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CHAPTER 4 Brown chap. 4

British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution

Of the obstacles that would face those first Britons who hoped to bring the injustice of slavery or the slave trade forward for public debate, few presented greater difficulties than the customary association of slavery with imperial wealth and power. To the many with an investment in the colonial economy or concerned with Britain's standing among European rivals, an empire without slavery was simply unthinkable. As trade theorist Malachy Postlethwayt asserted in 1746, "The *Negroe-Trade* and the natural Consequences resulting from it, may be justly esteemed an inexhaustible Fund of Wealth and Naval Power to this Nation."[1] Even those moved to denounce slavery in print often conceded that colonial slavery made Atlantic commerce and overseas settlement possible. When British chroniclers of American colonization, for example, reflected during the 1770s on the failed experiment to prohibit slavery in the infant colony of Georgia several decades earlier, they emphasized the folly of attempting to produce export crops without slaves. However humane the motives, William Russell maintained, banning slavery in the fledgling colony was "a species of oppression." John Huddleston Wynne found slaveholding distasteful, thought it corrupted the morals of British settlers, and feared it would end in bloody insurrections. Yet, even with his misgivings, Wynne could not bring himself to advocate slave trade or slavery abolition. The "very short experience" in Georgia showed a ban on slavery to be "an impractical measure." "The want of hands to cultivate the southern plantations" made slavery "a necessity," wrote Wynne. Further, he noted, echoing an opinion held even by many of slavery's professed opponents, "Africans,

1. Malachy Postlethwayt cited in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford, 1988), 150; for further discussion on this point, see 151–154. Note also in this context the verdict rendered by Seymour Drescher: "The essential rationale for British-sponsored slavery, from first to last, was its apparent contribution to the collective wealth and power of the empire." Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London, 1987), 20.

or their descendants, are better able to support severe labour in hot countries than any of European blood."[2]

For Granville Sharp and the other early proponents of antislavery initiatives, the challenge lay not only in the power of vested interests but also in the limited ways that those troubled by slavery could imagine the future development of the American colonies. The fruits of long-standing practice and the imperatives of international competition made a strong case for resisting radical change. Moreover, the experience of American colonization indicated few alternatives to slave labor. As best as anyone in Britain could judge, an Atlantic empire required human bondage, a belief that not only weakened the impact of antislavery argument but also inhibited the possibility of organizing concerted action for change. For how does one rally support for a goal—an empire without slaves—that few could conceptualize or articulate, that almost no one in the British Isles had thought viable, and that, as it must have seemed to even the most hopeful, resided in the realm of fantasy?

Several of the first antislavery propagandists in England simply dismissed pragmatic questions and rejected slavery on principle. "It is impossible," John Wesley wrote in 1774, "that it should ever be necessary, for any reasonable creature to violate all the laws of Justice, Mercy, and Truth." If empire required slavery, Wesley suggested, then empire ought to be renounced. This kind of moral absolutism, however laudable in principle, could win little sympathy from those responsible for colonial governance and scarcely more from a public invested in the fruits and majesty of empire. Wesley himself seems to have understood the futility of his position. "Should we address ourselves to the Public at large?" he asked rhetorically. "What effect can this have? It may inflame the world against the guilty, but is not likely to remove the guilt. Should we appeal to the *English* nation in general? This is also striking wide. . . . As little would it

2. William Russell, *The History of America, from Its Discovery by Columbus to the Conclusion of the Late War; with an Appendix, Containing an Account of the Rise and Progress of the Present Unhappy Contest between Great Britain and Her Colonies,* 2 vols. (London, 1778), II, 305; [John Huddleston] Wynne, *A General History of the British Empire in America: Containing, an Historical, Political, and Commercial View of the English Settlements; Including All the Countries in North-America, and the West-Indies, Ceded by the Peace of Paris,* 2 vols. (London, 1770), II, 540, 541, 545.

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3. John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery,* 3d
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XXVI, no. 3 (1998), 1–5.

4. See generally Davis, *The Problem of*
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nial Slavery, 1776–1848 (London, 1988), 35
British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery

5. Note also the comments by David
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Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution,

in all probability avail, to apply to the Parliament. So many things, which *seem* of greater importance lie before them that they are not likely to attend to this." Wesley resigned himself to espousing the unpromising strategy British Quakers also settled on during the late 1760s and early 1770s: a direct appeal to merchants, planters, and captains of slave ships to change their ways.[3]

An antislavery movement did not have to happen in Britain. There had never been one before. But if antislavery argument was to have effect, moralists would have to do more than simply declare that slavery was wrong. Many Britons could accept the moral argument, as we now know.[4] The real burden lay in rethinking the relationship between coerced labor and empire, disassociating the institution of slavery from prevailing assumptions about the purposes of overseas colonies, and developing practical, attainable, compelling alternatives. What would an alternative to colonial slavery entail? To pose the question hints at the magnitude of the task.[5] Reformers would not only have to devise new schemes for the recruitment, organization, and management of labor. They also would have to uproot

3. John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery,* 3d ed. (London, 1774), 19, 23, 24–27; Minutes of the Meeting for Sufferings, XXXII (May 29, 1767, Aug. 31, Nov. 2, 1770, Jan. 11, 1771), 69, 408, 424, 444, Library of the Society of Friends, London. More than a dozen years earlier, in a seminal passage from his *System of the Principles of the Laws of Scotland,* Scottish jurist George Wallace had also recommended surrendering empire if empire required exploitation of slave labor. See David Brion Davis, "New Sidelights on Early Antislavery Radicalism," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 589. On the public embrace of empire, see Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995); Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War, and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past and Present,* no. 150 (February 1996), 111–114; and H. V. Bowen, "British Conceptions of Global Empire, 1756–1783," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* XXVI, no. 3 (1998), 1–5.

4. See generally Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* pts. 2 and 3; Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery,* 12–24; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), 35–66; and Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York, 1992), chaps. 1–5.

5. Note also the comments by David Brion Davis on the challenges involved in abolishing slavery in those regions where slavery was of limited import: Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 86–92.

customs fundamental to enterprise throughout the British Atlantic. A program to end slavery, for example, either would have to lure slaveholders into surrendering their slaves voluntarily or would have to divest slaveholders of their human chattel through force. The second approach necessarily would require from the state an unprecedented invasion of customary, nearly sacred rights in property and therefore would present daunting, if not insurmountable, constitutional, political, and logistical hurdles. Indeed, any plan for emancipation presented the specter of enhanced imperial authority, if not a formal shift of power from the colonial assemblies to Parliament. Even a scenario involving a gradual voluntary end to slavery would demand institutions empowered to mediate between former slaves and former slaveholders. How else, in the absence of mass revolt by the enslaved, could emancipation be secured and enforced throughout the colonies?

Furthermore, in addition to threatening to dispossess colonists of their property and aggrandize the imperial state, emancipation promised revolutionary social change. Slavery established status in British America as well as a scheme for labor. If the enslaved would no longer be slaves, who exactly, in civic terms, would they be? Abolishing slavery would seem to present one of two prospects: an incorporation, in some form, of liberated slaves into colonial society or, alternatively, relocation of hundreds of thousands of freed slaves to the frontiers of the British Empire or outside the realm. A genuine challenge to slavery thus entailed far more than a challenge to slave labor. It necessitated, as well, an engagement with fundamental questions regarding property, imperial governance, and social organization. At bottom, those who would abolish slavery required an alternative concept of empire.

This chapter directs attention to the first British proposals to end colonial slavery, delineates their character, accounts for their timing, and explains their failure to win public attention and political influence, with the aim of illuminating aspects of the relation between antislavery opinion and evolving definitions of imperial mission between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. The challenge of ruling the diverse populations brought within the empire in the 1760s inspired among policy makers a paternalistic ethos centered on pacifying His Majesty's new subjects and restraining the ambitions of British settlers. The broader impulse to extend royal protection to outsiders encouraged several British writers, and particularly writers concerned with imp
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ticularly writers concerned with imperial administration, to conceive of slaves as British subjects as well as the property of slaveholders. And this willingness, among a select few, to think of slaves as subjects of George III assisted the formulation of the first tentative emancipation schemes, which are situated and explained here within the context of the wide-ranging, public discussion of imperial policy that took place during the Revolutionary War. Because envisioning the British American provinces without slavery, more generally, required novel ways of thinking about empire, substantive debate about colonial governance had the potential to facilitate unconventional thoughts about the future of slavery and the slave trade in the British Atlantic. The first emancipation schemes served and reflected the broader-based aim to solidify and refurbish faltering British control in North America. In important ways, slavery reform proposals were entwined with attempts to bolster metropolitan authority. This nascent ideal of imperial stewardship, premised on a centralization of power and a policing of social relations in overseas possessions, offered a framework for an antislavery campaign. But the vision was vulnerable to the scope and novelty of its ambitions in the 1770s and, in the event, undone and discouraged by the unfavorable results of the American war for independence.

"These papers will contain a proposal for the extension of the future power and commerce of Great Britain." This unlikely introduction opened an anonymously published essay printed in 1772 with the title *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* the first British publication to offer a concrete, if quixotic, emancipation scheme. The author suggested that the state purchase each year several dozen African boys and girls from the slaving forts along the eastern Atlantic coast, instruct and train the children in England, and settle them at the age of sixteen as colonists in the Pensacola district in the new British province of West Florida. The resulting colony of free Africans, the author argued, would encourage manumissions by giving British settlers a place to send liberated slaves while inducing "a spirit of industry and achievement" among the enslaved by opening the prospect for freedom. Furthermore, the West Florida settlement would present, for southern climes, a competing model of labor and social relations. Customary practices are hard to change in established colonies, the author conceded. By contrast, new and (from a British perspective) underpopulated provinces offered unusual opportuni- [1]

ties for experimentation, perhaps "a nursery of some good intentions which may hereafter be extended with facility into the other colonies, or into Great Britain itself." The Pensacola colonists would demonstrate that free laborers could cultivate export crops and that Africans would produce them even if not held as slaves. Eventually, by necessity, the older colonies would abandon slavery to compete with their more successful southern neighbor. Over time, in Pensacola, "the settlers will increase, they will cultivate, they will trade, they will overflow; they will become labourers and artizans in the neighbouring provinces; they will, being freemen, be more industrious, more skillful, and, upon the whole, work cheaper than slaves . . . and slavery will thereupon necessarily cease." This, then, was an imaginative, if ingenuous plan to "check the progress of slavery" by exposing its disadvantages, by displaying the merits of free labor and the capacities of Africans, and by allowing "time and management," not a sudden shift in policy, to effect change. Through prudent, incremental steps, cooperation between blacks and whites in the Americas would replace the enmity bred by racial slavery.[6]

If the proposal seemed whimsical, it originated in a considered, knowledgeable inquiry into American governance. The author, Maurice Morgann, served William Fitzmaurice Petty (second earl of Shelburne) as private secretary and, in this capacity, sometime adviser on colonial administration.[7] Unlike Granville Sharp or John Wesley, Maurice Morgann participated actively in the formulation of imperial policy. Morgann not only embraced empire. He spent much of his career trying to make the empire work. During Shelburne's tenure as president of the Board of Trade in the spring and summer of 1763, Morgann assisted his patron in drafting measures for the organization and management of American territories ac-

6. [Maurice Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies* (London, 1772), 4, 7, 13, 15, 25.

7. Morgann perhaps is best known for his discerning *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (London, 1777). Daniel A. Fineman identifies Morgann as the author of *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* but without supporting documentation. See Fineman, ed., *Maurice Morgann: Shakespearean Criticism* (Oxford, 1972), 6–7. In his private correspondence, Granville Sharp makes several references to the proposal by "the ingenious Mr. Morgan." See, for example, Granville Sharp to earl of Macclesfield, Feb. 20, 1773, and Sharp to Col. James, Apr. 8, 1773, both in Granville Sharp MS Letterbook, fols. 176, 180, York Minister Library (YML).

