A whole host of painful ideas rushed into my mind at that moment. In sad contemplation all the distorted images of this abhorrent traffic presented themselves to my recollection."[173] When Pinckard had been amongst British slavery in Barbados, he had never uttered so strong a protest to the system. Even as he stood in the hold of a British slave ship, staring down at captured Africans packed like sardines, he did not proclaim the inhumanity of his compatriots. Pinckard only offered his strongest objections when the perpetrators were foreigners, not fellow Englishmen.

Pro-slavery writers also offered moral and rational arguments that justified the continuation of slavery. First and foremost, there was concern that a general emancipation would prove dangerous for the White population and could culminate in a violent massacre. In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, planters took rumors of slave plots and revolts very seriously. Lewis related an alleged plot involving 1,000 slaves, who designed to kill all of the Whites on the Island. Such rumors were widespread and usually false, but that was little comfort to fearful men like Lewis, who believed many slaves would enjoy cutting their masters' throats.[174] Lewis explicitly stated that if emancipation were enacted, the first consequence "would be, in all probability, a general massacre of the whites."[175]

Beyond the fear of violence, there was a fear that emancipation would usher in an economic collapse. Lewis said he regretted that slavery had ever taken hold in the

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[173] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 218-220: Pinckard provides a very impassioned and sentimental argument against slavery, which contradicts his depiction of idyllic slave life in both Barbados and Guiana.
[174] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 113-115.
[175] Ibid., 88.

colonies, but that the "system is now so incorporated with the welfare of Great Britain as well as Jamaica, as to make its extirpation an absolute possibility." He believed that while domestic slavery did not serve a major economic function and could be eliminated, plantation slavery was vital to the survival of the colony and thus the empire.[176] Pinckard added that in places with a low population, slavery was necessary to ensure manpower during emergencies. In such situations, scarcity of labor could not be overcome "without having recourse to a system of coercion."[177] Coleridge warned against the economic turmoil that might be created by a hasty abolition: "it is as demonstrable morally as any proposition in Euclid is mathematically, first that the property in the soil must change hands; second that the commerce of the islands must languish or die altogether."[178] These types of concerns were widely shared among Whites in the West Indies, and they resonated with audiences in Britain as well. Travel writers sympathized with the planter class, who feared that abolition would destroy their livelihood.[179]

While many speculated about the potential negative effects of abolition, others took another tack. They argued that abolition alone could do little to improve the status of the slave. To some, a lack of education was the greatest obstacle to the slaves' advancement. Coleridge urged that "it is not to emancipation but to education that the sincere philanthropist ought to direct his present labors."[180] He believed childhood education would be the most important step in ameliorating both the moral and material position of the slaves.[181] Also, by providing the slaves with Anglican instruction, the

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[176] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 181.
[177] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 224.
[178] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 100.
[179] Madden, *Twelve Months Residence*, 37, 67: Madden refers to the perceived negative effects of abolition on the sugar economies.
[180] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 55.
[181] Ibid., 267.

planter could "bind them to him by every moral tie imaginable." Education would ensure the slaves' loyalty to Whites, while also preparing them for a new role as freedmen.[182]

Those in favor of slavery argued that slaves were not morally prepared for freedom. Much of this rhetoric was based solely on persistent stereotypes about Africans: that they were lazy and uncivilized. The moral character of Blacks was doubted by most British travelers, including those who were somewhat sympathetic to abolition. Coleridge asserted that the slaves wanted nothing beyond food and rum, and that any money they have was most likely acquired through theft.[183] Pinckard too was struck by the alleged amorality of the slaves: "generally sad thieves, they appear to know no sense of honesty. Ignorant of all moral principle, they steal without feeling any sense of wrong."[184] Richard Madden, who was more critical of slavery, suggested that slaves had been forced to use "falsehood, cunning and duplicity" to resist oppression. But he unsympathetically maintained that all Blacks "are addicted to lying, prone to dissimulation, and inclined to dishonesty."[185]

