Introduction

Instead of simply dividing the emerging empire into Eastern and Western halves, English sailors, traders, planters, governors, and investors often imagined a somewhat homogeneous tropical zone, defined by latitude rather than longitude. By the seventeenth century, the English, like other Europeans, conceptualized the places that fell in between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn as part of a common "Torrid or burnt zone."[1] As they ventured along the coast of West Africa and through the East and West Indies, they noted what they thought were broad consistencies in climates. In 1678, the author of a brief history of the new English colony in Jamaica felt little need to explain the "Climate." It was essentially the same as anywhere else "betwixt the Tropicks."[2] The island was subject to same thunder and lightning storms and strong winds "as all Countries in that Latitude."[3] In the seventeenth century, the English used the terms "climate" and "latitude" as near synonyms, assuming, simply, that places at the same latitude would have the same climate.[4] During an early modern era of European overseas expansion, the English participated in a broad European invention of

[1] R. Holland, *Globe Notes* (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1678), 28; see also Guy Miege, *A New Cosmography, or Survey of the Whole World in Six Ingenious and Comprehensive Discourses* (London: Printed for Thomas Basset, 1682), 72.

[2] "The History and State of Jamaica under Lord Vaughan" [1678], p. 3 (quotation), p. 5, Library of Congress Online Resource, https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/search?searchCode=LCCN&searchArg=2021667739&searchType=1&permalink=y (accessed October 2022).

[3] "History and State of Jamaica," 3, 5.

[4] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period," *American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (1982): 1262, 1266–1267.

the idea of the tropics; they associated this torrid zone with both an abundance of life and the threat of death and decay.[5]

The English reasoned that it was the hot sun that led to tropical abundance. The heat drew precious metals and gemstones closer to the surface in the tropics and created exceptionally nourishing conditions for agriculture.[6] As a sixteenth-century English geographer explained, "the influens of the sonne doth norishe and bryng fourth gold, spices, stones and perles."[7] The exotic spices of the East Indies were linked with the silver and other precious metals that had brought such wealth to Spain in Central and South America; they were all attributed, in some part, to the effects of the climate.[8] In the seventeenth century, sugar joined silver and spice in the minds of the English as one of the great riches of the tropics. The torrid zone became a place in which vast fortunes could be made.

Yet, the tropics also loomed as a dangerous place. The heat was alarming and oppressive for people accustomed to the more moderate climes of the British Isles. The temperature, the sudden and violent bursts of the rain, and the miasmas produced by abundant and rotting vegetation led to sickness and death. In the seventeenth century, the English feared the malleability of human bodies and constitutions in various environments and climates; they associated diseases with places. Sudden changes in temperature or precipitation were deemed particularly hazardous.[9] Moving from one place to another could cause or cure disease. In the first half of the seventeenth century, English travelers were warning that the tropics, with its extreme weather conditions, were filled with "pestilent" and "Violent" fevers which "killed many" in the "hot season."[10] Late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English traders

[5] Hugh Cagle, *Assembling the Tropics: Science and Medicine in Portugal's Empire, 1450–1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 5–9.

[6] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1984): 218–220.

[7] As quoted in Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates," 218; This belief that precious metals would be found in hot and humid places persisted into the eighteenth century, and some observers remained convinced that gold and silver mines would eventually be discovered in Jamaica. See James Knight, *The Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica and the Territories Thereon Depending from the First Discovery of the Island by Christopher Columbus to the Year 1746*, ed. Jack P. Greene. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 391–392.

[8] Kupperman, "Puzzle of the American Climate," 1267.

[9] Gary Puckrein, "Climate, Health and Black Labor in the English Americas," *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 180–182.

[10] Sir Henry Colt to George Colt, August 20, 1631, in *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623–1667*, ed. Vincent T. Harlow (London: Printed for the Hakluyt

in West Africa attributed the severe sickness and mortality they experienced there to the climate.[11] In the 1650s, a member of Parliament in England thought that one of the great injustices that prisoners of war faced when they were transported to Barbados was that they had to make the passage through the "heat and steam" that came with sailing "under the tropic."[12] English physicians believed that the heat and humidity of the tropics created its own peculiar diseases.[13] Historian Karen Ordahl Kupperman argued that the English began to articulate "profound anxiety" about what hot climates could do to their bodies.[14] In the tropics, whites would come to fear not only death but racial degeneration, a fear that became more entrenched over time as ideas about race hardened.[15]

English travelers, traders, migrants, and settlers were increasingly convinced over the last half of the seventeenth century that the tropics were an unhealthy place for white bodies, at least until they had acclimatized. The heat and heavy rains and the speed with which vegetation and flesh grew and rotted produced, as one English traveler to Bombay observed in 1701, a "Malignant Corruption of the Air" that ensured that Europeans all suffered from disease (see Figure A.1). The English were particularly susceptible. People from "England," the traveler explained, "Seldom or never faile to End their days very Soone here." The corrupt air ensured that wounds were "rarely cured." The deadly tropical air of Bombay – made worse by the stink of the rotting fish customarily used as manure – not only killed Europeans but led to monstrous wonders. Spiders in that corrupt air grew to "ye Bigness of a mans thumb & ye toads of ye Bigness of Small ducks." The Bombay traveler had heard that it even "Rained

Society, 1925), 99; "The Description of Trinidad," in *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana*, ed. Harlow, 130.

[11] Puckrein, "Climate, Health and Black Labor," 183.

[12] John Towill Rutt, ed., *Diary of Thomas Burton Esq*, vol. 4, *March–April 1659* (London: Henry Coulburn 1828), 256.

[13] Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates," 224.

[14] Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates," 213; see also Kupperman, "Puzzle of the American Climate," 1268; see also Mark Carey, "Inventing Caribbean Climates: How Science, Medicine, and Tourism Changed Tropical Weather from Deadly to Healthy," *Osiris* 26, no. 1 (J2011): 129.

[15] Natalie J. Ring, "Mapping Regional and Imperial Geographies: Tropical Disease in the U.S. South," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, eds. Alfred W. Crosby and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 307–308; Trevor Burnard, "Placing British Settlement in the Americas in Comparative Perspective," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850*, eds. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 410, 428.

frogs" from time to time.[16] In the minds of the English, the tropics became an alien place filled with marvels and horrors. It was unclear how permanent or mutable English susceptibility to the heat and the corrupt air might be. Many colonial architects, travelers, and physicians observed high death rates for Europeans travelers to the tropics; some encouraged lifestyle changes to combat the high mortality.[17] Yet, the death tolls remained high until the English acquired some resistance or immunity to the mosquito-borne diseases that became endemic in the tropics, diseases that were driven in part by the globalization of trade and forced labor markets.[18] By the 1660s, the tropics had become a place that English migrants avoided. If they did travel to the tropics, they hoped to profit enough to leave quickly and return to the British Isles. Caribbean assemblies, desperate for white migrants, began to pass laws to increase white settlement in order to better "propogate his Ma[jes]ties designes on . . . this side the Tropicke."[19]

How would the English populate and trade in the tropics – where vast fortunes seemed to await – if the heat was so dangerous, the air was so corrupt, and white newcomers died so quickly? Who would willingly migrate? Forced migration and labor became the key to English imperial designs in the tropics, a place that the English recognized as a distinct geographical space. In 1684, East India Company (EIC) directors, who were using the Caribbean colonies as a model of successful tropical colonization, had decided it might be necessary to buy slaves from the Royal African Company (RAC) for the EIC colony in St. Helena off the coast of Central Africa (see Figure A.2). They insisted that the "Experience" of the English and "all other European nacons" had proven it was "utterly impossible for any Europe plantacion to thrive between the Tropics upon any place without assistance and labour of negroes."[20]

[16] "Voyage of the Macclesfield to and from Borneo," [1701–1702], Ms Rawl. C. 841, ff. 9–9v, Bodleian Library.