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quired at the Peace of Paris. In July 1766, when Shelburne joined the Chatham administration as secretary of state for the Southern Department, Morgann received the post of undersecretary responsible for American affairs. Seventeen months later, in December 1767, Shelburne designated Morgann to serve as the cabinet emissary to Quebec, where, three years after conquest, the rights of His Majesty's French Catholic subjects and the arrangements for government and revenue remained unresolved and, in both Quebec and Britain, bitterly contested. Morgann returned from Canada in January 1770 to find the Chatham ministry dissolved, his patron out of favor, and his influence accordingly curtailed. Shelburne's dozen years in opposition left Morgann without a role in imperial administration during the Revolutionary War. And American independence robbed Morgann of the three-hundred-pound sinecure he enjoyed as absentee secretary for the province of New Jersey. But when Shelburne returned to office briefly as secretary of state for the Home Department in 1782, he tapped Morgann to serve in New York as executive secretary to Sir Guy Carleton at British army headquarters, where Morgann reluctantly administered the retreat of British forces from the thirteen former colonies.[8]

8. Morgann's career in imperial governance is described in Fineman, ed., *Maurice Morgann,* 4–9. A substantial collection of his policy memoranda is preserved in the Shelburne Papers at the William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich. From published sources, further detail on his work for Shelburne may be gleaned from R. A. Humphreys, "Lord Shelburne and the Proclamation of 1763," *English Historical Review,* XLIX (1934), 245–250; Humphreys, "Lord Shelburne and British Colonial Policy, 1766–1768," *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, L (1935), 259n; Franklin B. Wickwire, *British Subministers and Colonial America, 1763–1783* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), 93–94, 96–97n; Michael G. Kammen, *A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Politics, and the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), 279–280; and Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760–1775* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1961), 151–152, 157–158. Morgann's mission to Quebec is best followed in two collections of reprinted documents: Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Documents relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759–1791,* I (Ottawa, 1907), 199–201, and W. P. M. Kennedy and Gustave Lanctot, eds., *Reports on the Laws of Quebec, 1767–1770* (Ottawa, 1931). The Quebec colony's attorney general, Francis Maseres, was unimpressed by Morgann's grasp of the constitutional questions at issue, writing privately, "He is a well-bred agreeable man but not a lawyer; and he has a pompous way of talking that seems borrowed from the house of commons cant about the constitution etc., without having

In these positions, Morgann wrote expansively on imperial policy, in each instance with the overarching aim to harness the colonies to metropolitan authority. "The Colonists," he asserted in 1763, "are merely Factors for the Purposes of the Trade." The same year he suggested, among other draconian measures, revoking the charters held by the several American provinces. In one scholar's judgment, Morgann's policy recommendations in the months after the Seven Years' War were "probably harsher than the spirit of any British legislation toward America before the passage of the Boston Port Bill."[9] This rigid authoritarianism softened after the Stamp Act crisis, by which time both Shelburne and Morgann had concluded that coercive policies would harm trade and incite rebellion. Still, although favoring conciliatory measures thereafter, Morgann never ceased to regard America as "mere colonies planted in subservience to the Interest of Great Britain and calculated to increase its commerce its Wealth and its power." British might derived from its western empire, the erstwhile subminister believed. Throughout the American war, even after the defeat of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, he held out hope for reconciliation and an imperial union. In 1786, three years after peace with the independent United States, Morgann still clung to the dream of restoring British sovereignty in North America, confident, recorded loyalist diarist William Smith, that no government "the Offspring of Theoretic premeditation" could long survive.[10]

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precise Ideas of what he would say." Maseres to Fowler Walker, Aug. 31, 1768, in W. Stewart Wallace, ed., *The Maseres Letters, 1766–1768* (Toronto, 1919), 119. Morgann was at Carleton's side at Tappan in May 1783 when the British commander informed George Washington that slaves liberated by British forces would not be returned to their masters. Paul R. Reynolds, *Guy Carleton: A Biography* (New York, 1980), 144–146. The variety and extent of Morgann's work in New York may be followed in the papers of British Army Headquarters, which Morgann held in private possession until 1789. See volumes II through IV of Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain . . .*, 5 vols. (London, 1904–1909).

9. "On American Commerce and Government Especially in the Newly Acquired Territories," Shelburne Papers, LXXXV, fols. 26, 29; Wickwire, *British Subministers and Colonial America*, 94–95.

10. Fineman, *Maurice Morgann*, 4–6; Humphreys, "Lord Shelburne and British Colonial Policy," *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, L (1935), 268–269; "On the Right and Expediency of Taxing America" [c. 1765], Shelburne Papers, LXVVV, fol. 73; L. F. S. Upton, ed., *The*

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11. [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition*

12. The manuscript copy of Morgann reference to the scheme appears in his (1763): "It may appear whimsical to pr about 8 or 10 years old should be annua and then sent over to Florida and Louisia perhaps pursue, in respect to the animal his Estate. If even one of the Islands wa believe future ages would bless so genero as the Parent of Freedom." On early sch *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the P* (New York, 1986), 432–433. For British see Board of Trade secretary Thomas Cessions in Africa and America at the Shelburne and the Proclamation of 1763

Several writers had proposed amelioration of slavery, and many had denounced the institution on principle, but before Morgann wrote in 1772, no one in England had devised a scheme for gradual emancipation. His *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies* bespoke a sharp contempt for racial bigotry, animated, in this instance, by the case of *Somerset v. Steuart,* which, as it did for several others, moved Morgann to publish his opinions on slavery and race. However, the Florida scheme took shape first as a policy memorandum, as a privately distributed document, not as antislavery propaganda. It surfaced from Morgann's immersion in the minutiae of American governance, not from the public debates surrounding the Somerset case. Although the plan was published in 1772, Morgann hatched the idea of colonizing free Africans in Pensacola nine years earlier, "soon after the conclusion of the late Peace," he explained in the preface.[11] Initially, he had appended the plan to a manuscript titled "On American Commerce and Government Especially in the Newly Acquired Territories," one of several documents drafted for Shelburne late in the spring of 1763, months before the Board of Trade advertised the sale of Florida land grants, months before Georgia agent William Knox circulated his influential "Hints respecting the Settlement of Florida," indeed, more than a year before ministers had a decent map of the Pensacola district.[12] Morgann's

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Diary and Selected Papers of Chief Justice William Smith, 1784–1793, II, *The Diary, October 6, 1785, to May 18, 1787* (Toronto, 1965), 105.

11. [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* 1.

12. The manuscript copy of Morgann's plan does not survive, but an unambiguous reference to the scheme appears in his "On American Commerce and Government" (1763): "It may appear whimsical to propose that a certain Number of boys and girls about 8 or 10 years old should be annually brought from affrica, educated here 'till 15; and then sent over to Florida and Louisiana as Settlers: Yet an enterprising farmer would perhaps pursue, in respect to the animal creation, some plan of this nature for improving his Estate. If even one of the Islands was to be so settled, by way of Experiment only, I believe future ages would bless so generous a policy, and Brittain be for ever remembered as the Parent of Freedom." On early schemes for Florida settlement, see Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), 432–433. For British want of information on the West Florida district, see Board of Trade secretary Thomas Pownall's "Sketch of a Report concerning the Cessions in Africa and America at the Peace of 1763," printed in Humphreys, "Lord Shelburne and the Proclamation of 1763," *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XLIX (1934), 262.

manuscript addressed problems of administration, revenue, and defense. A settlement for freed Africans in the heart of the British Empire, he added, would further long-standing objectives: expanding trade, fortifying British North America's southern border, settling barren territories without the loss to England of productive laborers, enlarging the pool of consumers for British products, and developing a channel through which to funnel trade with the Spanish colonies. Africans could serve the empire better, he hypothesized, if not held as slaves.

Morgann offered, instead, a novel concept of community within the British Empire. Racial difference resulted from environment, he explained, and as a consequence had utility. Morgann accepted that Europeans perished in tropical climates and that in those regions, therefore, only Africans and their descendants could cultivate the land. But to him, these "facts" recommended the incorporation of Africans into civil society, not enslavement and social death. If the frontier imposed by climate marked the perimeter of British power, it also indicated where Africans could best serve as agents of British expansion. Maurice Morgann may have known of the British use of (enslaved) black manpower in military expeditions against Cartagena (1741), Martinique (1759), Guadeloupe (1759), and Havana (1762), but his proposal shared rather more with the liberationist imperialism first promoted in the late sixteenth century by the younger Richard Hakluyt. African allies and auxiliaries, if encouraged to settle the underdeveloped territories in the Floridas and the Caribbean, Morgann insisted, could themselves produce staple crops for European markets and conduct trade, on behalf of the British Empire, with Spanish America. Similarly, if nurtured and adequately supported, alliances with sovereigns along the coast of Africa could help extend commerce "through the very heart" of the continent, where Britons lacked the capacity and constitution to settle.[13]

Abolition of slavery, then, rather than compromising empire, was the proper measure for a "free and generous government" inclined to "views of empire and domination" that were "worthy of ambition." Unleashed from the disgrace of slavery and no longer "restrained by climate," the British Empire would stand on "the sure foundations of equality and justice." Morgann envisaged an absorption of the "black subjects of Britain" into the

13. [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* 27.

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14. Ibid., 25, 26, 33. On the British use of s
century military expeditions, see Peter Voelz, *S*
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proposal of 1579 to colonize the Straits of Ma
English convicts, see Edmund S. Morgan, *Am*
Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York, 1975),

15. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Natio*
119–120. See also Eric Richards, "Scotland a
Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *St*
gins of the First British Empire (Chapel Hill,
Scotland's Empire and the Shaping of the A
2003), 204–213.

16. [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Sla*

imperial corpus. In due time, Morgann assured, the former slaves would "talk the same language, read the same books, profess the same religion, and be fashioned by the same laws." Through marriages with Europeans in the new settlements, variations in skin color would "wear away" by steady, imperceptible "degrees." "The whites will inhabit the northern colonies," and "to the south, the complexions will blacken by regular gradation." Then, with "one tongue," a "united people" would "commemorate the auspicious aera of universal freedom" while "the sable arm" of British authority would reach "through every region of the Torrid Zone," "shake the power of Spain to its foundations," and elevate Great Britain "to the seat of unenvied and unlimited dominion."[14]

After the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, to discourage further uprisings in Scotland Parliament enacted legislation that would transform "savage" Highlanders into assimilated, productive, loyal Britons.[15] With a similar end in view, Morgann's plan gradually would acculturate Africans, award them a stake in the empire, and thereby discourage insurrections and the threat of what he predicted to be "a general" and "merited carnage." And just as Scottish soldiers helped make possible the conquests of the Seven Years' War, blacks would help secure British supremacy in the Americas. Civilize, liberate, incorporate, and unite. This was Morgann's formula for achieving uncontested rule in the Americas, ending slavery, and in the process "restoring the integrity of the British government, and vindicating the credit and honour of our common nature."[16] In viewing Africans as potential allies rather than internal enemies, as subjects of the crown rather

14. Ibid., 25, 26, 33. On the British use of slaves and free blacks in mid-eighteenth-century military expeditions, see Peter Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York, 1993), 77–81. For reference to Hakluyt's proposal of 1579 to colonize the Straits of Magellan with escaped Spanish slaves and English convicts, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 16–17.

15. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 119–120. See also Eric Richards, "Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire," in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 106–112, and T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire and the Shaping of the Americas, 1600–1815* (Washington, D.C., 2003), 204–213.

16. [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies*, 32.

than the property of slaveholders, Morgann pictured an empire defined by neither ethnicity nor religion—in fact, on nothing more than allegiance.

Maurice Morgann wrote creatively about slavery because, in part, as a matter of employment, he ruminated routinely on imperial policy. And his decision to describe enslaved Africans as imperial subjects reflected a characteristic and intensifying concern among British administrators to enhance the presence and extend the influence of the crown in the American territories. The cessions of the 1760s brought an unprecedented number and variety of peoples within British dominions. Never had England or Britain seized more land at once. "In the multitude of people is the king's honour," the Book of Proverbs taught. Assessed in more utilitarian or mercantilist terms, the crown had acquired an almost countless number of new cultivators, consumers, and dependents. By contemporary estimates, in 1763, the twenty-five-year-old George III could now claim authority over an additional seventy-five thousand French Canadians, approximately thirty thousand planters, slaves, and Caribs in the Ceded Islands, perhaps one hundred thousand Native Americans, a smattering of Spanish colonists in the Floridas, and, it was believed, anywhere between ten and twenty million people in Bengal.[17] In theory, by conquest or capitulation, each had become subjects of the crown, as the propagandists of the empire repeatedly averred. Foreigners settling in British dominions "are to be considered in the same light of obedience as natural born subjects," asserted scribe and agriculturist Arthur Young. "The inhabitants [of India]," wrote William Knox, "are British subjects, tho' governed by their own laws, or laws

17. Contemporary estimates of population presented in P. J. Marshall, "Empire and Opportunity in Britain, 1763–1783," Royal Historical Society, *Transactions,* 6th Ser., V (1995), 112, and, for the Ceded Islands, Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution,* IX, *The Triumphant Empire: New Responsibilities within the Enlarged Empire, 1763–1766* (New York, 1956), 238, 240, 255–256. On mid-eighteenth-century views of the benefits of populousness, see especially Frederick G. Whelan, "Population and Ideology in the Enlightenment," *History of Political Thought,* XII (1991), 34–72. Also helpful are Edgar S. Furniss, *The Position of the Laborer in a System of Nationalism: A Study in the Labor Theories of the Later English Mercantilists* (Boston, 1920); Klaus E. Knorr, *British Colonial Theories, 1570–1850* (Toronto, 1944), 68–81; James Bonar, *Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young* (New York, 1966); and Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen: The Controversy over Immigration and Population, 1660–1760* (Cranbury, N.J., 1995).