Many believed that slaves lacked the spirit of independence and self-improvement necessary for life in a capitalist system. Notions of paternalism suggested that plantation life was beneficial to the slave as part of a reciprocal relationship. Several writers took this idea to its limit, claiming that slaves really did not desire freedom. Matthew Lewis, himself a slave-owner, asserted that a slave's greatest fear was having a master that he did not know. The only thing worse was the prospect of having "no massa."[186] Coleridge too reported that many slaves prefer slavery, and even refuse manumission when it is

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[182] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 188.
[183] Ibid., 101.
[184] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 118.
[185] Madden, *Twelve Months Residence*, 136.
[186] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 34.

offered. He believed that the supposedly comfortable lifestyle of slavery served as "a very consolatory substitute" for freedom itself.[187]

Lewis argued that the free Blacks and free Coloureds (people of mixed race) in Jamaica were too lazy and un-industrious to make an honest living, and he could not imagine why emancipated slaves would fare better.[188] He did not consider that factors besides inherent laziness (racial prejudice, strict color bars, limited access to education, and a predatory judicial system) could have been holding Black people back.

Coleridge was the most verbose on this subject; he opposed even the establishment of savings banks for the slaves. He argued that savings banks can be beneficial to the working poor, but excluded Blacks from that category – "the negroes of the West Indies are not an industrious poor; they are indolent by nature, as their brethren in Africa are at this moment."[189] It is ironic that a class of people introduced explicitly and solely for their labor would not be considered part of the *working* poor. In any case, Coleridge doubted that slaves possessed a stimulus to industry, or understood the importance of work and property ownership. These things would have to be taught to them in time by their White masters. Once slaves gained the willingness to be productive, emancipation would be a blessing to them and the colony.[190] But as Coleridge viewed the current situation, "the freedman becomes the first week a vagabond, the second a robber, and the third a grinder of corn by the sweat of his legs in the jail pf Port of Spain."[191]

As much as they defended slavery through their testimonies and moral arguments, these writers could not deny the unrest that the system was causing in the colonies and

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[187] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 312-314.
[188] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 154.
[189] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 100.
[190] Ibid., 99.
[191] Ibid., 101.

the home islands. Violent slave resistance had become a real concern, especially following the Haitian revolution. Meanwhile, the growth of abolitionism in Britain was leading to urgent debates about the future of slavery. In this environment, it was difficult to place blame without indicting the system itself. Slavery sympathizers did so by attacking the abolitionists directly.

Most planters in the British West Indies were Anglicans, and many of them were upset about the presence of abolitionist Methodists on the islands. By proselytizing to slaves, and arguing for their freedom, Methodist missionaries were providing a message that was at odds with their present existence. To planters and their sympathizers, this was a dangerous situation which could easily lead to violence and unrest.

Matthew Lewis was skeptical of any outsiders' attempts to bring religion to his slaves. [192] But he was especially wary of the Methodists, who he felt were actively causing trouble. Lewis' journal is rife with rumors of plotted or impending slave revolts and conspiracies. He described a plot involving 1,000 slaves who planned to kill every white on the island – gleefully enjoying their masters' murder.[193] For this and similar disruptions, he blamed "Brown Methodists" who he claimed were inciting rebellion during secret night-time meetings with slaves.[194] Here he was referring to free Blacks and Coloureds (people of mixed race) who had converted to Methodism.

