The Unfree Origins of English Empire-Building in the Seventeenth Century Atlantic

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Weighing his country's prospects for empire in 1654, Thomas Scot declared that the people of England were poised to become "masters of the whole world."¹ Although certainly grandiose, Scot's boast was nonetheless grounded in a less-encompassing reality. As a leading Parliamentarian, Scot had borne witness to how the English Revolution had transformed England from a monarchy to a republic that had dedicated itself to imperial expansion. Although historians will always disagree about the empire's chronological origins, many would concur that the 1649–1654 era marked a critical point in the empire's emergence. During this period, the revolutionary state had conquered and colonized Catholic Ireland, vanquished the Dutch in a naval war, and launched two transatlantic expeditions to bring oscillating colonies more firmly into the imperial orbit. At the same time, Parliamentary legislation laid the legal foundations for what would become a prosperous empire. Indeed, at the end of 1654, the year Scot made his enthusiastic declaration about England's imperial potential, the state mobilized a transatlantic armada consisting of 42 ships and 13,490 men to conquer and colonize Spanish Hispaniola. Although the expedition failed in that attempt, it did conquer Jamaica, creating an English colony out of a former Spanish possession where profits from sugar, extracted from the labor of slaves, would make it one of the richest dominions in the imperial realm.² Scot's bragadocio, in sum, was a commentary on the English state's first, concerted foray into empire-building in the Atlantic world.

This chapter discusses the labor history surrounding the birth of England's Atlantic empire during the age of the English Revolution. The religious, discursive, commercial, and intellectual history of the early empire has been well-documented; its labor history, however, has a comparatively thinner

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- 1 Scot quoted in Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1648–1653* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 330–331.
 - 2 British Library Sloane Mss 3926 fol. 2; Frances Henderson, ed., *The Clarke Papers: Further Selections from the Papers of William Clarke*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5, 203, 205; Bernard Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution 1648–1660* (London: Clarendon Press, 1989), 87.

literature.³ Equally problematic, the labor histories of England's seventeenth century colonies rarely adopt an imperial or even an Atlantic perspective and too often contain themselves to questions bound by some of economic history's most myopic methodologies.⁴ Employing labor as a useful category of historical analysis, however, reveals that the state found it impossible to begin building its Atlantic empire without laying revolutionary claims to its dominion over the bodies and labor power of the people it governed in Britain and Ireland. Labor history also illustrates how the new imperial state's policies facilitated England's rise as a slave trading power, hastened the evolution of multiple forms of chattel bondage in the colonies, and contributed to one of the most tragically profound innovations of early modern capitalism, the racialization of slavery in the English Atlantic.

As this chapter discusses, to lay the political and economic foundations of England's Atlantic empire, the state found it necessary to mobilize what the historian Evelyn Jennings has called "productive" and "constructive" labor. As Jennings explains in the Spanish imperial context, productive labor occurred in mines and on plantations which had been capitalized through private investment. These ventures profitably exploited workers by subjecting them to various forms of unfree labor ranging from the native American tribute system to the perpetual enslavement of both creole and African-born "negros." In contrast to the mostly private organization of productive labor, the Spanish

- 3 David Armitage, "The Cromwellian Protectorate and the Languages of Empire," *Historical Journal* vol. 35, no. 3 (1992): 531–555; *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robert M. Bliss, *Revolution and Empire: English Politics and the American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Errand into the Indies: Puritan Colonization from Providence Island through the Western Design," *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 45, no. 2 (1988): 70–99; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Although Chapter 6 in Pestana's book deals with the labor history of the early empire, for a more comprehensive and insightful treatment, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). Unfortunately, Abigail Swingen's new work on the labor history of the empire was published too late to make use of in this chapter. See Swingen's *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
- 4 For influential economic histories of colonial servitude, see David Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and David Souden, "Rogues, Whores and Vagabonds? Indentured Servant Emigrants to North America, and the Case of Mid-Seventeenth-Century Bristol," *Social History* vol. 3, no. 1 (1978): 23–41. For my critique of these works and other economic studies of servitude, see "Indentured Servitude in the Seventeenth Century Atlantic: A Brief Survey of the Literature," *History Compass* (2013): 1–10.