[17] For examples, see Colt to Colt, August 20, 1631, in *Colonising Expeditions*, ed. Harlow, 99; Thomas Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen Planters of the East and West Indies* (London: Andrew Sowle, 1684), 51–53, 60–61, 66–68; London to Bencoolen, May 9, 1690, India Office Records (IOR): E/3/92, f. 49, British Library.

[18] Justin Roberts, "'Corruption of the Air': Yellow Fever and Malaria in the Rise of English Caribbean Slavery," *Early American Studies* 20, no. 4 (2022): 653–672.

[19] "An Act Obliging the Inhabitants of This Island to Keepe and Maynetayne Christian Men Servants," July 5, 1677, Colonial Office Papers (CO) 154/2, p. 326, National Archives, United Kingdom.

[20] London to St. Helena, November 26, 1684, IOR: E/3/90, f. 251v, British Library. For another copy of this letter, see Ms. Rawl. A. 302, f. 89v, Bodleian Library. For an

By the 1680s – a pivotal decade in the development of English slavery – this had become a near universal conviction across the English empire. In the tropics, the English empire would need to be built – and even defended – by slaves and, more broadly, by people who were indigenous to the tropics. By the 1680s, the English were convinced that the tropics would require a distinct political economy of empire. The tropics would be a slave empire, an empire built and maintained by non-Europeans. It would be an empire that was lucrative but fragile. It would also become the engine of British imperial power in the eighteenth century.

English assumptions about the homogeneity of tropical environments and climates not only created a common fear of tropical fevers, it also shaped their efforts to expand and manipulate the early empire and redistribute its resources. In 1649, for example, as English colonists first began to grow rich from sugar in Barbados, a group of merchants and planters tried to settle a new plantation colony on the island of Nosy Be, just off the coast of Madagascar (see Figure A.1).[21] The investors were excited because the island was near the "Latitude of Barbados," and it was about the same "bignesse and goodnesse."[22] Sugar was one of the crops they hoped would grow well there.[23] A former governor of an English Caribbean colony was appointed to lead the settlement; it was a disastrous failure.[24] Early Barbadian sugar planters – trying to find beasts of burden that could thrive in the heat – turned to importing African camels, but they struggled to figure out what to feed them.[25] In the 1660s and early 1670s – when Jamaican planters were still experimenting with cacao, indigo, and other crops – some English investors chose to transplant the rich spices of the East Indies to Jamaica, where English Caribbean planters could exercise more control over producing them

important study of the EIC's use of the Caribbean model, see Michael D. Bennett, "Caribbean Plantation Economies as Colonial Models: The Case of the English East India Company and St. Helena in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* (2022): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2034569 (accessed August 2023).

[21] For a more detailed discussion of this English effort to colonize Madagascar, see Alison Games, *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208–217.

[22] Robert Hunt, *The Island of Assada* . . . (London: Nicholas Bourne, 1650), 3.

[23] Hunt, *Island of Assada*, 5.

[24] Edmond J. Smith, "'Canaanising Madagascar': Africa in English Imperial Imagination, 1635–1650," *Itinerario* 39, no. 2 (2015): 292.

[25] Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London: Moseley, 1657), 22, 56, 58; James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands* (Barbados: Brown & Sons, 1893), 157–158.

and evade Dutch competition. They eventually abandoned their plans.[26] Undeterred by all these botched efforts at tropical transplantation, agents of the RAC tried their hand at Caribbean-style plantations producing export crops in West Africa, while the EIC employed a former Barbadian overseer to try to start sugar planting, first in St. Helena and then in Sumatra.[27]

English colonists, merchants, and traders looked for economic opportunities across the global tropics. The RAC and the EIC traded in different hemispheres, but their great trading houses were near each other in London, and the agents for each company would have shared news from across the emerging tropical empire with each other and with other merchants and traders at the Royal Exchange and at the nearby coffee houses.[28] Maurice Thompson, the governor of the EIC in 1657, had investments in Virginian tobacco and Barbadian sugar and in the trade in both European servants and African slaves to the Americas.[29] In the early 1650s, James Drax was the wealthiest sugar planter in Barbados. He owned a vast estate and 200 slaves.[30] He also became a governing member of the EIC in 1657, and he may have encouraged the Company's

[26] For cacao and indigo planting before the transition to sugar in Jamaica, see Cary Helyar to William Helyar, September 24 and November 7, 1670, p. 15, Helyar Manuscripts; Somerset Heritage Centre. For transplanting East India spices to Jamaica, see Richard Ford, "A Proposall for Removing Spices and Other Plants from the East to the West Indies," Egerton MS 2395, f. 337, f. 379, British Library. For more on these schemes, see Kate Mulry, "The Aroma of Flora's Wide Domains," in *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America*, eds. Daniela Hacke and Paul Musselwhite (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 266–271. Notes from Cary Helyar to William Helyar, December 15, 1670, DD/WHh/1090/4, and Copy of Cary Helyar to William Helyar, December 15, 1670, DD/WHh/1090/4, Helyar Manuscripts; Nicholas Blake to Charles II, February 28, 1669, CO 1/67, no. 95, [9].

[27] London to St. Helena, November 26, 1684, IOR: E/3/90, f. 251; London to St. Helena, August 3, 1687, IOR: E/3/91, f. 179v; London to Bencoolen, August 31, 1687, IOR: G/35/2, unpaginated; Henry Barham, "The Civil History of Jamaica to the Year 1722," Add MS 12422, 190, British Library; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142, 148; Dalby Thomas to RAC, May 10, 1706, T70/5, pp. 25–26.

[28] Simon P. Newman, *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration* (London: University of London Press, 2022), 16–20.

[29] David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 81; L. H. Roper, "Reorienting the 'Origins Debate': Anglo-American Trafficking in Enslaved People, c. 1615–1660," *Atlantic Studies* (2022): 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2034570 (accessed August 2023).