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18. [Arthur Young], *Political Essays concerning*
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III. Agriculture, IV. Manufactures, V. The Colonies
36; [William Knox], *The Present State of the Na*
Trade, Finances, etc. etc. Addressed to the King an
(London, 1768), 85; John Campbell, *A Political*
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framed by the East India Company." In the aftermath of British incursion on Carib lands in Saint Vincent, John Campbell insisted that the natives were still "intitled to Justice and Humanity, more especially when considered as Subjects of the Crown of Great Britain." To Campbell, the point was important enough to repeat: the Caribs must be "treated with Justice and Lenity, to which as Men, and Subjects of the Crown of Great Britain, they are surely entitled."[18]

In the eighteenth century, the meaning of subjectship retained the quasi-medieval connotations of a personal bond between individual and lord. Subjectship could be natural or acquired, that is, a consequence of birth within the sovereign's domain or of absorption through naturalization or conquest. In either case, subjectship was understood as natural, perpetual and immutable, a civic analogue of the relation between parent and child. The relationship entailed obligations: the monarch owed the subject pro-

18. [Arthur Young], *Political Essays concerning the Present State of the British Empire; Particularly respecting: I. Natural Advantages and Disadvantages, II. Constitution, III. Agriculture, IV. Manufactures, V. The Colonies, and VI. Commerce* (London, 1772), 36; [William Knox], *The Present State of the Nation: Particularly with respect to Its Trade, Finances, etc. etc. Addressed to the King and Both Houses of Parliament,* 3d ed. (London, 1768), 85; John Campbell, *A Political Survey of Britain: Being a Series of Reflections on the Situation, Lands, Inhabitants, Revenues, Colonies, and Commerce of This Island; Intended to Shew That We Have Not Yet Approached Near the Summit of Improvement, but That It Will Afford Employment to Many Generations before They Push to Their Utmost Extent the Natural Advantages of Great Britain; in Two Volumes* (London, 1774), II, 682n, 684n. Gregory Evans Dowd has argued that British officials found it difficult to think of Native Americans, and other non-Europeans, as subjects of the crown. Dowd, *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore, 2002), 174–212. Most of his evidence, though, derives from the records produced by imperial officials residing in the colonies. The view from London seems to have been more varied, since several writers and state officers do seem to have used the language of subjectship to describe the status of the various nations and peoples. These were ideological claims to possession far more than descriptions of the character of British relations with others in this period. The concept of subjectship, moreover, unlike citizenship, does not imply equality. In any case, the point here is that expanded definitions of subjectship were available and current among British observers in the early 1760s, when Maurice Morgann conceived his scheme, although they may not have been typical.

tection, while the subject owed allegiance. The relationship also conveyed membership: although subjects could and did hold different ranks, in theory, each could rightfully claim certain privileges, not the least of which was the right to hold real property and the right to equal consideration under the law.[19] In this respect, the increasingly multiethnic, polyglot empire presented difficult if not unfamiliar questions, specifically, the extent to which the new subjects would affirm their subordination by avowing allegiance to the crown and the extent to which those who pledged their allegiance should enjoy the same rights as natural-born subjects.

British officials responsible for imperial governance looked to encourage trade and generate further revenue for a depleted treasury after the Seven Years' War. At the same time, they aimed to keep British colonists from antagonizing the established residents in the acquired territories. In several instances, in the laws and policies authorized for Quebec, in the investigations into the actions by East India Company officials in Bengal, and in the regulation of trade and settlement in the North American hinterland, ministers attempted to solidify authority over foreign peoples in a way that thwarted the ambitions of speculators fixed to exploit ceded lands.[20] The

19. James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 3–8, 51; P. J. Marshall, "Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century, IV: The Turning Outwards of Britain," Royal Hist. Soc., *Trans.*, 6th Ser., XI (2001), 3–4.

20. This paragraph and the next build on and extend several of P. J. Marshall's articles: "Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XV, no. 2 (1987), 105–122; "A Nation Defined by Empire, 1755–1776," in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London, 1995); "Parliament and Property Rights in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire," in John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London, 1995), 530–544; and "Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century," Royal Hist. Soc., *Trans.*, 6th Ser., XI (2001), 5–15. See also H. V. Bowen, *Elites, Enterprise, and the Making of the British Overseas Empire, 1688–1775* (London, 1996), 173–193; Eric Jarvis, "His Majesty's Papist Subjects: Roman Catholic Political Rights in British West Florida," *Gulf South Historical Review,* XVI (2000), 6–19; and J. Russell Snapp, "An Enlightened Empire: Scottish and Irish Imperial Reformers in the Age of the American Revolution," *Albion,* XXXIII (2001), 388–403. The problem of managing foreign peoples residing within British dominions, it must be emphasized, predated the Seven Years' War. The ethos of cosmopolitan authoritarianism, with its

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Model for the Early Modern British Empire," *Jo*
XXV, no. 1 (1997), 1–36.

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The Imperial Challenge: Quebec and Britain
(Montreal, 1990), and David Milobar, "Quebe
the Atlantic Empire: 1774–1775," *Parliamentary*
P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead:*
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ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empir*
1998), 530–551; and Marshall, "Transactions of
Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteen
Hist. Soc., *Trans.*, 6th Ser., X (2000), 1–16.
Whitehall and the Wilderness; Peter Marshall,
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White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires,*
1650–1815 (Cambridge, 1991), 269–365; J. Rus
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Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Oh
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Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognized Native American possession of the lands west of the Appalachians and prohibited British settlement there. The Quebec Act dashed the hopes of newly arrived British merchants in the colony who wished to codify a Protestant ascendancy and establish uncontested rule for themselves. The Privy Council obliged British settlers in Grenada to admit French Catholic planters to the council, assembly, and judicature. In part, such measures reflected the ideal of paternalism fundamental to the monarchical ethos. To the new subjects, the stepchildren in the imperial family, the king owed and thereby pledged to provide protection. However, honoring the property of conquered peoples and tolerating institutions and practices alien to British law also represented a politic accommodation to circumstance. In some regions, imposing the British

characteristic emphasis on state supervision of overseas enterprise, was extended rather than originated in the 1760s. Elizabeth Mancke, "Another British America: A Canadian Model for the Early Modern British Empire," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XXV, no. 1 (1997), 1–36.

From the sizable historiography on the territories Britain acquired in the Seven Years' War, the following bear particularly on the present discussion. Quebec: Philip Lawson, *The Imperial Challenge: Quebec and Britain in the Age of the American Revolution* (Montreal, 1990), and David Milobar, "Quebec Reform, the British Constitution, and the Atlantic Empire: 1774–1775," *Parliamentary History,* XIV, pt. 1 (1995), 65–88. India: P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740–1828* (Cambridge, 1991); Bowen, "British India, 1765–1813: The Metropolitan Context," in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* II, *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 530–551; and Marshall, "Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century, III: Britain and India," Royal Hist. Soc., *Trans.*, 6th Ser., X (2000), 1–16. The North American hinterland: Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness;* Peter Marshall, "Colonial Protest and Imperial Retrenchment: Indian Policy, 1764–1768," *Journal of American Studies,* V (1971), 1–17; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991), 269–365; J. Russell Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge, La., 1996); Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (Cambridge, 1997), 161–175; and Dowd, *War under Heaven,* 213–224. Grenada: Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire,* 268–272, and Andrew Jackson O'Shaugnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 124–126. For an interregional perspective, see Robin F. A. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759–1775* (Gainesville, Fla., 2000).

constitution, as a practical matter, was out of the question; this was certainly the case in Bengal and nearly so in Quebec. Elsewhere, the effort and expense required to support effective administration could be elusive, as Whitehall would learn between 1764 and 1768, when a shifting set of administrations half-heartedly attempted imperial regulation of the trans-Appalachian west.

Even more important, permitting British colonists to seize the property and land of existing residents risked inciting armed conflict, as officials in Britain learned the hard way during and after the Seven Years' War. Recurring violence threatened both to invite the interference of European rivals, especially in the Caribbean, and to generate further costs to maintain peace. It made more sense to assuage and incorporate potential enemies living within British dominions. When advisers favoring toleration of Catholicism and a restoration of French civil law argued on behalf of the Quebec Act, for example, they stressed that securing the loyalty of the Canadian majority would both aid the defense of the western frontier and decrease the threat of a French *revanche*. There was nothing new about attempts to pacify and acculturate American Indians. But after 1763, after Pontiac's War, an accommodationist strategy served to answer as well the imperatives resulting from territorial expansion. When John Stuart, His Majesty's superintendent for the southern district, proposed to the Board of Trade in 1764 strict imperial regulation of colonists who traded with Indians, a bureaucracy to ensure enforcement of the new laws, and, in the words of historian J. Russell Snapp, "a color-blind judicial system," he hoped to prevent settlers from fomenting a backcountry war.[21] With Native Ameri-

21. Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier,* 63. In 1769, Alexander Cluny advocated alliances with Indians in West Florida to achieve ends with which Maurice Morgann would have concurred. First, "they would take that labor upon them, which from the difference of climate we are unequal to." Second, voluntary labor would have the salutary effect of liberating Americans from the "Necessity and Danger of importing the untractable Negroes of *Africa,* whose numbers hourly threaten the Safety of our Colonies, as their Expence is an heavy burthen upon their Trade." Third, cultural assimilation and social harmony would follow; the natives "would soon learn our Manners, and incorporating themselves with us, become a part of our own people." [Alexander Cluny], *The American Traveller; or, Observations on the Present State, Culture, and Commerce of the British Colonies in America, and the Further Improvements of Which They Are Capable; with an Account of the Exports, Imports, and*

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Written Originally to the Right Honourable
Experienced Trader (London, 1769), 112.

22. This assessment of the Carib War dr
260–266; Bernard Marshall, "The Black Cari
into the Windward Side of St. Vincent, 176
(December 1973), 4–19; Michael Craton, *Test*
British West Indies (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), 14
Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797
"Planters, Imperial Policy, and the Black C
Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbea
Fabel, *Colonial Challenges,* 156–186, 200–20
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1784 (Montreal, 1992), 62–94, and Geoffrey
Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia (Phi

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cans, with Canadians, with French planters in the West Indies, with the peoples of Bengal, with Highlanders, and perhaps, too, with Africans as Maurice Morgann suggested, accommodation, absorption, and metropolitan oversight and regulation seemed the best way to further trade, decrease expenditures, and preserve peace.

To be sure, the British used force, too. The crown honored the property rights only of those who took oaths of allegiance. Those who rejected subjectship faced the prospect of relocation or extermination, as many Native Americans came to learn. When the Caribs of Saint Vincent insisted in 1772 on independence from British authority and prevented settlement of their lands, ministers sent two regiments from North America to compel their submission. But, in contrast to the removal of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755, a vocal but significant minority in Parliament and out-of-doors denounced expropriating the property of the established inhabitants. In 1755, clearing Acadia of "subversives" could be framed as a necessary bulwark against French and Indian aggression in North America. Extirpating the Caribs, by contrast, looked more like an expensive and dishonorable gift to rapacious land-grabbers.[22] The new governor appointed in 1773, Valentine Morris, thought more might be gained from an alliance with the Caribs, and their employment as auxiliaries in colonial forces, than

*Returns of Each Colony Respectively, —— and of the Numbers of British Ships and Seamen, Merchants, Traders, and Manufacturers Employed by All Collectively: Together with the Amount of Revenue Arising to Great-Britain Therefrom; in a Series of Letters, Written Originally to the Right Honourable the Earl of ********* by an Old and Experienced Trader* (London, 1769), 112.

22. This assessment of the Carib War draws on Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire,* 260–266; Bernard Marshall, "The Black Caribs: Native Resistance to British Penetration into the Windward Side of St. Vincent, 1763–1773," *Caribbean Quarterly,* XIX, no. 4 (December 1973), 4–19; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), 145–153; Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London, 1986), 242–249; Michael Craton, "Planters, Imperial Policy, and the Black Caribs of St. Vincents," in Craton, *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1997), 117–132; and Fabel, *Colonial Challenges,* 156–186, 200–204. For a considered overview of the expulsion of the Acadians, see Naomi E. S. Griffiths, *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686–1784* (Montreal, 1992), 62–94, and Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia* (Philadelphia, 2001), 140–157.

from antagonizing them through war. On balance, after the Seven Years' War, intermittent protests notwithstanding, Whitehall did not permit British entrepreneurs to enjoy free rein in the new territories. Ministers preferred managed subjugation to naked exploitation, if only to secure the submission of His Majesty's new subjects.

These developments, the addition of new peoples to the empire and the disposition to conceive the relation in terms of allegiance and protection, help make sense of otherwise incongruous moments when writers treating imperial affairs, such as Maurice Morgann, cast slaves as subjects of George III. Absentee slaveholder William Knox presents the most unlikely case. Former provost-marshal of Georgia, briefly London agent for Georgia and East Florida, substantial plantation owner, sometime adviser to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, undersecretary of state in the American department from 1770 to 1782 (the same office previously held by Maurice Morgann), Knox emerged during the first years of the British antislavery movement of the late 1780s and early 1790s as a stalwart defender of the slave trade.[23] Yet, if Knox thought slavery necessary to empire, he could not approve, in 1768, cruel treatment of "so vast a multitude of his [majesty's] own subjects." In his view, British colonists' property right in slaves was local, not absolute, because the colonial assemblies granting the right themselves were subordinate to the "supreme magistrate" of king-in-council. Slaveholders may have a legal claim to a slave's service, but, as British subjects, as with apprentices in England, slaves had a claim to "an impartial dispensation of the laws." In this argument, Knox was as interested in asserting the principle of imperial sovereignty, specifically the authority of Parliament to legislate for the colonies, as ensuring humane treatment of the enslaved. He recommended similar programs of intervention to supervise relations with Indians in North America and Catholics in Ireland and Quebec. What matters here is the off-handed, casual way with which Knox identified slaves as subjects and, in this designation, allowed a right to

23. Leland J. Bellot, *William Knox: The Life and Thought of an Eighteenth-Century Imperialist* (Austin, Tex., 1977). For Knox's support of the slave trade, see Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections,* VI, *The Manuscripts of Miss M. Eyre Matcham; Captain H. V. Knox; Cornwallis Wykeham-Martin, Esq., etc.* (Dublin, 1909), 202, 203, 222, 291–292, and [Knox], *A Letter from W. K., Esq. to W. Wilberforce, Esq.* (London, 1790).

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History, XXXVII (1971), 19–40. A brief but
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Albion, XXXIII (2001), 390–395.

25. "Under the English slave system in t
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Eighteenth Century (Barbados, 1970), 20–2
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England . . . (London, 1769), 72n.