imperial state directed the “constructive” labor of infrastructural development, employing a mix of Crown slaves, convicts, political prisoners, and contract laborers to build docks, wharves, roads, forts, canals, and railroads. The infrastructural work of these unfree laborers helped make private colonial investment profitable and the colonies themselves defensible from pirates, privateers, and imperial armadas.⁵

When compared to its Spanish counterpart, however, the English state took the lead in helping to procure and deploy both productive and constructive labor in the mid-seventeenth century, the very point at which it chose to assert itself as the sovereign agent of English imperial expansion around the Atlantic. The productive labor of seventeenth century servants and slaves in English colonies is almost always explored within a colonial context, while constructive military labor in the seventeenth century English empire has only begun to attract scholarly attention.⁶ As this chapter demonstrates, broadening our perspective from mere colonial to Atlantic-wide horizons illuminates how the early imperial state began forging a political economy of capitalism through the coercion of military and plantation labor on a scale unprecedented in English history.

5 See p. XX of this volume.

6 Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For dynamic and influential work on seventeenth century servitude and slavery in the English colonial context, see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, 2 vols. (New York: Verso, 1997); Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975). I have attempted an Atlantic analysis of servitude and slavery in “Out of the Land of Bondage: The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition,” *American Historical Review* vol. 115, no. 4 (2010): 943–974 and “Fire under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Chapter 7. For pioneering scholarship on military labor, see Denver Brunsman’s *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 1–38 for an insightful overview of the history of English naval impressment, ca. 1500–1700; the rest of Brunsman’s book deals with the key part naval impressment played in eighteenth century British empire-building. For other leading work on the relationship between military labor and eighteenth century British imperialism, see Niklas Frykman, “Seamen on Late Eighteenth Century Warships,” *International Review of Social History* vol. 54 (2009): 67–93; Peter Way, “Class Warfare: Primitive Accumulation, Military Revolution and the British War Worker,” in Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth eds., *Beyond Marx: Confronting Labor History and the Concept of Labor with the Global Labor Relations of the 21st Century* (Berlin and Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2009); “Memoirs of an Invalid: James Miller and the Making of the British-American Empire in the Seven Years’ War,” in Donna Haverty-Stacke and Daniel J. Walkowitz ed., *Rethinking U.S. Labor History: Essays in the Working-Class Experience, 1756–2009* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 25–53.

To proceed, this chapter begins with a discussion of how the Commonwealth encouraged the transatlantic slave trade from Africa through imperial legislation and the impact these commercial policies had on the development of the colonial plantation complex. It then moves on to chart the reasons why the new imperial state revolutionized the system of colonial “transportation,” the process by which the poor and others deemed undesirable were shipped into forced labor in the colonies. The last part of the chapter focuses on how the state, in the face of popular opposition, mobilized constructive labor for empire-building by means of military conscription.

Slave Trade

In the three years following its birth in 1649, the revolutionary Republic legislated England's Atlantic empire into existence through three sets of laws: the Plantation Act of 1650; the Navigation Act (1651); and the Act for the Settlement of Ireland (1652). The Irish settlement bill will be discussed below, but for now it's important to recognize that Parliament established its sovereignty over the colonies through the Plantation Act, which in turn gave it the authority to regulate imperial commerce through the Navigation Act the next year. Parliament intended to use the Navigation Act as leverage against Holland by forbidding Dutch merchants to trade with English colonies. At the time, the United Provinces loomed large in English eyes as Europe's greatest naval power. The Dutch Republic also figured as England's most potent commercial competitor around the globe, even in commerce with its own Atlantic colonies. The English hoped that the Navigation Act and the daunting prospect of lost profits would compel the Dutch to accept their invitation to partner in a militant Protestant, republican empire. Besides paving the way for a Protestant internationale, the imperial union the English proposed to the Dutch would open each country's global and colonial markets to the other, a lucrative trade that would fall under the protection of the world's most formidable blue water fighting forces. The United Provinces, however, rejected the Commonwealth's overture and the two republics went to war on the high seas in 1652.⁷ England's victory in 1654 forced the Dutch to accept the Navigation Act's trade restrictions, an obvious boon to English merchants engaged in colonial commerce. Written largely by Maurice Thomson and Martin Noell, England's leading colonial merchants and two of the nation's most important slave traders, the Navigation Act created an