Henry Nelson Coleridge blamed Methodists ('sectarians') [195] for increasing the risk of a slave rebellion. He worried that with their limited knowledge of Christianity,

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[192] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence,* 72: Lewis would not even allow an Anglican minister to provide short lessons to his slaves on Sundays.
[193] Lewis, *Journal of a residence*, 113-114.
[194] Ibid., 89.
[195] This is the term that Coleridge uses to refer to Methodists pages 185-190. It suggests that Methodists are separate from and divisive to mainline English Protestantism.

slaves would fail to grasp the differences between Methodism and the Anglicanism of their masters. It would be too easy for them to simply identify their masters' faith as something different – "They believe their worship is true, and therefore they must think their master's false."[196] He argued that Methodists held too much power over the slaves, and were manipulating them against their masters.[197] And while he admitted that the Methodists "have done some present good amongst the negroes," he ultimately found that their teachings served to alienate the slaves from their masters.[198]

Little blame was placed on the planter class – they were exonerated in several ways. First, they were generally portrayed as kind masters, much unlike the tyrants that the abolitionists claimed they were. Coleridge concluded after visiting twelve colonies that he could not say the planters were guilty of any "cruelty, active or permissive, towards the slaves."[199] Lewis asserted that planters only punished their slaves for heinous crimes, and the "instances of tyranny to negroes are now very rare." Of course Lewis and his father served as examples of humane treatment.[200] While Pinckard illustrated many cruel scenes, especially in Dutch Guiana, he also wrote of many pleasant and hospitable masters like Mr. Dougan. Dougan's plantation boasted a slave yard that Pinckard characterized as "one of the happiest villages within the wide circle of the globe."[201] In regard to his own experiences, he found the planters in both Barbados and Guiana to be extremely kind and hospitable.[202]

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[196] Coleridge, *Six months in the West* Indies, 185.
[197] Ibid., 186.
[198] Ibid., 188-189.
[199] Ibid., 310.
[200] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence*, 60-61.
[201] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies Vol. 2*, 205.
[202] Ibid., 189.

Some tried to defend the planters by arguing that they had not chosen slavery, and indeed would abolish the system if it were a viable option. Coleridge claimed that, to his knowledge, no planters felt that slavery was truly a good system. They simply felt it was an unfortunate truth that abolition would do more harm than good.[203] Lewis echoed this sentiment; on principle: "every man of humanity must wish that slavery, even in its best and most mitigated form, had never found a legal sanction." But in reality, he believed that the system could not be abolished "without the certainty of producing worse mischiefs than the one which we annihilate."[204]

In his defense of slavery Coleridge appealed to authority, arguing that the system was legal under both secular and religious law. He pointed to the presence of slavery in Biblical times as a justification. While holding another man (especially a fellow Christian) in bondage suggests immorality, the Bible never explicitly condemns slavery – "That the spirit of that religion *tends* to abolish servitude is clear, that it *admits* of servitude is even still clearer."[205] Western civilizations had practiced slavery since classical times, and it was still allowed under the constitutions of most European nations. Coleridge applauded the British Government which had been "wise... informed and temperate" in avoiding untested radical reforms. While admitting that some reforms were necessary, he remained confident that the government would demand "nothing which may not be granted with the most apparent advantage to the planters themselves."[206]

In their depictions of slave societies in the West Indies, British travel writers painted a scene which effectively contradicted the abolitionist argument. They showed

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[203] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies,* 316-317.
[204] Lewis, *Journal of a Residence,* 181.
[205] Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, 304: Italics are Coleridge's own.
[206] Ibid., 324-327.

Blacks to be immoral and uncivilized beings who were incapable of independent life in a free society. These stereotypes were used to justify their enslavement. The practice of slavery was shown in a very mild manner, with the omission of horse-whips, torture, disease, murder and rape – the symbols which resonated with the sentiments of Britons at home. The plantation was alternatively characterized as a place of pleasant, idyllic paternalism, where kind masters sheltered their ignorant and dependent slave-children.

These writers argued that abolition was not necessary, and furthermore that it would necessarily bring unwanted consequences. In essence, their writing was a defense of the status quo. While slavery had its flaws, they were unwilling to place blame on the planter class or on the English Government. The only Whites who were criticized were outsiders – the crude tenant class or the Methodists who were seen as subversive and 'sectarian.' Travel writers identified with the planter class, who shared their social status as well as their national heritage. In defending slavery, these writers were crafting a defense of English gentlemen, and of the nation itself.