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protection from the crown. "It is most reproachful to this country," he declared, "that there are more than five hundred thousand of its subjects, for whom the legislature has never shewn the least regard." He hoped ministers would examine the slave codes and require the colonies to report on measures taken to ensure the slaves' "legal rights."[24]

Few adopted William Knox's notion of slaves as subjects, it should be emphasized. In this period, Britons rarely paused to reflect on the civil status of enslaved Africans or to consider slaves as any more than the property of British colonists.[25] Yet, when Maurice Morgann proposed enlisting liberated Africans in imperial expansion, or when, several years later, James Ramsay characterized slaves as industrious, "valuable sub-

24. [William Knox], *Three Tracts respecting the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negro Slaves in the Colonies, Addressed to the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* [London, 1768], 27, 32, 33. Leland J. Bellot provides the most extensive overview of Knox's attitudes toward slavery and race but, regarding slavery, fails to recognize the conflicted character of Knox's thought and overlooks the subminister's concern to impose imperial oversight. See Bellot, "Evangelicals and the Defense of Slavery in Britain's Old Colonial Empire," *Journal of Southern History,* XXXVII (1971), 19–40. A brief but more penetrating assessment of Knox and his views on slavery appears in David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York, 2004), 186–192. For Knox's views on problems of empire, more generally, see Snapp, "An Enlightened Empire," *Albion,* XXXIII (2001), 390–395.

25. "Under the English slave system in the West Indies," Elsa V. Goveia concluded, "the slave was not regarded as a subject, but rather as property; and when the English humanitarians attempted to take the view that he was a subject, they were advocating a theoretical and practical innovation which only slowly gained acceptance in the controversies over amelioration and emancipation." Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century* (Barbados, 1970), 20–21. During his crusade against slaveholding in England, Sharp insisted that slaves brought to the British Isles became subjects of the crown and, hence, "absolutely secure in his or her personal liberty." In an extended footnote buried in his first antislavery tract, he added, "Every inhabitant of the British colonies, black as well as white, bond as well as free, are undoubtedly *the King's subjects,* during their residence within the limits of the *King's dominions,* and as such, are entitled to personal protection, howsoever bound in service to their respective masters." Granville Sharp, *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery, or of Admitting the Least Claim of Private Property in the Persons of Men, in England* . . . (London, 1769), 72n.

jects" deserving succor and patronage, or in 1775, when Lord Dunmore promised freedom to Virginia slaves willing to assist the crown suppress an incipient colonial rebellion, they each drew on concepts of inclusion, allegiance, and protection that were strengthened, if not generated, by the accession of hundreds of thousands of aliens to the British Empire.[26] It may be that the idea of slaves as subjects could only have suggested itself when, more generally, as a consequence of the Seven Years' War, the governance and incorporation of strangers had become, inescapably, the subject of extensive discussion.

[II] As it happens, *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies* was the first of several British emancipation schemes circulated in the 1770s. In 1776, Granville Sharp publicized what he called the "Spanish Regulations," the colonial custom of *coartación*, which enabled and encouraged Spanish Caribbean slaves to purchase their freedom in installments.[27] In 1778, a Newcastle essayist appended a similar proposal to a pamphlet assaying prospects for retaining the North American empire. That same year, after a decade of frustrated struggles with the Leeward Islands elite, the Reverend James Ramsay from the island of Saint Christopher submitted to the bishop of London and the archbishop of Canterbury a memorial outlining "a plan for the education and gradual emancipation of slaves in the West Indies." In 1780, Edmund Burke composed a seventy-

26. James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), 113–114. For Dunmore, see Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 19–32, and Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 76–77.

27. On *coartación*, see H. S. Aimes, "Coartacion: A Spanish Institution for the Advancement of Slaves into Freedmen," *Yale Review*, XVII (1909), 412–431; Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford, 1986), 194–195; and Alan Watson, *Slave Law in the Americas* (Athens, Ga., 1989), 50–57. Sharp advocates the "Spanish Regulations" several times in private correspondence between 1772 and 1781. He endorses them in print in *The Just Limitations of Slavery in the Laws of God, Compared with the Unbounded Claims of the African Traders and British American Slaveholders; with a Copious Appendix: Containing, an Answer to Rev. Mr. Thompson's Tract in Favor of the African Slave Trade . . . A Proposal on the Same Principle for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Slaves in America . . .* (London, 1776), 54–55.

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110, Granville Sharp Papers, D3549 13/4/

29. Although see the comments inter
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Studies, XXVIII (1995), 379–396. Remar
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History Today, XXXVI (1976), 715–72
Economy: The Nature and Extent of St
507–511.

two-point "Negro Code" that provided for metropolitan oversight and administration of the British slave trade and slavery in the American colonies. Less than a year later, with Granville Sharp's encouragement, John Hinchliffe, bishop of Peterborough, drafted a bill based on the "Spanish Regulations" that would "soften and gradually reduce the Slavery in the West Indies."[28]

These proposals have escaped scholarly notice.[29] Roughly drawn and often inadequate to their professed ends, they scarcely attracted attention in their own day. In several instances, the authors withheld the texts from publication or, like Morgann, released them many years after the initial composition, in some cases anonymously. James Ramsay began work on

28. *Essays, Commercial and Political, on the Real and Relative Interests of Imperial and Dependent States, Particularly Those of Great Britain, and Their Dependencies; Displaying the Probable Causes of, and a Mode of Compromising the Present Disputes between This Country and Her American Colonies; to Which Is Added an Appendix, on the Means of Emancipating Slaves without Loss to Their Proprietors* (Newcastle, Eng., 1777); "Memorial Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies Particularly of the Slaves Employed in Their Culture, and Offering Reasons for Encouraging the Advancement of These Last in Social Life and Their Conversion to Christianity; Extracted from a Manuscript Composed on That Subject by James Ramsay, Minister in the Island of St. Christopher, and Author of a Plan of Reunion between Great Britain and Her Colonies published by Murray No 32. Fleet Street," cataloged as: "Memorial on the Conversion of Slaves in the Sugar Colonies by James Ramsay," Fulham Papers, XX, fol. 80, Lambeth Palace Library (for the copy addressed to the bishop of London, see Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Papers, XVII, fols. 221–223, Lambeth Palace Library); Edmund Burke, "Sketch of a Negro Code," in Paul Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1981–), III, 562–581. Evidence concerning Hinchliffe's scheme is preserved in Granville Sharp's diaries, although the document itself appears not to survive. See Diary G (Feb. 7, Mar. 12, 19, Apr. 7, 1781), fols. 106, 108, 110, Granville Sharp Papers, D3549 13/4/2, Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO).

29. Although see the comments interspersed through Eve W. Stoddard, "A Serious Proposal for Slavery Reform: Sarah Scott's Sir George Ellison," *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* XXVIII (1995), 379–396. Remarkably, the weighty corpus of Burke historiography has ignored his "Negro Code" almost entirely. Robert W. Smith provides an extended but ultimately inconclusive background in "Edmund Burke's Negro Code," *History Today,* XXXVI (1976), 715–723. See also James Coniff, "Burke on Political Economy: The Nature and Extent of State Authority," *Review of Politics,* XLIX (1987), 507–511.

his manuscript in 1768, completed an initial draft in 1771, extended it further by 1776, then abandoned the text for several years before publishing a substantially revised version in 1784 as *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies.*[30] Edmund Burke kept the "Negro Code" to himself for more than a decade before sharing it with Home Secretary Henry Dundas in 1792. John Hinchliffe refrained from distributing his emancipation scheme for nearly eight years; only the establishment of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade gave him the courage to bring it forward for wider scrutiny.[31] Those proposals that were published failed, almost entirely, to influence public debate. The leading literary journals thought Sharp's *Just Limitations of Slavery in the Laws of God* unworthy of review. Few seem to have noticed the Newcastle author's suggestions for reform.[32] Similarly, no one took seriously Maurice Morgann's Pensacola project. Shelburne, his patron, seems to have ignored it, as did the imperial administrators who recommended recruiting German and Swiss colonists from Louisiana and Protestants from France, but not liberated Africans, to settle West Florida.[33] The plan fared scarcely better with the public when published in 1772. Even Granville Sharp seems to have found only the warnings against future slave

30. The significance of Ramsay's revisions to his original text is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

31. Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas, Apr. 9, 1792, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke,* 8 vols. (London, 1792–1827), V, 197; Fair Minute Books of the Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Feb. 12, 1788), I, 37–38, British Library, Add. MSS 21254.

32. The principal literary journals, the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review,* elected not to comment on Sharp's tract. In surveying writing on slavery during the Revolution and in the decade after, I have yet to encounter reference to or commentary on the Newcastle pamphlet.

33. There is no reference to Morgann's plan in the several reports completed by the Board of Trade on the territories acquired in 1763. On subsequent proposals for West Florida colonization, see Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763–1783* (New Haven, Conn., 1943), 31–33; J. Barton Starr, "Campbell Town: French Huguenots in British West Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly,* LIV (1976), 532–547; Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West,* 478–479; Jarvis, "His Majesty's Papist Subjects," *Gulf So. Hist. Rev.*, XVI (2000), 13; and Gabriel B. Paquette, "The Image of Imperial Spain in British Political Thought, 1750–1800," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies,* LXXXI (2004), 206–213.

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35. *Monthly Review,* XLVI (1772), 535.

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insurrections worthy of comment.[34] The *Monthly Review,* typically sympathetic to antislavery sentiment, characterized the pamphlet as "visionary and romantic" and noted the author's advocacy of mongrelized American settlements with thinly masked bemusement.[35]

In the study of ideas and ideologies, though, the value of marginal texts lies in their capacity to elucidate broader patterns in thought and argument, and sometimes less with their immediate influence or affect on contemporaries. The emancipation schemes circulated in the 1770s, taken together, mark a transitional moment, a qualitative shift, a conceptual leap in British antislavery thought. The authors went beyond condemnations of slavery. They offered alternatives. They envisioned what had been unthinkable: an empire without slaves, worked by free black men and women vested with certain limited rights and liberties traditionally enjoyed by British subjects. The Georgia trustees' prohibition of slavery provided a precedent of sorts. But the reformers of the 1770s hoped to go further, looking less to prevent the expansion of slavery than to end human bondage where it existed. In retrospect, the British emancipation schemes of the Revolutionary era matter most, in fact, *because* of their limited influence. Students of British antislavery sometimes have written as if the movement's focus on slave trade abolition was foreordained, as if an unbroken line could be traced from Anthony Benezet's early publications condemning the slave trade in the 1760s to the formation of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. The evolution of abolitionism in Britain, however, was neither linear nor destined to assume a particular direction. The initial concern of the first antislavery activists, these emancipation schemes make clear, was colonial slaveholding itself, far more than the Atlantic slave trade. They bring to light, when taken together, a forgotten moment in early Anglo-American abolitionism, a period when a small but well-placed few devised schemes for comprehensive reform that, in breadth and reach,

34. In republishing a brief extract from Morgann's tract, Sharp selected only those passages alluding to the threat of slave revolts. Granville Sharp, *An Essay on Slavery, Proving from Scripture Its Inconsistency with Humanity and Religion* (London, 1773), 62–64. This was the focus as well of a review printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in July 1772. James G. Basker, "'The Next Insurrection': Johnson, Race, and Rebellion," *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual,* XI (2000), 43.

35. *Monthly Review,* XLVI (1772), 535.

would not be equaled again until after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

Why did several writers in these years promote emancipation when no one in Britain had thought to do so before? Each possessed an acute hostility to slavery, of course, and they wrote at a time when intellectuals elsewhere in Europe and the Americas also entertained the idea of fundamental reform to colonial slavery. In 1765, two years after Maurice Morgann composed his sketch for a free colony in Pensacola, the French political economist Abbé Baudeau suggested sending liberated Africans to till the vast tracts of land west of the Mississippi. Several years earlier, in 1758, a Lisbon-born lawyer and priest residing in Bahia, Manuel Ribeiro Rocha, advocated abolishing slavery in Brazil in favor of indentured labor. "Anti-slavetrader," writing in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1768, called for a petition to George III "to grant some of the ceded islands to the southward, for a Negro Colony" so that the next generation of blacks could be "sent thither at a suitable age at the expense of the government." Pennsylvania Quaker Anthony Benezet in 1771 recommended abolition of the British slave trade, a limited time of servitude for those already held in slavery, oversight of freed slaves by county supervisors, substitution of white indentured servants for slaves, and the establishment of a free colony for blacks west of the Appalachians. More generally, the burgeoning revolution against imperial rule in North America occasioned a variety of proposals for a comprehensive emancipation.[36]

36. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* 429–430; Celia M. Azevedo, "Rocha's *The Ethiopian Redeemed* and the Circulation of Anti-Slavery Ideas," *Slavery and Abolition,* XXIV, no. 1 (April 2003), 101–126; Darold D. Wax, "Reform and Revolution: The Movement against Slavery and the Slave Trade in Revolutionary Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine,* LVII (1974), 410; Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce, and the General Disposition of Its Inhabitants with an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave-Trade, Its Nature and Lamentable Effects* . . . (Philadelphia, 1771), 139–141; Jacob Green, *A Sermon Delivered at Hanover (in New-Jersey), April 22, 1778, Being the Day of Public Fasting and Praying throughout the United States of America* (Chatham, 1779); John Saillant, ed., "'Some Thoughts on the Subject of Freeing the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Connecticut, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of All Friends to Liberty and Justice,' by Levi Hart; with a Response from Samuel Hopkins," *New England Quarterly,* LXXV (2002), 107–128.

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37. The Newcastle essayist, however,
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38. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*
"Models of Emancipation during the Ag
no. 2 (August 1996), 1–21.