7 There were three seventeenth century Anglo-Dutch Wars: 1652–1654; 1665–1667; 1672–1674.

imperial trade zone with excise and customs duties that forced colonists to conduct all extra-colonial commerce through English ports. It also promoted a version of what contemporaries called “free trade,” in the sense that although the Act closed colonial commerce to foreigners, it opened it up to English merchants whose commerce abroad had been previously restricted by merchant monopolies.⁸ Free trade under the Navigation Act meant greater access to the African slave trade for English merchants; indeed, the Navigation Act helped inaugurate England’s rise as a slave trading Atlantic empire. Parliament had reincorporated the Guinea Company in 1651 to encourage its commercial ventures in Africa. But the state used the Navigation Act the same year to prevent the Guinea Company from monopolizing the commerce in enslaved Africans. As a result, new competition among English merchants expanded the volume of the slave trade to the English West Indies. By the mid-1650s, at least seventy five English slave ships were plying their lethal but very profitable trade off the African Gold Coast. By 1659, a Dutch bureaucrat living in the Bight of Benin recorded his wonder at the “endless number of (English) slavers” sailing there to purchase African people. By the end of the decade, vessels flying the English ensign were unloading 2,000 slaves annually to Barbados. As the Barbados historian Larry Gragg has noted, in the 1650s, English merchants eclipsed their Dutch rivals in the slave trade to the island. In a revealing instance of how the slave trade facilitated by the Navigation Act promoted the imperial state’s other interests in the Caribbean, General Robert Venables, a commander of the Western Design expedition, drew on the authority of the Act to impound the “cargo” of a Dutch slave ship captured in Barbados. Venables then sold the slaves to sugar planters to raise money to buy arms for the impending English invasion of Spanish Hispaniola.⁹

8 J.E. Farnell, “The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community,” *Economic History Review* vol. 16, no. 3 (1964): 439–454; Russell Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 59; “Plantation Empire: How Sugar and Tobacco Planters Built Their Industries and Raised an Empire,” *Agricultural History* vol. 81, no. 3 (2007): 312–314; Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: Economic History of the West Indies, 1623–1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 92–95.

9 Larry Gragg, “To Procure Negros: The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627–1660,” *Slavery and Abolition* vol. 16, no. 1 (1995): 65–84; Margaret Makepeace, “English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657–1688: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive,” *History in Africa*, vol. 16 (1989): 237–284; John C. Appleby, “A Guinea Venture, c. 1657: A Note on the Early English Slave Trade,” *Mariner’s Mirror* vol. 79, no. 1 (1993): 84–87; Leo F. Stock, *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America*, 5 vols. (Washington, DC, 1924), 1: 121–123; W. Noel Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and the*

The Navigation Act and the boom in England's African slave trade that it helped make possible figured crucially in the demographic transition of the unfree workforce on Barbados, where "negro" slaves began outnumbering European indentured servants certainly by the early 1660s, if not the mid-1650s. Barbados thus became the first place in the English empire to experience what colonial slavery scholars have called "the terrible transformation," whereby the system of permanent slavery, justified on racial grounds, replaced the indentured labor system as the main form of unfree labor in the colonial plantation complex. A decade after the passage of the Navigation Act, contemporaries, noting the profitability of racialized slavery, were calling African slaves "the sinews" of England's empire of liberty. The commercial policies of the newly-conceived imperial state thus played a catalytic part in the rise of slavery in the English West Indies and the racial stratification of freedom and slavery around the empire. As early as 1659, a member of Parliament, fearing that transporting Royalist rebels into colonial servitude had violated the civil liberties of free born Englishmen, wondered aloud if the political "slavery" of arbitrary government had led to the physical enslavement of English people, thus making their lives "as cheap as...negros."¹⁰

The Navigation Acts fostered a conflicted imperial discourse of freedom and slavery. Royalist sugar planters despised the Navigation Act, arguing that a revolutionary regime of usurping puritan fanatics had forced them into political "slavery" by disrupting their own "free trade" with Dutch slavers, who had supplied them with African slaves at the outset of the sugar boom. Free trade, as highlighted by this conflict between the imperial state and colonial capitalists, had yet to take on a coherent meaning in the seventeenth century. Perhaps more

West Indies, 1574–1660 (London, 1860), 331, 339; Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 1441–1700* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930), 1: 126–134; C.H. Firth, ed., *The Narrative of General Venables* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1900), 34; Appendix D, 140–141; Bodleian Library Carte Ms 74 fol.37.