Conclusion

These narratives influenced the historiography of both South Africa and the West Indies for years to come. Early scholarship of Caribbean history was dominated by White Europeans, who relied mostly on the work and testimony of other Whites. Because travel literature was so popular, it was widely printed and many copies remained available. As a result, travel narratives remained a staple resource for historians well into the twentieth-century.

William Mathieson relied heavily on travel narratives for his 1926 work *British Slavery and its Abolition*. He cited Coleridge, Lewis, Pinckard and other travelers as reputable sources. Dedicating three pages to Lewis' narrative, Mathieson unquestioningly concluded that "At all events he [Lewis] continued to practice the utmost humanity and forbearance."[207] And concerning Pinckard's account, Mathieson wrote that "we cannot pass lightly" over his encounters with humane and merciful masters.[208] W.L. Burn's *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies*, published in 1937, shows more of the ugly legacy left by travel writers. Burn, who acknowledged the importance of travel narratives like that of Richard Madden, repeated longstanding stereotypes about Caribbean Blacks. He rarely considered them in his work due to his admitted unfamiliarity with "the great mass of the population, habitually docile, occasionally savage, lazy, improvident, pitifully cheerful, the prey of fears, superstitions, desires, suspicions, which I cannot know."[209] He sympathized with the White master class who

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[207] William Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), 100-102.
[208] Ibid., 89.
[209] W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 9.

had to "direct masses of shiftless, incorrigible beings" while suffering the "incessant attacks of missionaries and negrophilists."[210] These outlandish sentiments are drawn almost verbatim from the writings of men like Henry Coleridge and Matthew Lewis a century earlier.

In the last half of the twentieth-century, West Indian history came under the direction of Native historians who relied on more reliable sources and discounted these narratives. The Marxist, materialist work of C.L.R. James and Eric Williams revolutionized the field during the 1940's – this tradition has been carried on by historians like Robin Blackburn. More recently, Philip Curtin and David Eltis have used ship's logs, bills of sale, and other records to produce more accurate figures on the slave trade. Yet despite the wealth of new scholarship, historians have had to work against persistent stereotypes spread by travel writers.

In South Africa, travel narratives did not initially share the same importance to historiography. The first historian to write extensively on the history of the Cape was a turn of the century amateur, George McCall Theal. Theal, a strong sympathizer of Afrikaner causes, was not interested in British narratives which condemned Dutch treatment of the slaves. The first historian to conduct an in depth study of Cape Slavery was an Afrikaner, Victor de Kock. Like Theal, de Kock characterized Cape Slavery as a mild or 'benign' institution. In *Those in Bondage* (1953) de Kock referenced British travel narratives but only very selectively.[211]

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[210] Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, 38.

[211] Victor De Kock, *Those in Bondage: An account of the life of the slave at the Cape in the days of the Dutch East India Company* (London: Kennikat Press, 1971), 219-200: De Kock references instances of Dutch kindness in Gleanings *in Africa* and Lady Ann Barnard's *Cape Diaries*, but does not mention these writers' condemnations of the Dutch and slavery.

Because of the apartheid system and the limits placed on academia in South Africa, critical interpretations of Cape Slavery did not appear until the 1970's. The fall of apartheid, however, has opened the door for greatly expanded scholarship. In this new environment, a number of social historians have elevated travel narratives to a renewed level of importance. John Mason has relied heavily on travel narratives to contextualize the relationship between masters and slaves, as well as to gauge the social dynamics of Dutch households.[212] Pam Scully has similarly used travel narratives to investigate social conditions and gender relations in the frontier regions.[213] R.L. Watson examined British travel accounts for evidence of the growing abolition movement,[214] and Sue Newton-King has offered objections to John Barrow's narrative.[215] Despite the difficulties of verifying travel narratives, they are still a platform for new and meaningful scholarship, and they must be examined critically.