[30] Hilary McD. Beckles, "Plantation Production and White 'Proto-Slavery': White Indentured Servants and the Colonisation of the English West Indies, 1624–1645," *The Americas* 41, no. 3 (1985): 29.

colonization of St. Helena in 1658.[31] Martin Noell was a major investor in English overseas expansion until his death in 1665. He was an important figure in the early English slave trade from Africa and a member of Charles II's Council of Foreign Plantations. He also sat on the EIC's Court of Committees.[32] Josiah Child was a founding shareholder of the RAC, profiting from the transatlantic slave trade. In 1679, he became the largest shareholder of the EIC. He was appointed director of the EIC in 1681 and served as either the Company's governor or deputy-governor in every year of the 1680s.[33]

William Dampier serves as a striking example of how people from the British Isles traversed the global tropics in the seventeenth century and relied on slaves and slave trading to generate wealth. In the early 1670s, Dampier traveled through the Indian and Atlantic Oceans as a sailor before heading to work briefly as an overseer and sugar boiler in Jamaica on a sugar plantation called Bybrooke (see Figure A.3). He abandoned that post quickly and tried his hand at logging in the Bay of Campeche instead. He soon turned to raiding Spanish settlements on the Isthmus of Darien in Central America. In the 1680s, he participated in a raid on a Danish slave ship that was trying to trade with the RAC in West Africa, and he ransacked more settlements up and down the Pacific Coast of South America. In 1686, he returned to the East Indies, and in 1688 he began working at Bencoolen, the EIC's new pepper-trading trading foothold in Sumatra (see Figure A.4). By 1691, he found himself marooned off the coast of Australia in the Nicobar Islands, but he made his way by canoe back to Sumatra.[34] On his return to England, he stopped at Madras in

[31] J. E. Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community," *Economic History Review* 16, no. 3 (1964): 439, 439n1; L. H. Roper, *Advancing Empire: English Interests and Overseas Expansion, 1613–1688* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 169.

[32] Nick Robbins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 49–50; Veevers, *British Empire in Asia*, 81; Julie M. Svalastog, *Mastering the Worst of Trades: England's Early Africa Companies and Their Traders, 1618–1672* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 21, 113, 164, 175–178, 188, 208, 211–212, 232.

[33] Margaret R. Hunt and Phillip J. Stern, eds., *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay with Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2015), 24.

[34] Adrian Mitchell, ed., *Dampier's Monkey: The South Sea Voyages of William Dampier* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2010), 129–131; ; William Dampier's Journal (Sloane MS 3236) in *Dampier's Monkey*, ed. Mitchell, 535–536; William Hasty, "Piracy and the Production of Knowledge in the Travels of William Dampier," *Journal of Historical Geography* 37, no. 1 (2011): 42–45; "Transcription of William Whaley to Colonel

India, where he bought a half-share in an enslaved man he called Jeoly. The enslaved man was originally from Miangas, a small island in the Indonesian archipelago. In London, Dampier sold his share in Jeoly, and the enslaved man became a human exhibit: "The Painted Prince."[35] Dampier's experiences serve as a reminder that historians need to imagine English people venturing themselves and their capital through an early modern world with permeable imperial boundaries. Strictly defined historiographic boundaries, particularly those defined or shaped by the study of the origins of modern nation states, make this more difficult.

The historiographical concept of the Atlantic World has been a paradigm-shifting heuristic device for understanding European colonization in the western hemisphere from the sixteenth century until the early nineteenth century. The study of the Atlantic has allowed historians to appreciate understand broad contexts and to make transnational connections and comparisons. Historians of the colonial Americas are now more deliberately conscious of the ocean's existence as a conduit rather than a barrier, linking the British colonies on the North American mainland with Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean islands. The Atlantic framework challenged the teleological dictates of nationalist historiographies by demanding that we think of the colonial era as something more than the origins of the nation-state, demanding that we see more possibilities inherent in the past. The Atlantic World framework has also urged scholars to consider geographic spaces that might have made more sense to people in the past than people in the present, and it has led historians to better see the permeability of imperial boundaries.[36]

The Atlantic World has its limitations as a conceptual framework for understanding the larger worlds through which people like Dampier traveled. It is an anachronistic framework, invented by historians.[37] The

Helyar from Jamaica, January 27th, 1674," DD/WHh/1090/2, pp. 108, 111, Helyar Papers.

[35] David A. Chappel, *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 27–28; Geraldine Barnes, "Curiosity, Wonder, and William Dampier's Painted Prince," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006): 33–44.

[36] For work exploring the historiography of the Atlantic World, see David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Peter A. Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?" *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 725–742; Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[37] Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 742–743.

field was largely created and dominated by historians of the colonial Americas – particularly historians of the British colonies such as Bernard Bailyn, Philip D. Morgan, and Jack P. Greene.[38] It was largely an Anglocentric construct and, for the most part, it remains one.[39] It grew out of the study of early America and is still closely associated with it. As a lens of analysis, it creates a deceptive compartmentalization of the globe and threatens to place undue bias on the West.[40] As Peter Coclanis has argued, the broad framework of the Atlantic World, paradoxically, "limits the field of vision of its devotees," partly because it "accords too much weight to Europe's ventures into the Americas in the early modern period and insufficient weight to Europe's ventures in the East."[41]

To keep yielding richer insights, some aspects of European expansion demand new geographic frameworks and a more global scope. Iberian empires very clearly spread beyond the Atlantic. Lima, Potosi, the Philippines, and the trans-Pacific Manila Galleon trade are pivotal to understanding the Spanish empire and even to understanding Spanish policies in the Atlantic. Brazil and Africa played key and connected roles in the Portuguese empire but, before the 1650s, the Portuguese overseas empire was as much an Indian Ocean empire as it was an Atlantic empire.[42] The Atlantic also played a secondary role in seventeenth-century Dutch overseas expansion. The role of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the Indian Ocean is pivotal to understanding the economic miracle of the seventeenth-century Dutch empire. For every Dutch migrant who went to the Americas, 25 went to Asia.[43] The Atlantic Ocean was more important than the Indian Ocean in French expansion, but the sheer volume of sugar and coffee production in eighteenth-century St. Domingue can lead historians to overlook the

[38] Coclanis, "Drang Nach Osten: Bernard Bailyn, the World-Island, and the Idea of the Atlantic," *Journal of World History* 13, no. 1 (2002): 169–182: Games, "Atlantic History," 751; Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World," 727.

[39] Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 784–785.

[40] Smith, "Canaanising Madagascar," 277–278; Richard B. Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 44, 47–48.

[41] Coclanis, "Drang Nach Osten," 178; Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World," 726.

[42] Kenneth Maxwell, "The Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century: A Southern Perspective on the Need to Return to the 'Big Picture,'" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 3 (1993), 215; Coclanis. "Drang Nach Osten," 178.

[43] Coclanis. "Drang Nach Osten," 178.

extensive sugar plantation complex that the French developed in the Mascarene Islands – just east of Madagascar – after the 1720s or their efforts to seize some of the textile trade in southern India from the British in the first half of the eighteenth century.[44] It is also difficult to understand British overseas ventures by looking at the Atlantic Ocean alone. The British dominated the eighteenth-century Atlantic, but Asia played an increasingly critical role in the growing empire. In fact, by 1700, the British imports from Asia were collectively as valuable as their Caribbean imports and the Atlantic system was dependent on Asia.[45] The empire was an interconnected entity. In the eighteenth century, Indian textiles were used to purchase West African slaves who would be sent to grow Caribbean sugar. Scholars of the early Americas have started to appreciate that the construct of the Atlantic World might need to be more expansive. They have been embracing not just hemispheric and transatlantic but now, often, global contexts.[46] The Omohundro Institute, the flagship for early American history, has embraced the "capacious" concept of "#VastEarlyAmerica" with its seemingly limitless possibilities for expanded geographies and chronologies.[47]

Efforts to broaden the scope of early American/Atlantic history have become interwoven with the resurgence of imperial history among British

[44] Coclanis, "Drang Nach Osten," 178; Richard Eaton, "Introduction," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1; Douglas M. Peers, *India under Colonial Rule, 1700–1885* (New York: Longmans, 2006), 24–25; Jane Hooper and David Eltis, "The Indian Ocean in Transatlantic Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no. 3 (2013): 358–359.