- 10 50,251 people from Britain and Ireland and elsewhere in Europe arrived in the English Chesapeake and Caribbean between 1650 and 1660. Historians estimate that anywhere between 50% and 75% of these migrants were servants. 40,726 people of African descent were imported, mostly to the Caribbean, during the same period, nearly all of them as enslaved persons. As the European (mostly from Britain and Ireland) rate of migration had greatly outpaced that from Africa (almost all from west/central Africa) during the preceding decades of colonization, unfree workers from Europe continued to outnumber their African counterparts in the English Atlantic during the early 1650s, although Africans on Barbados came to outnumber Europeans by the late 1650s or early 1660s; this did not occur in the Chesapeake until the 1690s. For colonial migration statistics, see David Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (New York, 1984), 216–218, tables H3 and H4. See E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London, 1981), 227; Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 210–212.

importantly, the debate over free trade reveals how the commercial tensions generated by the conflicting interests of colonists and the imperial state were present at the empire's creation. Sharpened by the political language of freedom and slavery, these tensions rose and fell over the next century, although they spiked again little more than a century later following the passage of another set of navigation acts. The ensuing political dispute between colonists and the home government helped generate the imperial crisis that culminated in the American Revolution.¹¹

But in another, much less discursive struggle between freedom and slavery, English merchants, seamen, and planters were forced to confront determined resistance by the Africans they had enslaved through "free trade," both on plantations and on the slave ships themselves. Across the Atlantic during the 1650s, slave ships bound for the West Indies supplied the stage for several slave uprisings. During the same period, a series of slave rebellions shook Barbados and Bermuda, encouraged by both the growing number of slaves in those colonies and the political fallout from the English Revolution, which divided the planocracy and disrupted the disciplinary regime of the plantation, a vulnerability

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- 11 Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War and the London Merchant Community," 439–454. For the argument that the Navigation Act had more to do with English Continental diplomacy than colonial commercial competition, see Stephen Pincus, *Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1658* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40–50. For a view critical of Pincus' that stresses the commercial dimensions of the Navigation Acts and first Anglo-Dutch War, see Jonathan Israel, "England, the Dutch Republic, and Europe in the Seventeenth Century," *Historical Journal* vol. 4, no. 2 (1997): 117–121. Outside the small circle of elite merchant revolutionaries, members of the radical republican Leveller movement also advocated for "free trade" because it helped small producers and wore away at the royal prerogative. See, for instance, see John Lilburne, *The Charters of London, or the Second Part of London's Liberty in Chains Discovered* (London, 1646). For more scholarship on seventeenth century notions of free trade, see Christian J. Koot, "A 'Dangerous Principle': Free Trade Discourses in Barbados and the English Leeward Islands, 1650–1689," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* vol. 5, no.1 (2007): 132–163; Thomas Leng, "Commercial Conflict and Regulation in the Discourse of Trade in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* vol. 48, no. 4 (2005): 933–954; Pestana, *English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 159–174; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge, 2000), 100–124. For the classic statement of unrestricted free trade, see Hugo Grotius, *Mare Liberum* (Amsterdam, 1609). For the inter-imperial view, see John Selden, *Mare Clausum* (London, 1635). The imperial state periodically attempted to enforce its commercial policies on the colonies (ca. 1650–1775) with limited success. As Nuala Zahedieh argues, by the turn of the eighteenth century, colonists and their commercial and financial partners in London had created a de facto free trading Atlantic economy that largely eluded the state's commercial restrictions. See Zahedieh's *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660–1700* (New York: Cambridge, 2010).

that the enslaved seized upon to exploit. The enslaved would continue to resist in a cycle of Atlantic-wide rebellions that stretched into the late eighteenth century. In contrast to the navigation acts, these rebellions created an imperial crisis from below in the wake of the American Revolution, when hundreds of thousands of Britons, inspired by the freedom struggles of slaves and uneasy about the state's attempt to subject their American cousins to the imperial yoke, turned to abolitionism in an attempt to redefine the nature of British liberty.¹²