Yet, on balance, these contemporaneous initiatives, which sometimes received limited circulation even in their original languages, appear not to have informed British writings.[37] Instead, the British emancipation schemes reflected, in part, the broader tendency among European thinkers to apply in theory the lessons drawn from the emerging science of human society. The would-be emancipators chose to exploit, and their schemes indicate an unqualified faith in the validity of, cultural assumptions prevailing among many of the late-eighteenth-century intelligentsia. British reformers assumed that individuals worked more productively if moved by incentive rather than force. They held sacred the right to self-possession. And they had an unshakable confidence in the human capacity for moral development. In important respects, these writers aimed to bring colonial practice in line with what they thought to be universal truths about humanity and the good society. So, to a degree, the late-eighteenth-century idea of emancipation reflected an "enlightened" interest in guiding American plantation societies into conformity with "civilized" norms.[38] Yet if the idea of an empire worked by free labor was informed by an optimistic ambition to

37. The Newcastle essayist, however, did build explicitly on New Jersey Quaker William Dillwyn's *Brief Considerations on Slavery and the Expediency of Its Abolition; with Some Hints on the Means Whereby It May Be Gradually Effected; Recommended to the Serious Attention of All, and Especially of Those Entrusted with the Powers of Legislation* (Burlington, N.J., 1773). See *Essays, Commercial and Political,* 130–135. Of the writers under consideration here, only Granville Sharp seems to have possessed extensive familiarity with the antislavery publications printed in the North American colonies on the eve of the War of Independence. The works of these British projectors reflected and participated in the broader intensification of antislavery sentiment and circulation of antislavery literature after midcentury but, as strategies for substantive change, presented a departure from earlier work. The slavery reforms proposed by Abbé Raynal and his colleagues in *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Amsterdam, 1770) seem not to have influenced these schemes. The English historian William Russell appropriated several of Raynal's passages on slavery for his own *History of America* but advocated only an amelioration of slavery, adding tentatively that he looked forward to colonies "gradually conferring liberty on the negroes." Russell, *The History of America,* I, 579–583, citation on 583.

38. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* 400–438; Steven Mintz, "Models of Emancipation during the Age of Revolution," *Slavery and Abolition,* XVII, no. 2 (August 1996), 1–21.

make the world anew, emancipationism in Britain also took shape under the tangible pressures of a specific juncture in imperial history. Like Maurice Morgann, those who would reform slavery had in view the ways emancipation could sustain, and even advance, colonial enterprise. Rather than abstract and vague expressions of principle or fantastic projections of future change, the schemes, on the whole, exhibited concrete, if ultimately unworkable, attempts to restore accord and security within the empire at a moment of threatened dissolution, an agenda most evident when the sum effect of shared principles comes into view.

Begin with the proposed work regimes. British emancipationists accepted the need to sustain the productivity of colonial plantations. However, they questioned the labor model upon which those economies relied. Domestic experience, successful practices in the British Isles, seemed to establish axiomatic truths about human psychology applicable to workers in every society, truths enshrined in Adam Smith's influential passage on the advantages of wage labor in book 3 of *The Wealth of Nations*. James Ramsay urged slaveholders to consider "the state of workers in free countries," who, he asserted, execute "in the same time, thrice the labour of slaves." Consider, too, the work slaves and free laborers actually performed, the Newcastle essayist observed: "Men conscious of being free, will, even for moderate wages, engage themselves in labour that appear the most intolerable to slaves." That colonial experience failed to verify such propositions worried these reformers not at all. Planters may require African labor, Morgann and others agreed, but they did not require slave labor. How, then, to effect a transfer from slavery to liberty without infringing the property rights of slaveholders? Permit slaves to purchase their freedom from their owners by allowing wages for work completed during, as the Newcastle pamphleteer put it, "leisure hours." Schemes for self-purchase, as established by customs like the "Spanish Regulations," "give such encouragement to industry," enthused Granville Sharp, "that even the most indolent are tempted to exert themselves."[39] In this arrangement, slaves

39. Ramsay, "Memorial Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," fol. 79; *Essays, Commercial and Political,* 137, 143; Sharp, *The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God,* 55. As Seymour Drescher has stressed, the idea that free labor was cheaper and more productive than slave labor predated publication of *The Wealth of Nations*. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery,* 133. For instructive overviews

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gradually would acquire freedom, plantations would retain their workforce, and slaveholders would take a dual return on their investment—receiving both labor and a refund on the price paid for the freed slave. In effect, in exchange for liberty, slaves would bear the cost of their initial purchase and, presumably, perform the same work with greater efficiency. The emancipators did not intend simply to set slaves free. Instead, they would have the manumitted labor as before, but to draw wages rather than at the instigation of the whip.

To this end, emancipationists sought to protect slaves' earnings and ensure to them control over its use.[40] Burke's code, for example, would allow the enslaved to bequeath property to descendants and prohibit its seizure or appropriation by slaveholders. Such provisions would initiate, even where bondage remained, transfer of proprietorship away from the slaveholder and toward the self. In this transition to self-possession, the reformers considered fundamental an inviolable right to family relations. The Newcastle essayist would require slaveholders to sell enslaved children to their free parents who presented sufficient funds. Burke's code contained several provisions designed to recognize, encourage, and protect slave marriages. Similarly, the various proposals would vest slaves with claims to land. Granville Sharp would have "spare" lands divided into *"compact little Farms"* and slaves settled as peasants. In Burke's regime, married slaves resident on a plantation for more than twelve months could not be sold away.[41] In addition, then, to a right of self-purchase, the projectors would

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on the pre-Smithian discussions of the role of incentive in promoting industriousness, see A. W. Bob Coats, "Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in Coats, *British and American Economic Essays,* I, *On the History of Economic Thought* (London, 1992), 63–84, and Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), 136–146.

40. In nearly every instance, metropolitan commentators appear to have assumed, perhaps understandably, that slaves in British America always lacked claims to property. Generally, British antislavery writers knew nothing of the variety of labor systems embraced by the institution of slavery. Specifically, they were unaware of the prevalence of task-labor in the North American lowcountry. Nor were they aware of the existence or character of the internal economies in slave societies in British America or elsewhere. For an introduction to these topics, see Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998).

41. Burke, "Sketch of a Negro Code," in Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of*

establish for slaves a prior right to property and family, in effect, delineating a civil and domestic sphere for the enslaved upon which slaveholders could not intrude. If the emancipation schemes resisted ceding the enslaved full autonomy, they chipped away at the custom of slaves as alienable chattel. Masters would retain, for a time, rights to their human property, but not unlimited discretion to dispose of that property as they saw fit.

For the enslaved, compliance with prescribed cultural norms would be the price of the ticket to self-possession. If slaves were to be freed, the emancipators insisted, they would have to adopt British mores. Reform schemes espoused slave marriages, for example, less to honor slaves' desires than to foster civility. Admission to society required hewing to the patriarchal ethos. Because, in Burke's words, the "state of matrimony and the Government of family" best formed "men to a fitness for freedom, and to become good Citizens," he made marriage a precondition of liberty. Indeed, in his plan, slaveholders would provide "a Woman" to enslaved men over the age of twenty-one on the "requisition" of crown-appointed colonial officials. Those male slaves "fitted" for "the Offices of Freemen" would have reached thirty years, fathered no fewer than three children "born to him in lawful Matrimony," and earned a certificate from a parish minister attesting to "regularity in the duties of Religion, and of . . . orderly and good behavior." James Ramsay also positioned proper morals and manners as the bridge to liberty. To Ramsay, absolute dependence in slavery left the unfree worse than savages: "A savage in all his efforts, acts for himself, and the advancement of his proper concerns; but a slave is the bare appendage of a man, he has nothing to call his own." To free slaves without moral instruction, he reasoned, would leave them without the facility for self-advancement, which, to Ramsay's way of thinking, entailed fidelity to "the good of the community." To instill the values of social responsibility, Ramsay would have slaves judge each other's conduct "in the manner of juries."[42] In this way, slaves would grasp the importance of normative behavior and thereby acquire a stake in preserving the social order.

Edmund Burke, III, 577–579; John A. Woods, ed., "The Correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp, 1773–1809," *JAS,* I (1967), 15.

42. Burke, "Sketch of a Negro Code," in Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* III, 577, 578, 580; Ramsay, "Memorial Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," fol. 79.

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A persisting concern for stability, commerce, and civic harmony, then, figured prominently in these schemes. The emancipationists envisioned an ordered and orderly transition to freedom, a transition that, they optimistically presumed, would bring extensive benefits at negligible costs. Replacing slave labor with free labor would increase wealth because slave labor was inefficient. It would bring, they contended, an explosive growth in colonial consumption, as freedmen able to earn and acquire would purchase British manufactures in greater quantities. Best of all, slave labor would transform mutual contempt and violence among black and white in British America into a perpetual, fraternal peace. "To the public," Ramsay aphorized, "the difference between the slave and the citizen is immense, the one being the strength, the other being the weakness of the state." "Should we continue to keep nearly the whole race as slaves, and not encourage and assist them to liberate themselves," the Newcastle essayist warned, "the epocha of their universal freedom, and ruin of their present masters, may be at no very distant period." How foolish was this, when emancipation, properly administered, could serve *"state policy"?* In a scheme that expedited self-redemption, Africans "*must either be looked on as an accession of so many subjects, or as the means of such a national acquisition of property as they have paid for their emancipation.*"[43] For the first time, the argument from necessity was being turned on its head. Understood correctly, the gradual extension of liberty held the best prospects for preserving imperial wealth and power. "Police and public utility," Ramsay professed, "join their voices with religion and humanity."[44] The interests of slaves are the interests of masters. The interests of both are the interests of empire.

This notion, implausible and to most contemporaries demonstrably false, issued from a variety of sources, not from a coherent movement. Although they shared certain assumptions, the schemes reveal a hodgepodge of priorities and expectations. Some advocated immediate liberation. Oth-

43. Ramsay, "Memorial for Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," fol. 80; *Essays, Commercial and Political,* 143–144, 147.

44. Ramsay, "Memorial for Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," fol. 79. In a similar vein, Maurice Morgann had written: "This world is not, in truth, so imperfectly constituted, as that men are ever tempted, by real interest, to deviate from the principles of humanity and justice." [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* 10.

ers favored gradual emancipation over several generations. In a few instances, the schemes would have coerced planters into carrying out reforms. In others, the schemes depended on slaveholders' cooperation. With the exception of Burke's code, they betrayed a pronounced lack of system. Measures designed to reduce dependence on slavery most typically failed to arrange for reducing or eliminating the slave trade, for example. Indeed, Morgann, Burke, and the Newcastle pamphleteer seemed to assume that the slave trade would continue. Moreover, these first emancipation proposals were not the work of a particular party, interest, or network. The authors held disparate allegiances. The group included the chief propagandist for the Rockingham Whigs (Burke), a prelate sympathetic to American resistance (Hinchliffe), a clerk at the Board of Ordnance who fraternized with disaffected London radicals (Sharp), a provincial political economist (the Newcastle essayist), an undersecretary in the Chatham administration (Morgann), and a Scottish slaveholder residing in the island of Saint Christopher who would serve in the Caribbean as a spy for the British navy during the American war (Ramsay). They were largely unknown to one another and, evidently, drafted their schemes independently.[45] However, they shared—by virtue of experience, employment, or disposition—an active engagement with imperial questions.[46] The first proponents of

45. Granville Sharp, however, was responsible for informing John Hinchliffe of the "Spanish Regulations."

46. The contributions of Edmund Burke to the debate on America may be traced in Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* III. For Granville Sharp, see Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977); Robert E. Toohey, *Liberty and Empire: British Radical Solutions to the American Problem, 1774–1776* (Lexington, Ky., 1978), 36–52; and the previous chapter in this volume. I have discussed Morgann above; Ramsay's obsession with the revolution in North America figures in the pages that follow. Erstwhile Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson referred to John Hinchliffe as "the only Bishop who has interested himself in American affairs." Hutchinson cited in Paul Langford, "The English Clergy and the American Revolution," in Eckhart Hellmuth, ed., *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), 276n6. J. Russell Snapp has drawn attention to the provincial origins of the most ardent promoters of imperial reform in the era after the Seven Years' War. See Snapp, "An Enlightened Empire," *Albion,* XXXIII (2001), 389–390. Only two of the six writers under consideration here were Englishmen, and those Englishmen, comparatively, showed rather less

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47. R. C. Simmons, ed., *British Impr
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emancipation not only factored imperial interests into their proposals; they were themselves active in debating and rethinking colonial governance and administration.

The British not only thought more about their North American colonies during the Revolutionary era. They thought about those colonies differently. Writing about the colonies addressed a range of subjects before 1760: religion, theology, and church government; the experience of migration; the ends and means of commercial policy; the consequence of encounters with native peoples; the outcome of explorations in geography and science; the experience of travel and adventure.[47] These topics retained their importance. But after 1760, they were supplemented by now urgent, if long-standing questions regarding the standing of colonies and colonists within the empire, the structure of political authority, and the techniques by which colonies should be defended, financed, administered, and governed. Who should pay for empire and how? Did colonists reside within or outside the realm? What limits, if any, were there to the sovereignty of king-in-parliament in British America? Such questions prompted even more general public musing on the advantages and disadvantages of encouraging overseas settlement. Why have colonies? What purpose did they serve, in theory and in practice? Did faltering authority over North America recommend, more generally, new techniques of control elsewhere in the empire? These questions, powerfully raised by the expansion of the empire after 1763, acquired a growing importance in the late 1760s and 1770s.

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enthusiasm for antislavery proposals that made explicit the importance of state intervention in colonial affairs. Nonetheless, the sample from which this discussion is drawn is far too small to offer even tentative conclusions about the link between provincial origins and a commitment to antislavery reform. This is just one of many questions that would benefit from further research.