[45] Peers, *India under Colonial Rule*, 23, 25.

[46] See for example Bowen, Mancke, and Reid, eds., *Britain's Oceanic Empire*; Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Molly Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492–1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

[47] Karin Wulf, "For 2016, Appreciating the #VastEarlyAmerica," *Uncommon Sense – The Blog*, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture (January 4, 2016), https://blog.oieahc.wm.edu/for-2016-appreciating-vastearlyamerica/ (accessed October 2022); Wulf, "Must Early America Be Vast?" *Uncommon Sense – The Blog*, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture" (May 2, 2019), https://blog.oieahc.wm.edu/must-early-america-be-vast/ (accessed October 2022); Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup, "Materials and Methods in Native American and Indigenous Studies," *William and Mary Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2018): 223–225; Wulf, "Vast Early America," *Humanities: The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities* 40, no. 1 (2019), www.neh.gov/article/vast-early-america (accessed October 2022). For more on this turn to a "#VastEarlyAmerica" framework, see Trevor Burnard, *Writing Early America: From Empire to Revolution* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2023), 16, 34–36.

historians over the last quarter century.[48] Negative associations with older top-down and Eurocentric schools of imperial history may have kept historians confined to regionalism and the nation-state through the late twentieth century, but the empire is back.[49] The confluence of these two geographically expansive historiographical movements – Atlantic and new imperial history – has led to a rich process of cross-fertilization.[50] These new perspectives have recast the colonial world as something more than a collection of nation-states in waiting. We need to avoid projecting our modern understanding of nation-states onto these earlier periods. As the British empire scholar Steven Pincus has argued, "Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain and its empire need to be understood not as a nation-state with subordinate colonies but as an *imperial state*."[51] Influenced by this emphasis on larger and interconnected contexts, historians of British colonization in the Americas have returned to stressing the role of the metropolitan state in colonial affairs, even in the seventeenth century, when the English state had limited fiscal and military power.[52] At the same time, new global histories of the British

[48] A. G. Hopkins, "Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History," *Past & Present* 164 (1999): 198–243; Richard Price, "One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 603. For a sample of the new imperial history, see Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire*, 1660–1840 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[49] Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 216.

[50] The work of scholars such as Holly Brewer, Alison Games, Steven Pincus, L. H. Roper, and Kathleen Wilson epitomizes this blended Atlantic/Imperial approach. For examples, see Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Wilson, "The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2009): 45–86; Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1294–1322; ; Steven Pincus, *The Heart of the Declaration: The Founders' Case for an Activist Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Pincus, "The Rise and Fall of Empires: An Essay in Economic and Political Liberty," *Journal of Policy History* 29.2 (2017): 305–318; Roper, *Advancing Empire*; Games, *Web of Empire*; Games, *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[51] Steve Pincus, "Reconfiguring the British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2012), 63; emphasis in the original text. See also Pincus, "Rise and Fall of Empires," 307.

[52] For examples, see Ken MacMillan, "'Bound by Our Regal Office': Empire, Sovereignty and the American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century," in *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Stephen Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 67–102; Leslie Theibert, "Making an English Caribbean, 1650–1688" (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 2013); Abigail L. Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire:*

empire are incorporating the experiences and expressing the agency of marginalized peoples within the empire, making resistance a central theme, and challenging the idea of firm boundaries and cultural or political identities.[53] Historians are reimagining older narratives of colonization and expansion, and they now see the empire as an interconnected entity but also as a more complicated, permeable, and contested space.

The British empire was the most powerful European empire in the world by the late eighteenth century, and it was rapidly becoming a global entity. They were leaders in the transatlantic slave trade from West Africa and they were able to populate the Americas with both free and forced migrants in ways that eluded other empires. This strategy of settler colonialism in the British empire helped to ensure that the British were able to drive the French out of North America in the Seven Years' War. In 1754, at the start of the war, there were nearly 1.25 million settlers huddled into British colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America. In sharp contrast, there were no more than 80,000 French settlers in North America. This "meagre population," historian W. J. Eccles claimed, was so thinly spread that the French "were not really sovereign in the lands to which they claimed title."[54] The creation of a "military-fiscal state" ensured that the British empire experienced remarkable growth after 1750.[55] The British navy ruled the Atlantic for most of the late eighteenth century, and it helped to secure their colonial possessions in India and along the coast of West Africa. The British lost hold of the thirteen mainland North American settler colonies in 1776, but the growing military force of the EIC in India in the last half of the eighteenth century – especially after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 – and the support of the English state in expanding the EIC's control in India ensured that the

Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Justin Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam: The Barbadian Diaspora and the Expansion of the English Sugar Frontier, 1650–1675," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2016): 225–256; Holly Brewer, "Slavery, Sovereignty, and 'Inheritable Blood': Reconsidering John Locke and the Origins of American Slavery," *American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017): 1038–1078.

[53] See for example Bill Nasson, *Britannia's Empire: Making a British World* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004); Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London: Verso, 2011).

[54] W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534–1760* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, [1969] 1983), xiii; William R. Nester, *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607–1755* (London: Praeger, 2000), 2.

[55] Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 208.

"second empire" would continue to grow in the East.[56] The British empire, crows historian Niall Ferguson, became "the biggest empire ever, bar none."[57]

One must be very careful, however, not to project late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century British imperial power onto the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century empire. There was nothing predestined about the rise of British power, or for that matter its offspring of twentieth-century Anglo-American global power. As David Veevers argues in his study of the early British empire in Asia, scholars need to rethink narratives about "the strength and capabilities of the European nation-state to project itself as an almost incontrovertible truth."[58] Likewise, Richard Price has stressed that historians need to better appreciate the "inherently brittle" nature of British imperial power, even at its height.[59] For much of the seventeenth century, the English empire was largely developed through private initiatives, which were loosely backed by a fiscally weak central state. It was a decentralized and fragile empire.

Before the early eighteenth century, most of the factories and settlements established by people from the British Isles were precarious endeavors, even in the Americas, where a combination of disease and the violence of Iberian colonization had killed the majority of the pre-conquest Indigenous population.[60] English ventures at Roanoke on the outer banks of North Carolina and at Meta Incognita on a freezing southern peninsula of Baffin Island were abysmal failures at the end of the sixteenth century.[61] Jamestown, settled in Virginia on a swampy island with no fresh water, became the first permanent English settlement in the Americas in 1607, but it barely survived its early years.[62] While Jamestown survived, the fort the English established at the same time on

[56] Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793* (London: Longmans, 1952); Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 209; Tony Ballantyne, "The Changing Shape of the Modern British Empire and Its Historiography," *Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (June 2010), 429–430.