The British travel writers who visited South Africa and the West Indies during the early nineteenth century were cultural contemporaries. At home in Britain, they bore witness to the same debates over slavery and abolition. As social elites, they shared ideals of individual liberty and private property. And as whites, they shared stereotypes about non-whites, including the enslaved.

The colonies they visited shared important characteristics as well. First and foremost they were both slave societies. Though the slave population in the Caribbean

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[212] John Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection: Slavery and Emancipation in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). Mason's work is littered with references to travelers, including many Britons. John Barrow is heavily utilized, see pages 79-85.
[213] Pam Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 24-26.
[214] R.L. Watson, *The Slave Question: Liberty and Property in South Africa* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1990), 12 and 43-45.
[215] Susan Newton-King, *Masters and Servants on the Cape Eastern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19 and 217-218.

was much higher, slavery at the Cape was a fact of everyday life and something immediately apparent to any outsider. In both South Africa and the West Indies, slavery was characterized by a racial divide – White European settlers relied on the labor of dark skinned people, imported from outside of the colony.

Furthermore, laws regarding slavery and abolition were applied rather uniformly throughout the British Empire. When the slave trade was abolished in 1807, legal slave imports to both the Cape and the West Indies ceased immediately. When the Trinidadian Orders of Council placed limits on the treatment of slaves, the same guidelines were applied at the Cape by the proclamation of 1823. And when the process of apprenticeship and eventual emancipation began in 1834, it applied to all of the British Colonies.

Yet there were important differences between the two colonies. First there was the relative economic importance of the regions. In the Caribbean, a highly developed system of plantation slavery fueled a lucrative export economy producing mostly sugar but also indigo, tobacco and other commodities. Caribbean trade, both with the home islands and with foreign nations, was a huge source of revenue to the British Empire. The British had fought many wars to retain control over the West Indian trade and their commitment to the survival of the sugar industry was well demonstrated.

The planter class of the West Indies used the revenues of plantation slavery to construct a lifestyle that was marveled for its opulence. Travelers visiting the islands were met with scenes of spectacular Georgian mansions, tree-lined streets, and manicured gardens; the idyllic plantations offered unmatched hospitality. Many writers felt kinship to the planter aristocracy, who shared their nationality and class. Travel writers trusted the opinions of these planters and were sympathetic to their concerns.

The sugar trade, and the West Indian economy as a whole, was dependent on slavery. Without a controlled labor system to affect round-the-clock operation during the harvesting season, the plantation could not retain its profitability. After the American Revolution and the subsequent disruption of trade, Caribbean plantations maintained an even smaller margin for profitability. Planters worried that abolition would lead to increased labor costs that could ruin their operations. Travel writers considered the negative impact that this could have on the planters, the colony, and the Empire itself. West Indian planters feared for their lives as well as their livelihood. On the islands, Whites were heavily outnumbered by Blacks; and while military and civil authority was concentrated in the hands of Whites, there was always the very real prospect of rebellion. Eighteenth-century slave resistance in Jamaica and Suriname had forced Whites to make concessions to rebellious slaves, but it was the Haitian revolution that awakened serious fears in the planter class. Rumors of slave plots were common and were taken seriously. Many feared that by emancipating the slaves and relaxing restrictions on their movement, abolitionists were seriously endangering the lives of Whites. Travel writers were influenced by this fear, and they often argued against complete or immediate abolition, which they feared would bring disorder and danger to the islands.

The Cape Colony was much less economically and cultural connected to Great Britain. The products of Cape slavery: wine, wheat, and livestock, were relatively unimportant as trade items. Most of these goods remained in the colony, supplying settlers and visiting sailors. Plantation ventures had been unsuccessful at the Cape, and the colony was having financial difficulties. In fact, under its then-present boundaries the colony contained little arable land and no important natural resources; most regions could

only support grazing operations. The Cape's small rural economy contributed little to the greater empire and few Britons were heavily invested in protecting it.