47. R. C. Simmons, ed., *British Imprints relating to North America, 1621–1760: An Annotated Checklist* (London, 1996), xiii–xx. As Bob Harris has emphasized, attention to empire through the Seven Years' War tended to concentrate on the rivalry with France. The focus seems to have shifted to affairs in North America in the years that followed, at least until France entered the War of American Independence in 1778. Harris, "War, Empire, and the 'National Interest' in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain," in Julie Flavell and Stephen Conway, eds., *Britain and America Go to War: The Impact of War and Warfare in Anglo-America, 1754–1815* (Gainesville, Fla., 2004), 13–40.

They generated an extensive literature that revealed considerable diversity of opinion.[48]

Colonial slavery and the Atlantic slave trade remained far less vulnerable while agreement prevailed on the means and ends of empire, as long as custom validated established practice. While priorities remained fixed, few opportunities arose to rethink the relation between empire and slavery. But the American controversy put the imperial project to question and inspired a variety of creative and sometimes comprehensive plans to rework its structure. Exponents of parliamentary supremacy entertained the possibility of admitting American representatives to Westminster, for example. Political economist Josiah Tucker, who articulated the first doubts about the merits and necessity of possessing American provinces, suggested that Britain declare independence from the thirteen colonies. The radical political theorist John Cartwright proposed a "Grand British League and Confederacy" of self-governing states.[49] With regard to theorizing about empire, it was a time of experimentation. To an unusual degree, in this period, the British chose to examine received premises about overseas dominion, about its peoples, and about their relationship to each. The years of crisis opened a space for the reconsideration of imperial policy. And in this space those who intensely disliked slavery had an unforeseen opportunity not only to express antislavery sentiment but to develop novel alternatives.

[III] If the emancipation schemes of the 1770s, as an intellectual exercise, presented a sharp break from customary ways of conceiving the relation between slavery and empire, as potential policy initiatives they raised provocative questions regarding the exercise of power. Reducing the

48. On this literature, see Thomas R. Adams, *The American Controversy: A Bibliographical Study of the British Pamphlets about the American Disputes, 1764–1783,* 2 vols. (Providence, R.I., 1980), and Martin Kallich, ed., *British Poetry and the American Revolution: A Bibliographical Survey of Books and Pamphlets, Journals and Magazines, Newspapers, and Prints, 1755–1800,* 2 vols. (Troy, N.Y., 1988). These questions and debates are placed in their broadest context in Bowen, "British Conceptions of Global Empire," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XXVI, no. 3 (1998), 5–27.

49. J. G. A. Pocock, "Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: A Study in the Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Conservatism," in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 157–191; Toohey, *Liberty and Empire,* 36–52, citation on 47.

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50. Jonathan A. Bush, "Free to Enslave:
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51. W. E. B. Dubois, *The Suppression o*

power masters held over slaves required, in some way, reducing the power slaveholders possessed in the governance of colonial societies. It was one thing for British projectors to propose alternatives to slavery but something else to impose such alternatives on colonial slaveholders. The first anti-slavery crusaders regarded the challenge of reorienting imperial policy as nearly insurmountable, it is true. Yet the more fundamental problem was constitutional, not political. Even if emancipationists could generate momentum for slavery reform, did the crown or Parliament have the standing and resources to make such measures enforceable law? To frame the question in more general terms, who, if anyone, possessed the requisite authority to abolish slavery, and how, as a practical matter, could the proper authorities implement and sustain substantive change to colonial practices?

In the eighteenth-century British Empire, there was no precedent for imperial management of colonial slavery and no infrastructure to give such a design administrative life. Indeed, metropolitan officials capable, in theory, of shaping slavery in British territories had chosen, in effect, to ignore human bondage in the British colonies. From the first years of colonization forward, legal historian Jonathan Bush has stressed, neither the Privy Council, Parliament, nor the common law courts at Westminster attempted to write slave laws for the colonies or revise the codes enacted by colonial assemblies. This neglect followed from the broader custom of conceding to British settlers extensive autonomy in governing their internal affairs.[50] The Privy Council did negate prohibitive duties on slave imports and instruct royal governors to secure legislation protecting slaves from murder and "inhumane" severities.[51] Yet, in practice, imperial sovereignty

50. Jonathan A. Bush, "Free to Enslave: The Foundations of Colonial American Slave Law," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities,* V (1993), 417–470; Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Polities of the British Empire and the United States of America, 1607–1788* (Athens, Ga., 1986), 1–76; Greene, "Negotiated Authorities: The Problem of Governance in the Extended Polities of the Early Modern Atlantic World," in Greene, *Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History* (Charlottesville, Va., 1994), 1–24; Greene, "Transatlantic Colonization and the Redefinition of Empire in the Early Modern Era: The British-American Experience," in Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820* (New York, 2002), 269–282.

51. W. E. B. Dubois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of*

proved less decisive than the consistency with which British ministers honored colonial legislation that provided for property in and the governance of slaves. Metropolitan officials proceeded as if the local custom of slavery established a private right upon which they would not intrude. And this tradition of near purposeful neglect instilled an unspoken belief among American slaveholders that imperial administrators *could not* interfere in the possession and management of slaves in the British colonies. Paradoxically, then, colonial slavery, with the almost feudal autonomy it granted British settlers, resided *sub silentio*. It lay outside imperial oversight, while still, in principle, in the realm of imperial authority.

In important respects, this situation was unique among European states with colonies in the Americas. Roman civil law provided an analytic and theoretic framework for slavery in the Spanish Empire, the Code Noir instituted by royal edict for the French colonies in 1685, and the regulations obtaining in Brazil. Rather than a patchwork of provincial codes, Britain's rivals appeared to possess uniform laws of slavery, developed and administered in the metropolis and either extended or applied to dominions in America. And unlike the British American slave laws, which were concerned almost exclusively with policing the slave population, the civil law tradition governed relations between master and slaves, particularly as it related to the rights of the enslaved to self-purchase. The differences should not be overstated. Appearances could be deceiving. Settlers elsewhere in the Americas, like British colonists, instituted coercive local ordinances, took responsibility for the enforcement of the laws, and therefore could hinder the operation of protective regulations. In most instances, there was

America, 1638–1870, ed. A. Norman Klein (1896; rpt. New York, 1969), 7–37; Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *Royal Instructions to British Colonial Governors, 1670–1776,* 2 vols. (1935; rpt. New York, 1967), II, 505–508. The Board of Trade and the Privy Council at times acted more aggressively and decisively when slaveholders threatened unusually severe actions against free blacks. In 1739, the Privy Council prevented the Antiguan legislature from using slave testimony to prosecute two freedmen accused of aiding a conspiracy to revolt. Similarly, imperial officials in 1761 prohibited the assembly of Bermuda from expelling from the colony free blacks suspected of inspiring slave unrest. See David Barry Gaspar, *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore, 1985), 43–62; PRO CO 37/19, fols. 54–64.

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Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, a*
Louisiana, 1763–1803 (College Statio
quieu in the Caribbean: The Coloni
Civil," *Historical Reflections/Reflexio*
207; and A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "'A
Subjects of African Descent in Eighte
Studies, XXXII (2000), 307–332.

53. Sharp, *A Representation of the*
Slavery, 82; Ramsay, "Memorial Sugg
Colonies," fol. 79.

nsistency with which British ministers
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regulations. In most instances, there was

lein (1896; rpt. New York, 1969), 7–37; Leon-
o British Colonial Governors, 1670–1776, 2 vols.
8. The Board of Trade and the Privy Council at
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739, the Privy Council prevented the Antiguan
to prosecute two freedmen accused of aiding a
al officials in 1761 prohibited the assembly of
y free blacks suspected of inspiring slave unrest.
id Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in British America (Baltimore, 1985), 43–62; PRO

a limited capacity for and commitment to inspection and oversight.[52] But to British observers the regulations in the Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonies seemed by comparison to ensure enlightened administration and a measure of justice. Formally, at least, their codes placed slavery under law. To the proponents of gradual emancipation, the problem in British America was not so much the inadequacy of colonial law than what looked like no law at all. Granville Sharp likened American planters to Turkish despots. The slaveholder, he said, was "an arbitrary monarch, or rather a lawless Basha in his own territories." With disgust, James Ramsay reported to church prelates, "There is not a single law, I had almost said a single Custom that operates effectually in the [slaves'] favour. Every man may beat, abuse, ill treat, maim and starve them, at the suggestion of his lust, his avarice, his malice, his caprice."[53]

The custom of colonial autonomy, then, presented a formidable block to prospects for emancipation, as it did more generally to the exercise of imperial authority. A metropolitan attempt to seize and manage an institution traditionally administered exclusively by the colonial assemblies threatened, by necessity, profound constitutional change. This reluctance to interfere with customary rights to property and self-rule would help inhibit legislative action to end slavery in the established sugar colonies for another half century, until 1833, when the West Indian interest, cognizant of overwhelming public pressure for emancipation, secured from Parliament a

52. Gouveia, *West Indian Slave Laws;* Alan Watson, *Slave Law in the Americas* (Athens, Ga., 1989); Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean,* 190–196; Alejandro de La Fuente, "Law: Latin American Law," in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (New York, 1998), 253–255. For instances of the complexities in the application of these laws see, for example, Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763–1803* (College Station, Tex., 1999); Malick W. Ghachem, "Montesquieu in the Caribbean: The Colonial Enlightenment between *Code Noir* and *Code Civil,*" *Historical Reflections/Reflexions historiques,* XXV, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 189–207; and A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "'Acts of Grace': Portuguese Monarchs and Their Subjects of African Descent in Eighteenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies,* XXXII (2000), 307–332.

53. Sharp, *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery,* 82; Ramsay, "Memorial Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," fol. 79.

twenty-million-pound buyout of their slave property.[54] For a brief period, though, in the late 1760s and 1770s, limiting colonial self-governance had particular appeal within certain circles in the British government. The tentative emancipation schemes of the 1770s arose with and complemented the new priorities that took shape after the Stamp Act crisis, after British Americans explicitly challenged Parliament's authority to legislate for the colonies, as ministers tried to sustain and enforce colonial subordination. By instituting new taxes, by suspending recalcitrant assemblies, by policing with more vigor the acts of trade, and by reforming colonial administration, policy makers worked to affirm imperial sovereignty, in principle and in fact. To the few inclined to muse at length on the subject of colonial slavery, the apparently unlimited, inviolable right in British America to property in persons proved that the colonists possessed, already, far too much independence. Even evident, egregious abuses lay beyond the power of the British state to prevent. For those opponents of slavery who believed that Parliament should legislate aggressively on colonial questions, antislavery measures promised not only to redress moral wrongs; they promised as well to assist in the rehabilitation of metropolitan authority.

No writer defined this agenda with greater clarity than the Reverend James Ramsay. Ramsay understood that slavery reform could occur only by centralizing sovereign power in the British Empire, a step that, anyway, he thought urgent to preserving command of the North American colonies. More than others at this time, Ramsay made explicit the assumption implicit in the slavery reform schemes of this period. He directly confronted the problem presented by the almost complete independence enjoyed by colonial plutocrats. From the unpublished work Ramsay completed in the 1770s emerges a detailed picture of how antislavery opinion could foster hostility to colonial independence and how, in turn, reservations about colonial autonomy could deepen an opposition to colonial slavery. His unpublished manuscripts illustrate the affinity between assertions of parliamentary supremacy and the attempt to limit those customary rights that in-

54. See generally David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984), 174–175, 178–179, 345–346, and for further detail, D. J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government, 1801–1834* (Oxford, 1965). Only in the crown colonies, which lacked legislative assemblies, did the Colonial Office institute ameliorative reforms.

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55. On Bodin and slavery, see Davis, *The Pr*
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56. For the Jamaica revolt of 1760 that deep
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1764), 48. On Martin and Grainger, see Da
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B. Sheridan, "Samuel Martin, Innovating Su
tural History, XXXIV, no. 3 (July 1960), 126
A Study of James Grainger's "The Sugar-Can
"'Wish You Were Here': Exporting Engla
ELH, LXVIII (2001), 385–389.

sulated colonial slavery from external attack. James Ramsay had too much savvy to avow explicit support for enlightened absolutism. Yet his case against American slavery and colonial rebellion bore a pronounced, if unintended, resemblance to the absolutist arguments that sixteenth-century theorist Jean Bodin conceived when French nobles threatened to resuscitate personal servitude and Huguenot ideologues espoused resistance to monarchical authority: only a strong state headed by an indivisible sovereign could protect the dispossessed from oppression and ensure social harmony and political order.[55]

To an extent, Ramsay's reform proposals reflected a wider desire among certain planters in the British Caribbean to place colonial slavery on a more secure footing, an aim animated in part by an intensifying fear of slave insurrections.[56] However, where several of his contemporaries in the Caribbean recommended the amelioration of slavery, Ramsay wanted coerced labor abolished over time. Margaret Middleton, the pious spouse of his

55. On Bodin and slavery, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* 111–114, and Henry Heller, "Bodin on Slavery and Primitive Accumulation," *Sixteenth Century Journal,* XXV (1994), 53–65.