[57] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2003), xi.

[58] Veevers, *British Empire in Asia*, 6.

[59] Price, "One Big Thing," 608 (quotation), 612.

[60] Massimo Livi-Bacci, "The Depopulation of Hispanic America after the Conquest," *Population and Development Review* 32, no. 2 (2006): 199–232.

[61] David B. Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584–1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985): Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 43–59.

[62] James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic, 2005).

the Kennebec River in Maine was a failure.[63] The Spanish destroyed the Puritan settlement on Providence Island in the Western Caribbean in 1641.[64] Disease and attacks by the Kalinago and French ended multiple English efforts to settle Tobago in the 1640s and their attempt to colonize St. Lucia in the 1660s.[65] The Dutch successfully invaded the thriving new English sugar colony in Surinam in 1667 and then forced the English to cede the colony at the end of the Second Anglo-Dutch War.[66] The English struggled to find a permanent perch in the Carolinas until 1670. In the 1690s, a mix of disease and Spanish and Indigenous hostility ended the Scottish settlement in the thick swamps of the Darien peninsula and Scotland's efforts to establish an empire.[67] In Africa and in Asia, English factories were even more fleeting, precariously perched as they were on the coasts and subject to the whims of indigenous polities. The EIC suffered a particularly important loss in the Indonesian spice islands in 1682 when the Dutch ousted them from the city of Bantam. The loss was decisive. As one historian explained, it "threw the English back into India."[68] Several English forts on the Gold Coast of West Africa (modern-day Ghana) were overrun or abandoned at the turn of the eighteenth century as warfare erupted in the surrounding areas and disease claimed more RAC soldiers than usual.[69] In Africa and Asia, the

[63] Christopher J. Bilodeau, "The Paradox of Sagadahoc: The Popham Colony, 1607–1608," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 1 (2014): 1–35.

[64] Karen Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[65] William Willoughby to Lords of the Council, July 9, 1668, CO 29/1, 119–120; Reverend, C. Jesse, "Important Original Document Brought to Light in Trinidad: 7th June 1664 my Ld. Francis Willughbye Instructions to the Governor of Sta. Lucia," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 28, no. 4 (1961): 105–115; Reverend C. Jesse, "Barbadians Buy St. Lucia from the Caribs: The Sale of St. Lucia by Indian Warner and other Caribs to the Barbadians in A.D. 1693," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, 32, no. 4 (November 1968): 180–186.

[66] Alison Games, "Cohabitation, Suriname-Style: English Inhabitants in Dutch Suriname after 1667," *William and Mary Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2015): 195–242; Justin Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2016): 225–256.

[67] Julie Orr, *Scotland, Darien and the Atlantic World, 1698–1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

[68] Bruce Watson, "Fortifications and the 'Idea' of Force in Early English East India Company Relations with India," *Past & Present* 88 (1980): 72; Veevers, *British Empire in Asia*, 36, 182–183.

[69] K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), 246; K. G. Davies, "Living and the Dead: White Mortality in West Africa, 1684–1732," in *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*, eds. Stanley Engerman and Eugene Genovese (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 94–95;

seventeenth-century English and their European trade rivals were usually little more than pawns in non-European imperial struggles. They survived at the whim of others.

One might argue that the English had economic interests in Asia and Africa but not an actual empire in the seventeenth century, that what can be effectively examined in this early period is the *origins* of a later empire. Scholars have advanced many definitions of what constitutes an empire. Stephen Howe offered what he sees as a "basic, consensus definition," arguing that that an empire is essentially "a large political body that rules over territories outside its original borders. It has a central power or core territory – whose inhabitants usually continue to form the dominant ethnic or national group in the entire system – and an extensive periphery of dominated areas." Pincus has endorsed and used Howe's definition.[70] It is hard to argue that the English state dominated its settlements in tropical areas of West Africa or in the Indian Ocean through the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. One could even question whether they were able to consistently dominate the territories they claimed in the seventeenth-century Caribbean or North America. The English trade in West Africa and in the Indian Ocean was heavily dependent on the political and military support of indigenous polities. The English state was rarely the primary colonial agent advancing the empire at the margins. Scholars of the EIC have argued that the Company acted as a kind of sovereign and de facto state.[71] Private enterprise was the key to English expansion. In the Americas, seventeenth-century Barbadian sugar planters began building their own colonial network, trying to establish their own de facto colonies in South Carolina and Surinam. Barbadians and Barbadian sugar capital formed the vanguard of the early empire in the West.[72] Seventeenth-century English settlement and trade were clearly not backed by the kind of state power that one can see in the later eighteenth- or nineteenth-century empire.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that a combination of English colonists, planters and merchants on the ground, the English state, and

Robin Law, "Introduction," in *The English in West Africa, 1691–1699*, ed. Law (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), ix.

[70] Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14. Other historians of the British empire have used this definition. See also Pincus, "Rise and Fall of Empires," 308.

[71] Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[72] Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam."

merchant companies such as the RAC and EIC engaged in a collective – albeit decentralized and often contested – process of empire building in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, extending the margins of empire. The empire did not emerge fait accompli in the late eighteenth century. Seventeenth-century English colonial agents struggled to extend their control or domination and to populate more English sites with English settlers. We should not downplay these early efforts to extend English dominion even if they were often failures.

In the seventeenth century, the tropics were the heart of the embryonic English empire, but English imperial endeavors in the torrid zone were particularly precarious. The English struggled to populate the tropics with settlers, soldiers, and laborers, and they struggled to keep them alive and reproducing. Tropical mosquito-borne diseases – especially yellow fever and malaria – disproportionately killed European newcomers in the tropical zone, making it particularly difficult to maintain or recruit white settlers. The military and financial weakness of the English state ensured that English traders and soldiers were often powerless or dependent within more powerful Asian and African polities. The English lacked the firepower to fend off attacks on their colonies and factories. The profits to be had in plantation agriculture, in human trafficking, in the spice trade, or, eventually, in Indian textiles ensured that the English would have European and non-European rivals and that their settlements or commercial incursions would be contested. Perhaps most importantly, people from the British Isles proved to be a labor force insufficient to build an empire in the tropics. They could not be recruited, and it proved easier to force slaves and other non-European bondsmen to labor in the back-breaking tasks necessary to conduct English trade and planting in the torrid zone.

Scholarly perceptions of British colonial settlement in the Americas have been shaped by an older colonial American historiography that overemphasized North American settlement, particularly the colonies in New England.[73] Settlers in early New England reproduced rapidly.[74] After the initial wave of Puritan migration ended in 1640, European

[73] John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 91; Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories: A Response from the Anglo-American Periphery," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007), 1415–1418.