The "Boers" who settled at The Cape during the Dutch period were a diverse group of Dutch, French, and Germans from many different social positions. In the arid frontier regions, most were unable to obtain great wealth even with slavery. In contrast to the opulence of the West Indian plantations, most Boer homesteads were small, simple and isolated. British travelers commented on the crude, impoverished appearance of the Boers and their households. The class sensibilities of these writers led them to identify the Boers with the supposed vices of the lower classes: indolence, laziness, ignorance and impiety.

The Boers' nationality was an even more important factor. Having taken the colony from the Dutch during wartime, the British applied negative stereotypes about Dutch people to the settlers at The Cape. Dutchmen were said to be cold, cruel and unsociable, with their minds wholly bent on wealth and commerce. While Boers in the countryside were derided for their poverty, the Dutch in Cape Town were accused of ostentation and flagrant displays of wealth.

Regarding the practice of slavery, the Boers were doubly indicted. First, it was alleged that their cruel and greedy Dutch nature was to blame for their mistreatment of the slaves. Second, Britons claimed that the Boers pampered and indulgent lifestyle had made them lazy, indolent, obese and ungrateful. In short, the Dutch had slaves because they were immoral, and they were immoral because they had slaves. Thus British travel writers were universal in their calls for emancipation at the Cape.

It is clear that British travel writers applied a double standard when evaluating slavery and slaveholders in South Africa and in the West Indies. When Percival noted that the Dutch had never established a printing press at the Cape, he used it as evidence of their ignorance and dullness. But when Pinckard observed a similar lack in Barbados, he noted it simply as a curiosity; he never inferred any intellectual failing which might have been at fault. Coleridge, Lewis and Pinckard all confirmed the hospitality of the West Indian planters, both English and otherwise, who accommodated them on their travels. But when Dutch planters at the Cape showed generosity, it was dismissed as insincere and pretentious. Caribbean gentlemen who lived in the utmost opulence without ever lifting a finger were complimented, while Dutch slaveholders were labeled as lazy and indolent.

What were the reasons for this double standard? First, the British nation had much to lose from emancipating the slaves in the West Indies. The Caribbean sugar trade, an enormous source of revenue, was based on plantation slavery; Colonists and Englishmen alike were worried about the potential economic repercussions of emancipation. If the West Indian colonies floundered, it could create a great burden for English at home. The same was not true of the Cape Colony. While slavery still existed, the Cape Colony had little impact on British home life. There was no indication that emancipation at the Cape could profoundly impact the British Empire as a whole.

Second, British travel writers felt a stronger connection to the slaveholders of the West Indies. The planters they encountered were fellow countrymen with whom they shared many cultural ties. Travel writers identified with these planters and were sympathetic to their concerns; they worried about the economic effects of abolition and

the potential for racial violence. They accepted the planters' stereotypes of Black slaves, and were more inclined to justify the harsh ways in which slaves were treated. At the Cape, there was no such connection. The men who held slaves were Dutchmen – foreigners who had recently been enemies of the British; travelers expected them to be dull, pedantic, greedy and cruel. British writers were hostile to the Dutch, and they spared nothing in detailing their crimes against the slaves.

Furthermore, slavery at the Cape was considered a Dutch institution. Travel writers could condemn the system without indicting British settlers or the British government. In fact, they assured readers that their government was doing the utmost to ameliorate the situation. In the West Indies, there was a much deeper tradition of British slavery. For years, the British Government had sanctioned and profited from slavery in its Caribbean colonies. Many English gentlemen owned land and slaves in the sugar islands. It would be very difficult for writers to condemn West Indian slavery without condemning Britain itself.

In the end it was a question of nationalism that determined British travel writers' responses to slavery in the overseas colonies. In South Africa, where foreigners controlled a slave system of minimal economic importance, travelers felt free to advocate abolition. But in the West Indies, where slavery was closely tied to British people and the British economy, travelers were eager to show that slavery was necessary and beneficial. To do otherwise would contradict national pride and allegiance, as well as self-interest. In both regions travel writers let issues of identity and economy, not just morality, influence their depictions of slavery.

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