Colonial Transportation

While commercial legislation made a formative contribution to England's rapid ascent as a competitive player in the African slave trade, the state itself did not directly engage in the trade; the imperial state did, however, participate extensively in the trade of indentured servants, who made up the bulk of the unfree workforce on English plantations for much of the seventeenth century. It should be noted at the outset of this discussion that the history of English colonial transportation preceded the birth of the imperial state. Early in the seventeenth century, in conjunction with local government and private interests, the state began transporting people into colonial servitude to alleviate the social problems that civil society associated with England's rapid population growth. These initiatives, however, required the state to assume a power over its own people that it had never exercised before. In 1618, the City of London and the Virginia Company had devised a plan to capture and ship poor children to Virginia, where their moral characters would be reformed through the discipline that "severe masters" would mete out on them as domestics and tobacco field hands. The concern the Virginia Company and the City showed for the children's moral well-being must be measured against the protests of the children's parents, the children themselves, and members of the London citizenry. In the winter of 1619, all of these constituencies petitioned the English state to stop a shipment to Virginia of over a hundred poor children, whom constables had seized on the City streets. Responding to these petitions, the Privy Council, acting on behalf of King James I, recognized that no legal

12 Jerome Handler, "Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *New West Indian Guide* vol. 56 (1982): 5–43. Hilary McD Beckles, "A Riotous and Unruly Lot': Irish Indentured Servants and Freeman in the English West Indies, 1644–1713," *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 4 (1990): 503–522; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Chapters 4–6. Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

foundation existed to force children away from their families to work against their will “beyond the seas.” As a result, the Privy Council turned to the royal prerogative and sanctioned the City/Virginia Company plan, declaring it as beneficial to the state for relieving it of future idlers, criminals and vagabonds. Reinforcing the position of the City and Virginia Company, the Privy Council also asserted that the allegedly dissolute children would be morally redeemed through hard labor and stern task masters.¹³

The English Revolution and the imperial turn it quickly took produced another revolution in the state’s colonial transportation policies, when England’s self-described “godly” revolutionaries united their vision of social reformation at home with imperial ambitions abroad. Whereas before the Revolution, transportation evolved as a measure to combat the unruly expansion of the early modern English population, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1638–1651) and the English Civil Wars (1642–1651), which provided the military context for the English Revolution, had led to a dramatic population decline, around 3% of the total population. The figure, in comparison, exceeded the percentage of English killed during World War I. Although an expanding population no longer presented problems, puritan revolutionaries made England’s moral reformation a much higher policy priority than had their royal predecessors, passing a 1652 act that empowered all English JPs to ship undesirables off to colonial plantations. Scouring the land of what the self-styled saints described as the “noxious humours” of “lewd...dangerous...rogues, vagrants, and other idle persons,” would “secure the peace of the Commonwealth” and promote England’s Christian regeneration. Moral reformation at home, in turn, would provide the foundation for godly expansion abroad to advance England’s interests, the first of which, according to the state, lay in advancing the apocalyptic project of the Protestant Reformation. Deliberating with the Council of State over the proposed invasion of the Spanish West Indies in the spring of 1654, Cromwell told the Council of State that he planned to use “force to secure...eight or ten thousand bodies of men every year” to “vent” them out of England and Scotland and onto Caribbean plantations. Caribbean empire-building thus promoted England’s domestic reformation through a program of ethical cleansing based on colonial transportation. “Providence,”

13 Abbot Emerson Smith, “The Transportation of Convicts to the American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century,” *American Historical Review* vol. 39, no. 2 (1934): 233–234; J.V. Lyle, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, vol. 37, 1619–1621 (London, 1931), 118; Robert C. Johnson, “The Transportation of Vagrant Children from London to Virginia, 1618–1622,” in Howard S. Reinmuth, Jr., ed., *Early Stuart Studies: Essays in Honor of David Harris Willson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), 137–151.