56. For the Jamaica revolt of 1760 that deepened these anxieties, see Craton, *Testing the Chains,* 125–139, and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000), 221–224. Ramsay wrote several years after Antiguan planter Colonel Samuel Martin espoused treating slaves with "justice and tenderness," after the first British governor of Saint Vincent detailed publicly a regime for the "treatment, care, and protection" of imported Africans, and more than a decade after James Grainger urged benign, gentle "slave management" in the widely read *Sugar-Cane: A Poem.* Samuel Martin, *An Essay upon Plantership, Humbly Inscribed to His Excellency, George Thomas, Esq., Chief Governor of the Leeward Islands,* 4th ed. (London, 1765), 4; [Sir William Young], *Considerations Which May Tend to Promote the Settlement of Our New West-India Colonies, by Encouraging Individuals to Embark in the Undertaking* (London, 1764), 48. On Martin and Grainger, see Davis S. Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690–1750* (Chicago, 1990), 71–82; Richard B. Sheridan, "Samuel Martin, Innovating Sugar Planter of Antigua, 1750–1776," *Agricultural History,* XXXIV, no. 3 (July 1960), 126–139; John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's "The Sugar-Cane"* (London, 2000), 1–65; and Shaun Irlam, "'Wish You Were Here': Exporting England in James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane,*" *ELH,* LXVIII (2001), 385–389.

patron Charles, had written Ramsay in the 1760s to encourage religious instruction on the Saint Kitts plantations. In considering this request, Ramsay found himself addressing at length the character of Caribbean society and the impoverished state of the colonial church. By the spring of 1771, he had completed a lengthy letter in reply that recommended independent financing for the Caribbean clergy, a step he thought essential to fostering religious life in the colonies.[57] The building crisis in the North American colonies, however, helped Ramsay understand these primarily religious concerns in their political context. It led him to see colonial autonomy as a structural flaw in the imperial constitution, a flaw that enabled the abuse of labor and the neglect of religion throughout the plantation colonies. His original manuscript thus evolved during the 1770s into "something like a system for the regulation and improvement of our sugar colonies, and the advancement and conversion of their slaves." In these years, gradual emancipation became Ramsay's explicit aim.[58]

57. Ramsay printed Margaret Middleton's letter, without identifying her as its author, in the preface to the first of his published antislavery tracts. See *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves,* viii–xiv. For a brief but vivid treatment of Charles and Margaret Middleton, see John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London, 1977), 49–54. They receive more extended discussion in I. Lloyd Phillips, "The Evangelical Administrator: Sir Charles Middleton at the Navy Board, 1778–1790" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1975). See also chapter 6 in this volume. For Ramsay's lengthy reply, which first laid out ideas developed in his published work, see James Ramsay to Margaret Middleton, Mar. 20, 1771, Noel Papers, DE 32124/322/1, Leicestershire Record Office.

58. Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves,* iii. The Leicestershire manuscript, completed in 1771, explicitly rejects gradual emancipation as a realizable goal. "It would perhaps be difficult for government to form a plan, which would give full liberty, and thereby impart due importance and utility to the slaves in the West India colonies, without injuring or even entirely ruining the fortunes of their proprietors, and with them the trading part of the nation connected with them in business and interest." He continued: "The slaves in our little spot would at a very equitable appraisement amount to thirteen hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling. And in all our sugar colonies they cannot be less in value than twenty millions. And as the slaves, in our colony alone, are part of a stock of four millions, and as they alone give life effect and use to that stock the fruits of their labour being worthy yearly to the consumers above seven hundred thousand pounds sterling, it will easily be apparent that an immense change, or rather loss of property, would be occasioned by such a scheme, at once

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59. British Library, Add. MSS 27621. T
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By the mid-1770s, that manuscript consisted of two books. The first treated "the powers of government to improve the state of the colonies." After a first chapter comparing British slavery unfavorably with ancient and modern slave regimes, Ramsay addressed the necessity, in all states, of centralized authority, how this principle related to the administration of the American colonies, and the importance of religious establishments to effective governance. In the second book he discussed the "Powers of Government exercised in improving the condition of Colony Slaves." There he described the native capacities of Africans, the difficulties faced by those seeking to bring slaves to Christianity, and the likely benefits to colonial society that successful efforts at conversion would yield. He concluded with a comprehensive scheme for administrative reform.[59] From the origi-

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taking into effect in all our colonies. Nor would it be easy to find the masters an equivalent." The futility of pursuing emancipation he developed further several pages later: "A state of absolute freedom is a state of things, which we are rather to wish for than expect. It supposeth a regard for religion, a neglect of immediate profit, and a soundness of policy, very foreign to the estimation and opinion of the present age. And to make the plan effectual it would need to take place in all the European settlements. An event so little to be looked for in the course of things, that a man would hardly venture the imputation of so much extravagance as the bare suggestion of it would be deemed. For could so many clashing interests be made to agree in one point. And would not that great object of European policy, the balance of trade, be supposed to be in danger, if any partial innovation were to take place." Ramsay to Middleton, Mar. 20, 1771, Noel Papers, DE 3214/322/1.

59. British Library, Add. MSS 27621. The manuscript lacks a formal title. The title assigned by the British Library, which is the same as the title Ramsay gave his first antislavery pamphlet, simply misleads, as the contents differ dramatically. Here and throughout, I employ the phrase Ramsay used when describing his manuscript to the bishop of London: "Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies." The manuscript also presents problems for citing specific pages from the volume. As now preserved, the text of the reform scheme is bound with approximately three dozen pages of Ramsay's manuscript notes and commentaries on slavery-related subjects. As a consequence, two different systems for numbering pages appear in the volume, one of which, however, has been partially defaced by a subsequent slash through the figures inscribed on the top of each page. For the sake of consistency, the page numbers to be given here follow the "clean" series as presented in the manuscript, although this series does not correspond with the actual sequence of manuscript pages contained within the volume.

nal manuscript, he extracted the sections addressing governance and colonial administration and early in 1778 published them anonymously, in revised form, as *Plan of Re-Union between Great Britain and Her Colonies*, a text heretofore attributed to William Pulteney, second earl of Bath.[60] The opening chapter of the first book and the entirety of the second Ramsay revised, expanded, and published in 1784 as *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*, a landmark treatise in the nascent campaigns of the 1780s.[61] Although Ramsay published on the subjects separately, in an earlier incarnation his critique of slavery served, in part, as an attack on colonial autonomy.

Recent scholarship has given extensive attention to the character of British conservative thought in the era of the American Revolution.[62] In every important respect, Ramsay was strictly orthodox in his views. With regard to politics, he revered properly constituted authority and insisted on the supremacy of Parliament and the indivisibility of sovereignty. To a patrician's suspicion of popular politics he joined an active detestation of

60. For example, Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793*, I, *Discovery and Revolution* (London, 1952), 215–216. In addition to the conclusive evidence of Ramsay's authorship in the British Library manuscript, Ramsay took credit for *Plan of Re-Union* in his petition to the bishop of London, "Memorial on the Converson of the Slaves," fol. 79.

61. Folarin Shyllon provides an especially detailed account of Ramsay's influence on early abolitionism in Britain. See his *James Ramsay, the Unknown Abolitionist* (Edinburgh, 1977), 42–96.

62. Particularly instructive are: Margaret E. Avery, "Toryism in the Age of the American Revolution: John Lind and John Shebbeare," *Historical Studies* (Melbourne, Australia), XVIII, no. 70 (April 1978), 24–36; Paul Langford, "Old Whigs, Old Tories, and the American Revolution," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, VIII, no. 2 (1980), 106–130; J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1985), 199–247; James E. Bradley, "The Anglican Pulpit, the Social Order, and the Resurgence of Toryism during the American Revolution," *Albion*, XXI (1989), 361–388; Langford, "The English Clergy and the American Revolution," in Hellmuth, ed., *The Transformation of Political Culture*, 275–308; James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1993); and Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion, and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994).

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63. "Motives for the Improvement of the

political factions, such as the Rockingham Whigs, which he thought compromised the natural unity of the state. Ramsay viewed society as organic, not contractual. He believed that individuals could enjoy true liberty and security only through the advancement of the common good, which the state had the sole responsibility to protect. The church served as a bulwark to social order. So Dissenters and others who "affect to exalt the individual at the expence of the community" posed a threat, in Ramsay's view, to "decency, religion, and law." Two decades of residence in the British Caribbean left Ramsay hostile toward its ruling oligarchs. He took issue with the way colonists placed what he called the "Kingdom of I" above the interests of society as a whole. Slavery in British America displayed the consequences of such an ethos. Here was evidence of the tyranny spawned by unrestricted freedom. "Every where in every age," Ramsay noted, "the chain of slavery has been fashioned by the hand of liberty." Although positioned to bring slavery within the compass of law, the culprits, the colonial assemblies that licensed license and oppression, were "neither competent, or inclined, to introduce such reformation as humanity solicites." Indeed the slave codes the assemblies enacted led to "the negation of the law," since the end of law in every society, Ramsay wrote, was to secure "the equal protection of its citizens."[63] That slaves were not citizens was irrelevant to Ramsay where the right to legal protection was concerned. As laborers for the British state, slaves were members of society; and as members of society, slaves had a claim to the rights on which society, as such, existed to guarantee. Those colonial assemblies that refused to honor the rightful claims of each member to legal protection had forfeited, in principle, their right to legislate. For Ramsay, the wickedness of British American slavery clinched the case against colonial self-governance.

If the problem, then, lay with the imperial constitution, the self-evident solution was to "unhinge the present method of managing the colonies," end "the absurdity and contradiction of various, jarring legislators," recognize Parliament as the "supreme legislature," and reduce the power of colonial assemblies. A host of improvements to the sugar colonies, including a reformation of slavery, could follow, Ramsay explained. No longer should the colonies govern themselves with minimal oversight from Lon-

63. "Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies," xii, 27, 39, 44, 44n, 69.

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eaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832
Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion,
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don. And no longer should the Privy Council have the responsibility of reviewing colonial legislation. Instead, Ramsay recommended, each measure written in British America should be reviewed by a committee of Parliament, composed in part by delegates appointed by the several colonies. These procedural reforms would then clear the way for a substantive revision of colonial laws. Imposts, as far as possible, Ramsay wished to equalize. For law to have authority, for it to command assent, for it to unite an empire, it had to eliminate "particular exemptions." Those colonial taxes that regulated trade Ramsay wished to have levied in a uniform fashion, with the revenue earmarked for the navy, trading posts, and debts amassed from the "defence of trade and the colonies." All other colonial taxes would be "annihilated." Britain would pay for the civil and ecclesiastical establishments in the colonies. Customhouse officials in British America would receive salaries from the Treasury, to make unnecessary the uneven, costly fees and perquisites they imposed on traders. The crown's duties on enumerated goods exported from "the Old Charibee colonies" would be required from each colony in the British Caribbean; no longer would Jamaica or the Ceded Islands receive a dispensation. A portion of the resulting income would support additional clergy for the West Indies, thereby liberating ministers from dependence on the patronage of slaveholders. An independent clergy could then devote themselves to instructing slaves and, Ramsay hoped, mediating between slaves and masters. In cooperation with London-appointed judges to be charged with adjudicating conflicts between slaves and masters, the clergy would acquire reputations as the Africans' advocate. Clerical benevolence would draw the enslaved to Christianity. And as enslaved Africans attained a stake in society, as they established "proper" marriages, secured claims to their families, were attached to the land on which they worked, they would be prepared to contemplate the fate of their souls and the obligations of each individual to the good of society as a whole.[64]

This was how slaves would be brought to the gospel and ultimately, perhaps, to freedom: first, by establishing parliamentary supremacy; second, by restructuring colonial administration; third, by funding positions for independent clergy in the West Indies; fourth, by gradually incorporating slaves into civil society; and, fifth, by ensuring to them the protection

64. Ibid., 73–93, 154–167, citations on 72, 74, 77, 76.

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65. Ibid., 168.

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[Ramsay], *Plan of Re-Union between Great*

of the law. Fundamental, overdue reforms to empire would also result. Through a "timely interposition of the legislature," through an extension of levies on West Indian produce, Britain would "acquire a considerable accession of strength; have its trade and taxes improved, and a large number of useful fellow subjects, now sunk in misery and bondage made happy here, and capable of happiness hereafter."[65]

If James Ramsay had published his original text, interpreters of the British antislavery movement perhaps would have recognized the ties between the first aspirations for slavery reform and attempts at imperial reorganization. However, from the antislavery tracts Ramsay published in the 1780s, it is difficult, if not impossible, to detect his commitment to administrative reform and the indivisible sovereignty of king-in-parliament. And that is because James Ramsay deliberately suppressed the broader agenda that shaped his antislavery proposals. Ironically, the original manuscript, itself a product of the Anglo-American conflict, was a casualty of colonial rebellion. War in America demonstrated the likely consequences of heavy-handed attempts to impose imperial rule. It was far better, some British politicians concluded (particularly after the defeat at Saratoga in the fall of 1777) to cede legislative autonomy to potentially mutinous colonies in exchange for continued allegiance to the crown, preservation of commercial ties, and maintenance of a united front against European rivals. Lord North offered such terms to Congress through the Carlisle peace commission of 1778, and the Irish Parliament accepted such an arrangement from the Shelburne ministry in 1782. So Ramsay's proposal to strengthen imperial authority, which he seems to have completed in 1776, ran counter to the drift of informed opinion among those responsible for colonial governance.[66] His friends of "rank and learning," he would later explain, ap-

65. Ibid., 168.

66. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire,* I, 493–557. I date Ramsay's manuscript on the basis of a statement presented in the introduction to his *Plan of Re-Union* (1778). "The outlines of the following Plan are taken from a manuscript on the improvement of the sugar-colonies, which the author has had in hand these ten years. It has been extracted and fitted for a temporary publication, in hopes of its contributing something to elucidate the rights of Britain, deserted and betrayed as she is, by too many of her ungrateful sons. It was prepared, in another form, for publication two years ago." [Ramsay], *Plan of Re-Union between Great Britain and Her Colonies* (London, 1778), v.

proved of gradual abolition but advised him "with one voice" to strike from the manuscript "every part that tended to introduce those political questions, which must be unavoidable in treating the state of the colonies, and their dependence on a mother country."[67] Therefore, when Ramsay published the revised version of the manuscript in 1784 as *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies,* he removed each section and passage relating to sovereignty, legislatures, religious establishments, and taxes. The antislavery tract explained why slavery should be reformed and identified which reforms were necessary but not how those reforms should be authorized, implemented, or enforced. Retained was the plan for appointing additional clergy in the colonies, but extracted from the text was the scheme to fund their salaries. His antislavery treatise called for new laws that would allow slaves a semblance of legal protection, but it did not specify which legislature should act or, more to the point, which had the authority to act. In short, Ramsay's published work dodged the sensitive question of legislative power, upon which the original manuscript turned.