[74] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 104, 225–227.

migration to New England slowed to a trickle.[75] Yet, between 1640 and 1700, the white population in New England continued to grow from 13,500 to 90,700. They remained predominantly of English descent.[76] Historian Geoffrey Parker observed that people in the northeastern North American colonies of New England and New France "appear to have lived longer than any other group of humans in the entire early modern world."[77] Successful white settlement in northeastern North America fits well with theories of settler colonialism.[78] The story of relentless European population growth in northeastern North America, the expansion of these people westward, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples reinforces the narrative of an inevitable British and, eventually, Anglo-American empire destined to impose its hold over large areas of the world. The demographics of white settlement in England's early tropical empire ensured the creation of a distinctly different model of empire. The English had much more tenuous foothold in the tropics. Rather than replacing populations that were indigenous to the tropics, the English depended on them. It was an English empire built, populated, and often defended by non-English people.

The dismal failure of virtually all English imperial efforts to recruit white settlers to the tropics and maintain their numbers ensured that forced migration and bound non-European labor would be the keys to English expansion across the global tropics. White settlers from the British Isles could choose to avoid migrating, whereas the enslaved had no say in the matter. As this book will show, by the late seventeenth century, people of English descent were greatly outnumbered at English sites in Africa and in the East and West Indies. Enslaved non-Europeans formed the majority at almost every site of territorial and commercial expansion in the English tropics. Yet, they remained in the minority at seventeenth-century English settlements in North America. In 1708, South Carolina became the first and only English settlement in North

[75] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 95; Mary Sarah Bilder, "The Struggle over Immigration: Indentured Servants, Slaves, and Articles of Commerce," *Missouri Law Review* 61, no. 4 (1996), 768.

[76] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 103, 227.

[77] Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth-Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 446.

[78] Donald Denoon, "Understanding Settler Societies," *Historical Studies* 18 (1979): 511–527; Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassel, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

America to have an enslaved black majority.[79] The existence of slave majorities at British sites almost everywhere in the tropics created a unique model of empire that ran counter to settler colonialism in North America. This consistent turn to slave majorities across the tropical zone demands that we think about the relationship between slavery and European colonialism through new and more transoceanic frameworks. The pattern of relying on slave majorities and non-Europeans in the tropics proved consistent across European empires. Each of the European empires, however, had to formulate a specific approach to acquiring and managing enslaved people within their tropical empires. This book will focus on the English approach to formulating a tropical empire based on slaves.

Slave studies have been shaped, as one scholar has insisted, by the "'tyranny of the Atlantic.'"[80] From a global perspective, there were many varieties of slavery and bondage in the early modern era. Racialized plantation slavery in the Americas, however, has dominated public and academic discourse to such an extent that it has become the archetype of slavery. This form of slavery – particularly its late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century iteration – remains the comparative touchstone by which other forms of bondage – both historical and twenty-first century – are judged. This archetype is now so dominant that it has skewed our definition of slavery. If one takes a broader chronological and geographical view of slavery, then it becomes apparent that the variant of permanent, inflexible, and inheritable racial slavery that became the norm on Anglo-American plantations in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was unusual.[81] The English had to invent it. Slavery – from a broad global perspective – could be temporary, the boundaries between slavery and other statuses could be more permeable than in the Anglo-American

[79] Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and the British Caribbean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 101.

[80] As quoted in Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French," 47. See also, Allessandro Stanziani, "Slavery in India," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 4, *1804–2016*, eds. David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman. Seymour Drescher, and David Richardson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 246–247.

[81] Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Miers and Kopytoff (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 3; Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 14–19; John Donoghue, "The Curse of Cromwell: Revisiting the Irish Slavery Debate," *History Ireland* 25, no. 2 (2017): 25–26; Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York: Mariner, 2017), 1.

plantation colonies, and the offspring of the enslaved did not always inherit that same status.[82] The dominance of plantation slavery in the Americas in the study of slavery has meant that slavery has become associated with Africans and plantations to such an extent that scholars and the general public have become blinded to the ubiquity of slavery and other forms of bondage that could be, as one scholar of Indigenous slavery in the Spanish Americas suggests, "akin to enslavement" in the early modern world.[83]

Both "slave" and "servant" became loose, common, and conflated terms for the people that the English acquired and exploited. Terms of bondage within the empire were contingent and contextual; they were not rigorously defined, especially not before the 1680s. Delineating between slavery and other systems of bondage is notoriously difficult. Slavery is a blurry concept at the edges.[84] Many scholars of racial slavery in the Anglo-American world – particularly those who study the nineteenth-century United States – have constructed slave/free binaries, arguing that slavery was the quintessential denial of freedom and that what made it distinctively horrific was its "chattel principle" – the idea that a person could have a price.[85] A few scholars of non-Western slavery have also

[82] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 271–273; James Brooks, *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 34–35; Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 65–69; Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 210–211; Reséndez, *Other Slavery*, 7; Anthony Reid, "Slavery and Forced Labour in Asia: *Status Quaestionis*," in *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900*, ed. Richard B. Allen (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 43.

[83] Reséndez, *Other Slavery*, 10.

[84] As early as 1961, Sidney Mintz argued that that defining slavery had its "difficulties," and that slavery could mean "different things to different societies at different times." See Sidney Mintz, "General and Enthnology: Slavery," *American Anthropologist* 63, no. 3 (1961), 587. See also Sean Stillwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5; Rebecca Anne Goetz, "Indian Slavery: An Atlantic and Hemispheric Problem," *History Compass* 14, no. 2 (2016): 61.

[85] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, 1999), 19–44, 117–134; Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2–5. See also Johnson, ed., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Daina Ramey Berry made the question of "what it meant to be a person with a price" central to her research. See Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (New York: Beacon Press, 2017), 207; Lee B. Wilson, *Bonds of Empire: The*

highlighted "the saleable property of another" as central to the definition of enslavement.[86] Yet, some historians of non-Western forms of slavery have offered distinctly different models of slavery. They have been less interested in the idea that slaves constituted a form of property or that slavery was a condition of unfreedom. They prefer to focus on the slaves' connections or lack of connections to kinship and community networks.[87] In his masterful study of global slave systems, Orlando Patterson dispelled the notion that "only slaves are capable of being bought and sold." The key elements of slavery, he argued, were that the enslaved were powerless, dishonored and "Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth."[88] Because efforts to define slavery often bring scholars back to the archetype of racialized plantation slavery in the Anglo-American world, that iteration of bondage has led to a kind of definitional tyranny. Rather than chasing that elusive definition of slavery, it may be better to think more about vulnerabilities and forms of exploitation along a vast continuum between slavery and freedom or – perhaps more fittingly for an early modern world that was less focused on the principle of freedom – slavery and belonging.[89] As they ventured through the tropics in the seventeenth century, the English were able to take advantage of both a wide variety of bondage systems and ambiguities in the status of bondage to acquire both forced laborers and settlers.

While Africans became the people most subject to enslavement in the early modern era, there were many vulnerable ethnic groups brought into bondage at English sites in the tropics. The English, desperate for labor power to build the empire, were inveterate opportunists. They transported convicts, the poor, orphans, and prisoners of war from the British Isles to the Americas to serve as forced laborers. English merchants bought prisoners of war from African coastal elites on the Gold Coast. Indigenous Arawak and Kalinago people sold enslaved captives for paltry sums to English planters in Surinam. The EIC traded guns for Malagasy people stolen from their homes in the highlands of Madagascar. They also

English Origins of Slave Law in South Carolina and British Plantation America, 1660–1783 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 30–31.

[86] Reid, "Slavery and Forced Labour in Asia," 36.

[87] Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, 3–102; James L. Watson, "Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems," in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 9–13; Brooks, *Captives & Cousins*, 33–40, 245, 364–365.

[88] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5, 23 (quotations), 1–14, 21–26.

[89] Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 2–5.

bought children displaced by warfare or famine on the Indian subcontinent and people enslaved by debt in the Indonesian islands of Borneo, Nias, Sulawesi, and others. English people were normally the enslavers in the master–slave relationship, but they were occasionally taken as captives themselves, forced to toil on Mediterranean galleys or held in bondage by local rulers in India.[90] From the outset of imperial expansion, English demand for forced laborers exceeded the supply. The English had no qualms about engaging in and profiting from human trafficking wherever such people were available and affordable. People were simply one of the many commodities available throughout the early modern world.

The number of bondsmen held by the English in the tropics grew rapidly after the middle of the seventeenth century. African slavery began to replace indentured servitude in Barbados in the 1650s, and it was legally codified in the 1660s. The institution grew and spread quickly thereafter through the Eastern Caribbean and into North America. The demand for Caribbean labor was so high once sugar had been introduced in the late 1640s that the English also began to draw large numbers of Indigenous slaves into the Caribbean from the Guianas in the 1650s and then from the Carolinas after 1670. The RAC developed a large-scale trade in slaves with Africa in the 1660s to fuel the spread of sugar, but they were more concerned with African gold than African slaves until at least the 1680s. In the Indian Ocean, EIC merchants and other English investors used slaves throughout the seventeenth century to build or maintain factories. From the 1640s onward, they even imagined slave-based colonies peppered with plantations producing tropical agriculture. In the 1680s, the EIC became even more committed to using slaves to fortify its trading possessions, particularly in St. Helena and in Sumatra. They shifted to a more inflexible form of slavery that resembled the Caribbean system.[91] They began to purchase and trade in slaves on a larger scale at the same time as Jamaicans in the Western Caribbean were shifting toward a majority enslaved population and sugar agriculture.

Many forms of slavery and forced labor existed throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The English grafted onto existing slave systems in

[90] For important work on this topic, see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (New York: Pantheon, 2002).

[91] Richard B. Allen, "Slavery in a Remote but Global Place: The British East India Company and Bencoolen, 1685–1825," *Social and Education History* 7, no. 2 (2018): 153–154; Michael D. Bennett. "Slaves, Weavers, and the Peopling of the East India Company Colonies," in *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia*, ed. Allen, 240–241; Bennett, "Caribbean Plantation Economies."

the Atlantic and Indian oceans and used those sources of supply whenever they were available to help build their tropical empire. They gradually developed a more homogeneous and racialized English hybrid of slavery at their own tropical sites. This process stretched across most of the seventeenth century, but by the early eighteenth century, the English had developed a race-based form of labor slavery across the imperial state that was particularly draconian. It was a variant of slavery with less permeable boundaries between slavery and freedom than those that had existed in the slave systems the English initially encountered. The commodification of slave labor and an increasingly sophisticated understanding of property rights in slave labor was also central to the development of the emerging English slave systems. Perhaps most importantly, slaves were denied the privileges of subjecthood within the empire – a kind of social death.[92] This allowed the English to impose much more brutal and dehumanizing punishments with relative impunity.

Fragile Empire explores English efforts to expand their commercial and colonial reach across the global tropical belt from the mid-1640s through the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Because seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century colonial architects conceptualized the torrid zone as a distinct geographic framework, that geographic lens deserves the attention of modern historians. The current historiographic emphasis on seeing beyond the development of the nation-state in the early modern era and the return to imperial histories has created space for such a study. This book will stress that the English turned to slavery and forced migration to maintain the tropical empire. The first half of the book examines the creation of a lucrative tropical English empire grounded on slave labor, while the second half of the book explores how forced labor, forced migration, and the disease environment of the

[92] Subjecthood has played an important role in Holly Brewer's work on the rise of English slavery. See "Subjects by Allegiance to the King? Debating Status and Power for Subjects – and Slaves – through the Religious Debates of the Early British Atlantic," *State and Citizen: British America and the Early United States*, eds. Peter Thompson and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2013), 25–51; Brewer, "Slavery, Sovereignty, and 'Ineritable Blood': Reconsidering John Locke and the Origins of American Slavery," *American Historical Review*, 122, no. 4 (2017): 1048, 1071–1072. Anna Suranyi in her work on indentured servitude has also argued that the rights of subjecthood, which she equates with citizenship, made the bondage of white servants different from the bondage of enslaved people. See Anna Suranyi, *Indentured Servitude: Unfree Labor and Citizenship in the British Colonies* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Presses, 2021). For more on the concept of social death as a defining principle of slavery, see Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

tropics produced racial demographics that made the tropical empire seem particularly fragile. The English empire grew into the British empire after the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Act of Union, but this book will focus for the most part on the expansion of the *English* empire.[93]

Although the fine minutiae and nuance of English settlement and trade in the tropics may be lost with such a broad geographical and chronological scope, the gains in this study will be greater than the sum of the many small losses. Global perspectives are invariably difficult because, as A. G. Hopkins once remarked, "Regional specialists have constructed impressive fortresses of knowledge that can easily withstand efforts to incorporate them into any wider union."[94] Broader syntheses, however, create fertile grounds for new connections and insights. This book offers the reader a chance to reconsider the origins and meaning of human bondage in the English empire through a new geographical framework, one that incorporates the East and the West. It highlights the many iterations of slavery in different contexts around the global tropics. By showing the plurality of this insidiously flexible institution, it will encourage new ways of thinking about the definition of slavery itself. This book will also offer a new lens on the tenuous development of the early English empire, reinforcing the extent to which the English were forced to rely on non-English peoples to build that early empire. It will urge us to reconsider the nature and meaning of empire.

To better understand the minutiae of settlement, this book will often restrict its focus to comparisons of Barbados and Jamaica with the RAC sites on the Gold Coast and EIC settlements and factories on the Coromandel Coast of India and in St. Helena and Sumatra. These were the sites at which slavery became most entrenched in the tropics. EIC factories and the textile trade in India were far more important in the later eighteenth century than their Indonesian factories, but it is important to appreciate that the EIC was still intent on seizing a portion of the Indonesian pepper trade from the Dutch through most of the seventeenth century. Their Indonesian factories remained central to their vision of expansion, meriting a closer examination. This book undertakes a close examination of the archival records of English settlement from places in

[93] Some historians would argue that the Englishness of the British empire persisted after 1707. Hopkins argues that the British empire was a "predominantly English empire" until the loss of the North American mainland colonies in 1776. See Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 212.

[94] Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 198.

the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century tropics at which the English had begun to transition to slave majorities.