An elastic concept of subjectship and a perceived need to bring the enlarged empire under ministerial control helped make schemes for slavery reform possible. At the same time, the inability to translate theoretic authority into actual power helped make their enactment (political hurdles aside) nearly impossible and even their publication ill advised. James Ramsay mangled his original manuscript with reluctance. Factious demagogues had so captured public opinion, he later grumbled, that "it had become a sort of treason to express any attachment to the laws of government or religion in our country, or stand in vindication of their claims." As noted, Ramsay did publish his proposals for reorganizing the empire, but anonymously in 1778 as *Plan of Re-Union between Great Britain and Her Colonies,* a misleading title for a work concerned to annul "all the little colony-systems" rather than shape an amicable peace.[68] He longed for an earlier era when, he claimed, colonies accepted their subordination to the mother country and when the state and the church possessed unquestioned authority.

67. Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves,* iii–iv.

68. [Ramsay], *Plan of Re-Union between Great Britain and Her Colonies,* xv.

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69. Ibid., xv.

70. Ibid., 52n, 53n, 135n. On the near
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> Twenty years ago, things might have been assumed as axioms, that are now become objects of grave discussion. This is not, in common, the age of establishing, but of unsettling first truths . . . "Every man his own legislator," is a phrase which when applied to created Being, contains blasphemy too horrid to be imagined, or nonsense, that mocks explanation. Yet it is powerful enough to annihilate every law of God, either respecting religion or adopted authority. And with them it has pulled down family, society, an established religion, all that men ever fought or bled for.[69]

James Ramsay hated slavery, but he may have hated the American rebels more. He despised their leading men in Congress ("atheistical profligate bankrupts"), the actions of their army ("numerous scenes of horror, oppression, inhuman murders, and unrelenting cruelty, in every possible dress"), their constitutional principles ("laid in profligacy, Atheism, ingratitude, and oppression"), and the "consummate effrontery" of their friends in Britain, particularly the Rockingham Whigs.[70] In the end, Ramsay would have to console himself with an attack on slavery alone. Those efforts would bring him notoriety and influence. James Ramsay would be the first to fix British attention on colonial slavery in a way that had lasting effect. With this success, though, he failed utterly in what he initially set out to do, to assist in preserving and reconstructing the American empire.

[IV] The nascent British interest in slavery reform during the Revolutionary era must not be divorced from the ultimately unsuccessful metropolitan efforts to reconstitute imperial authority. When William Knox suggested that slaves, like indentured servants, should be eligible for an "impartial dispensation of the laws," he stressed that "no authority, but that of parliament," could institute such a measure. Of slavery, Maurice Morgann wrote, "The evil is wholly imputable to the state; and the remedy can be obtained only by its assuming different maxims and a better policy" for the empire as a whole. Provide America with a new constitution, Methodist minister Thomas Vivian advised Lord Dartmouth, the former secretary of

69. Ibid., xv.

70. Ibid., 52n, 53n, 135n. On the near visceral hatred of philosophes and political radicalism among the orthodox, see Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative,* 38.

state for British America, and let that constitution "be similar to our own" under "the same Supreme Legislature." The price of political equality, Vivian added, should conform with metropolitan standards of civility and justice: "Why not compleat the resemblance or union as much as possible by abolishing slavery among them?" Emancipation, he added, would rescue enslaved Africans from oppression, contribute to uniting the empire under uniform laws, and, importantly, ensure the dependence of the colonies. Even if Americans surrendered their arms, Vivian observed, "they would still be glad to embrace the opportunity of becoming independent." Only divesting Americans of their bondsmen would permanently "weaken" their strength.[71]

By 1778, the commanders of the British army in America had reached the same conclusion and, in liberating slaves owned by colonial patriots as a matter of policy, effected in practice the abstract aims articulated by emancipation theorists—an assertion of imperial rule through the appropriation of human property possessed by rebellious British colonists.[72] No one spelled out the way emancipation could shift the balance of power in North America with more candor than Sir William Draper: "Proclame *Freedom* to their Negroes," he advised in 1774, "then how long would they be a people? They would soon cry out for pardon, and *render unto* CAESAR *the Things which are* CAESAR's." Samuel Johnson presented a similar suggestion one year later. "If they are furnished with fire arms for defense, and utensils for husbandry, and settled in some form of government within the country, they may be more grateful and honest than their masters."[73]

The self-styled British friends of American liberty who favored slavery reform hid from the authoritarian implications of the antislavery measures they espoused at the cost of incoherence. David Hartley wanted Parliament to enact a law protecting slaves from their owners but opposed metropolitan attempts to legislate for the colonies. Granville Sharp campaigned

71. [Knox], *Three Tracts,* 25; [Morgann], *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* 13; Thomas Vivian to earl of Dartmouth, Jan. 16, 1777, Dartmouth Papers, D(w) 1778/II/1733, Staffordshire Record Office.

72. See generally Frey, *Water from the Rock,* 45–171.

73. [Sir William Draper], *The Thoughts of a Traveler upon Our American Disputes* (London, 1774), 21; Basker, "'The Next Insurrection,'" *The Age of Johnson,* XI, 48.

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74. George Herbert Guttridge, *Dav*
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75. Burke, "Speech on Repeal of th
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ardently early in the Revolutionary War on behalf of colonial autonomy yet hoped that the crown would prevent colonists "from oppressing their *poor Brethren*." This, he declared, was an "essential purpose of Regal Government."[74] Edmund Burke, too, wrestled with conflicting principles. In 1778, he renounced the imperious maxims enshrined in the Declaratory Act of 1766, which he had a hand in producing.[75] Yet the provisions of his Negro Code of 1780 would have charged an army of administrators with policing each component of the slaving network in the British Atlantic. Indeed, if enacted, it would have established a colonial bureaucracy more extensive than even the most ambitious plans of imperial administration for North America proposed to date. A slave ship would require clearance from a "searcher of the Port" to depart from England. At the British forts on the African coast, state-appointed inspectors would supervise and approve slave sales. Britons intending to trade inland in Africa would require a license from the governor, whom Burke would vest with the power to prosecute unscrupulous traders. The commander of the naval fleet stationed off Africa would have the power to inspect slave ships "as often as he shall see occasion." In the West Indies, Burke would appoint for each island an "Attorney General, Protector of Negroes," whose responsibilities would include, among other duties, receiving complaints from slaves, prosecuting slaveowners for felonious assaults, and purchasing the freedom of slaves who "shall appear to him to excel in any mechanical Art or other knowledge or practice." In addition to bringing the enslaved under the care of state-appointed officials, Burke would have placed the British Atlantic slaving network within the jurisdiction of the common law. Traders who kidnapped slaves in Africa would be jailed in London, Bristol, Liverpool, or Glasgow and prosecuted "as if the Offenses had been committed

74. George Herbert Guttridge, *David Hartley, M.P., an Advocate of Conciliation, 1774–1783* (Berkeley, Calif., 1926), 327–328; Granville Sharp to Lord North, Feb. 18, 1772, in Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp . . .* (London, 1820), 78–80; Granville Sharp, *The Law of Retribution; or, A Serious Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, Founded on Unquestionable Examples of God's Temporal Vengeance against Tyrants, Slave-Holders, and Oppressors* (London, 1776), 183n.

75. Burke, "Speech on Repeal of the Declaratory Act," in Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* III, 373–374.

within" those "Cities and Towns." Even more radically, "in all cases of injury to Member or life" in the colonies, "the offenses against a Negro," Burke recommended in an echo of William Knox, "shall be deemed and taken . . . as if the same were perpetrated against any of his Majesty's subjects."[76] Burke, like Knox and Ramsay before him, championed the "indiscriminating supremacy of law" throughout British dominions, law that, he and others were coming to believe, should admit the claims of the enslaved.

The proposals to superintend colonial slavery through new metropolitan bureaucracies comported with wider attempts to fortify and extend in the Americas the administrative machinery of the state. They marked a faith in the advantages of centralizing power within the empire. And they reflected an emerging preference to assert greater control over the far-flung settlements and conduct policy in a way that assuaged and "improved" the diverse peoples residing within. In the schemes for slavery reform lie, not only the germs of an abolitionist ethos, but also the seeds of the nineteenth-century imperial mission that lauded Christianity, civilization, and commerce.[77] But dissolution of the North American empire interrupted efforts to extend imperial rule. With faith lost in the ability of the government to command consent in the western Atlantic, interest in concrete measures for slavery reform waned along with broader attempts to strengthen metropolitan control in colonies governed by representative assemblies. In their initial, unguarded incarnations, the innovative schemes for gradually abolishing slavery composed by John Hinchliffe, James Ramsay, and Edmund Burke would remain unpublished.

The British government lacked a compelling political or economic reason to abolish colonial slavery in the era of the American Revolution. And, as British military strategy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars would show, ministers would continue to place a priority on securing, sustaining, and, if possible, extending the West Indian plantation

76. Burke, "Sketch of a Negro Code," ibid., 562–581, citations on 564, 570, 572, 580.

77. Marshall, "Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XV, no. 2 (1987), 105–122; Eliga H. Gould, "American Independence and Britain's Counter-Revolution," *Past and Present,* no. 154 (February 1997), 107–146.

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79. David Brion Davis, "American S
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economy. Typically, between 1776 and 1815, Britain resisted the temptation to incite slave revolts. Regiments of slave soldiers were established in the 1790s to defend Caribbean slavery rather than spark its overthrow.[78] Yet even if ministers had wanted to act against slavery, the American conflict seemed to establish that neither Parliament nor the crown held a clear authority to do so. Commanders in the American theater, of course, could free the slaves of belligerents who placed themselves outside the crown's protection. Those slaveholders loyal to the king, though, retained their customary right to self-governance and chattel slavery. By successfully resisting restrictions on colonial autonomy, the North American rebels discouraged future attempts at comprehensive imperial reform. In this respect, they unintentionally insulated slavery in the existing sugar colonies from metropolitan interference for several decades to come. If, as it has been argued, the American Revolution improved the prospects for a general emancipation by confining slavery to those colonies unable to revolt against imperial rule, the conflict also reinforced long-standing limits on Parliament's power to intervene in the internal affairs of the British settlements in the western Atlantic.[79]

The first British activists failed in their effort to promote antislavery measures, in part, because they lacked a viable program of reform. The plans they devised required from the imperial state powers that it appeared not to possess. In the end, alternatives would have to appear possible to make possible campaigns for an alternative. Subsequently, in the 1780s, reformers would shift their attention to abolishing the slave trade, which Parliament had an unquestioned authority to regulate and which, before the Revolutionary War, American patriots had highlighted as an emblem of British tyranny in America. The individuals who first made slave trade abolition seem plausible, by advocating trade with Africa in staple crops

78. Michael Duffy, "World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815," in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* II, *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 184–195; Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795–1815* (New Haven, Conn., 1979).

79. David Brion Davis, "American Slavery and the American Revolution," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1983), 262–280; O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided,* 245.

instead of slaves, numbered among the theorists and commentators on imperial affairs.[80] Moral commitment and public sentiment would provide the energy for abolitionism. Yet, as with programs for slavery reform in the decade before, the campaign to abolish the slave trade in the 1780s would build on a more general rethinking of how the empire ought to work, in this instance, under the very different conditions presented by national humiliation, massive debt, diplomatic isolation, and population and territorial losses in America. This is a central theme of the chapter that follows.

In the schemes treated here, there was an underlying confidence in the capacity of enlightened officials to guide and regulate colonial affairs. In the last years of the American war, by contrast, anxieties regarding imperial expansion, always present but less prominent before 1775, acquired new importance. Before the war, policy makers thought too little had been done to secure British rule in America. After successive defeats and the heightened threat of French invasion, a broader public came to believe that ministers had perhaps tried too much. If the idea of concerted action against the Atlantic slaving system first gestated in the attempts to wield control over British overseas settlements, the deepening conviction that action must be taken against the slave trade matured with doubts regarding the virtue of rapid overseas expansion. Where, to a few in the 1770s, the iniquities of the slave system first signaled administrative neglect, by the early 1780s, to many, it would begin to symbolize, instead, what one clergyman called in 1781 the declining "moral state of the British Empire."[81]

80. See, for example, Josiah Tucker, *Reflections on the Present Matters in Dispute between Great Britain and Ireland* . . . (London, 1785).

81. Samuel Stennett, *National Calamities the Effect of Divine Displeasure; a Sermon, Preached in Little Wild-Street, Near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, on Occasion of the General Fast, February 21, 1781* (London, [1781]).

CHAPTER 5

Africa, Africans

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1. John Coakley Lettsom, ed., *The*
1783–1784), III, xlvi–xlvii. The Benezet
Warning to Great Britain and Her Colo
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XXXII (May 22, 1767), 68, Library
Minutes of the Committee on Friends

2. John Fothergill to Granville Sharp