Although this book will help to underscore common elements within the English tropical empire, there were clearly significant differences between the English imperial presence in the circum-Caribbean world and their presence in Africa or Asia. When the English arrived, the Indigenous populations in the circum-Caribbean had been largely destroyed by smallpox, influenza, and measles epidemics introduced by the Spanish and Portuguese. The English could carve a space, albeit with significant violence, in this world for themselves and build colonies. In the Caribbean, the English built plantations and stocked them with the enslaved to produce the exotic goods they sought, but in tropical Asia and Africa the English normally traded in goods produced or sold within local empires. The early tobacco and cotton plantations that rose in the English Caribbean in the 1620s and the sugar plantations that were developed in the 1640s required far more slaves and forced laborers than the trading stations in tropical Asia or Africa. It was also much easier for people from the British Isles to sail across the Atlantic to supply and defend these Caribbean colonies than it was for them to establish and defend colonies off the coast of Madagascar or the Indonesian islands. In West Africa and in Southeast Asia, the English remained traders and middlemen, perched on the edge of much larger and more powerful indigenous empires that had not, like the populations in the Americas, been decimated by disease. The English in Asia were far from home and far more vulnerable themselves. In the Caribbean, the English became exclusively slave masters but, as they sailed along the Barbary Coast or settled in India, they were also subject to being enslaved.

To set the stage, the first chapter traces the contours of the expanding English tropical empire in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Commercial and territorial settlement in the tropics offered significant potential for profit, but the English had to contend with other European rivals in this age of overseas expansion. In the seventeenth century, the English built a territorial and commercial empire on the on the heels of Iberian powers and, in the East Indies, in the shadow of the Dutch. Like their European rivals, English colonists, traders, and governors turned to forced labor and migration to maintain the tropical empire. As they forged this new predominantly slave empire, English investors experimented with a wide variety of different colonial models. They tried to extend plantation agriculture beyond the Americas, and they tried to bring the spices and peppers of the East Indies crops to the Americas to

grow. They became both imitators and innovators, modeling the successful endeavors of European rivals but also carving their own path. The late seventeenth-century empire was not so neatly divided into territorial expansion in the West and commercial settlement in the East. The tropics remained a place full of lucrative possibilities, and the English remained opportunists as investors and as enslavers. Many, if not most, of their ventures were utter failures. But slave-produced goods and factories constructed and maintained by forced labor ensured profit margins that would be high enough to continue to attract investors. By the end of the seventeenth century, slavery had become the defining feature of the English tropical empire.

The second and third chapters will turn to studying the kinds of people held in bondage in the English tropics and the conditions or terms of that bondage. It will stress the diversity of people forced to labor and migrate within the English empire. The second chapter will focus on six groups in particular: the poor, criminals, and prisoners of war from the British Isles; the Indigenous people of the circum-Caribbean; enslaved West Africans from the Gold Coast (principally modern-day Ghana); people sold into slavery in India during times of famine and political destabilization (especially on the Coromandel Coast); the Malagasy people of Madagascar; and the Indigenous peoples of the Indonesian archipelago. This chapter will focus on the political and socioeconomic conditions that made people vulnerable to enslavement or other closely adjacent forms of bondage. The third chapter will turn to the many forms of bondage in the early English tropics, showing how difficult it can be to even define slavery from a global perspective, especially over the course of the seventeenth century. There was a blurry line between slavery and other conditions of bondage or subjugation, but the English gradually developed a more consistent approach to non-European enslavement across the tropics. By the 1680s, one particularly inflexible and brutal genus of racial slavery – forged in the Caribbean – had outcompeted most other forms of slavery, and it became the default in the English empire.

The fourth chapter explores how the disease environments of the tropics shaped English settlement and limited free white migration. The globalization of forced labor markets and trade were catalysts in the spread of yellow fever, dengue and falciparum malaria, diseases that originated in Africa and that disproportionately weakened or killed English migrants to the tropics. The ways in which the English understood and responded to evolving tropical disease environments contributed to the rise of enslaved majorities in the tropics, and the effects of

those disease environments on different populations informed ideas about human difference that would coalesce into a more hardened nineteenth-century racism. The chapter will focus on case studies of how disease in the Caribbean, in Sumatra, and on the West African Gold Coast at key points in the seventeenth century made English footholds in the tropics much more precarious than in other more temperate zones of the empire.

The fifth and sixth chapters examine the impact of slave majorities and limited white migration and settlement to the English tropics. Chapter 5 details the increasing black to white ratios at tropical sites across the colonies during and after the dispersal of white settlers from Barbados from the 1640s through the 1670s. The English tried to mitigate their fears of these emerging racial imbalances by turning to new modes of political arithmetic to socially engineer populations and recruit more European migrants. They calculated how many white settlers would be necessary to ensure the survival of the English in the tropics and counter the new crisis in political economy. These constructed metrics helped to entrench ideas about racial distinctions. Chapter 6 turns to the threat of invasion and insurrection that most English tropical colonies faced because of dwindling white migration and the English reliance on bondage and forced migration to populate and build the tropical empire. It shows how the very real threat of invasion and insurrection shaped these colonies and how the English navigated these twin threats. Ultimately, English settlers and governors in the Caribbean turned to brutal and draconian policies of slave management to maintain their colonies while English agents in Asia and Africa were forced to rely on others to help them control the enslaved and defend their factories and settlements. By the end of the seventeenth century, the English in both the East and West Indies had begun to tentatively explore the idea of arming the enslaved, turning to their non-European bondsmen to build, populate, and now even defend the empire. Armed slaves became agents of empire.

The combination of enslaved majorities, European rivals eager to build their own tropical empires, disease outbreaks, and the existence of more powerful indigenous polities in Africa and Southeast Asia made the English continually anxious about their settlements in the torrid zone. In West Africa and Southeast Asia, the English were subordinate powers, and they relied in large part on the support and protection of the people among whom they had settled to control their slaves and maintain their interests. The indigenous Asian and African populations living around English factories routinely suppressed slave uprisings and captured runaways, although they did not always bring them back. Across the empire,

English governors, merchants, and settlers continually invented and then reinvented modes and metrics of political economy to try to mitigate the threat of invasion or rebellion. They turned to draconian violence to control the enslaved in the West and in the East, and they codified and entrenched that violence in slave laws in the West.

From a broad global perspective, the economic heart of the early overseas empire was in the tropics. It was, overwhelmingly, a slave empire, and it was a fragile one. The emergence of slave majorities threatened the survival of English colonial ventures, but slavery also ensured profits were high enough that the English persisted. In the eighteenth century, British planters became masters of sugar production in the Caribbean, and British traders became the dominant force in the eighteenth-century transatlantic slave trade. By 1815, they controlled the most significant Caribbean colonies. Whereas English merchants had struggled through the seventeenth century to control more of the pepper trade in Indonesia, they found a more lucrative trade in textiles in India by the turn of the eighteenth century. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the British would rule India, and by the late nineteenth century they would participate in the European scramble to colonize Africa. The survival and ultimate power of this mighty British empire was never preordained. This book joins recent scholarly efforts to counter the assumption that the British were destined to expand across the globe, as if there was something inherent or superior in the West that would ensure that expansion. The early English empire was a chaotic and unstable place. Non-English people – some willing and some forced – ensured the survival of the early English empire. The tropical empire – the heart of early English overseas expansion – was built on the backs of slaves; it was populated by forced migrants; it was dependent on the support of indigenous African and Asian polities. It emerged in the eighteenth century from its uncertain origins because greed trumped fear.