Cromwell roundly declared, “seemed to lead us hither to the West Indies,” where ruled “the Spaniard, being the greatest enemy to the Protestants in the world.” With the Spanish antichrist growing richer, stronger, and prouder through its American dominions, the Lord Protector concluded “we must now consider the work we may do in the world as well as at home.”¹⁴

Beyond promoting England’s own godly reformation, the imperial state used transportation to combat political resistance in Scotland, Ireland, and England itself. Hundreds of Scottish soldiers captured during the Republic’s conquest of Scotland (1651–1654) and dozens of English Royalists taken during a 1655 rising were shipped to the colonies, where they were forced into labor in places as disparate as Massachusetts iron works, Virginia tobacco plantations, and Barbados sugar mills.¹⁵ Over ten thousand Irish Catholics, possibly tens of thousands, fared far worse than the English and Scots, however, as they were targeted for transportation for multiple and sometimes overlapping reasons that included poverty, underemployment, religion, and suspicion of political sedition. But the underlying purpose behind all of the reasons the state cited for transporting Irish Catholics lay in completing the conquest and colonization of Ireland.¹⁶

The state’s transportation policies in mid-seventeenth century Ireland differed fundamentally from those in England and Scotland, since the state designed the transportation of Irish Catholics to Atlantic colonies to facilitate the colonization of Catholic Ireland by English and Scottish Protestants. English merchants were deeply involved in this process, particularly men like

- 14 Padraig Lenihan, “War and Population, 1649–52,” *Irish Economic and Social History* vol. 24 (1997): 18–21; C.H. Firth, ed., *The Clarke Papers*, 4 vols. (London: Camden Society, 1891), 3: 203–206; S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649–1660*, 4 vols. (London, 1894–1903), 3: 159; Egerton Mss 2395 fols. 228–229, BL; Allen B. Hinds, *Calendar of State Papers of English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, 1655–1656* (London, 1930), 146–161; Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, 447.
- 15 Marsha Hamilton, *Social and Economic Networks in Early Massachusetts: Atlantic Connections* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 42–43; Pestana, *English Atlantic in Age of Revolution*, 183, 208–212.
- 16 While nobody knows the exact number transported from Ireland into the colonies during the 1650s, the number certainly exceeded ten thousand. See my discussion of Irish transportation in *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution*, 260–261, and FN 36, p. 347 for archival and secondary sources. William Petty, an early political economist who gained invaluable experience in Cromwellian Ireland evaluating the profitability of Irish land and labor for the Commonwealth, estimated 34,000 Irish men were shipped out of Ireland by the English following the 1649 conquest, although this number would have included soldiers sent to Europe. See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 123.

Martin Noell with close ties to the revolutionary governments of the 1650s. Noell had helped finance the Irish conquest and was deeply invested in the slave trade; he also owned land and estates in Barbados, Montserrat, and Jamaica. For their services to the state in the conquest of Ireland, Noell and his fellow investors were remunerated in confiscated Catholic land, which they either developed or sold off to Protestant settlers. But Catholic lands could not be colonized without removing Catholic people, which led the English state, through the Act for the Settlement of Ireland, to enact the policy of transplantation, whereby Catholics would be forced to give up their property and move west across the River Shannon to take up state-allotted holdings in the province of Connaught. When Catholics, either in arms or through other means, resisted being forced into what amounted to an early modern reservation system for Irish “savages,” they could be transported beyond the seas and into forced labor in English colonies. Irish soldiers who had surrendered with the Duke of Ormonde’s army were first targeted for transportation. Partisan fighters called “tories” who continued to fight after Ormonde’s formal surrender also faced transportation when captured. To terrorize the Catholic population into submission, the state also subjected the families and neighbors of tories, or any civilian whom the English accused of supporting the tory insurgency, to colonial transportation. Indeed, entire villages suspected of such sympathies were emptied of their inhabitants, whom the English shipped to Barbados and Jamaica. Nothing like this ever happened in England or Scotland, because these countries were largely Protestant and they were not being colonized. In Ireland, transplantation sped the way for colonization while transportation made the colonization of the Caribbean more lucrative by supplying workers to labor hungry sugar planters.¹⁷

17 Robert Dunlop, ed., *Ireland Under the Commonwealth: Being a Selection of Documents Relating to the Government of Ireland from 1651 to 1659*, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), 1: 338–339, 341, 354–355, 430, 437, 467, 477, 485, 489–490, 528, 544, 553; Robert P. Mahaffy, *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland Preserved in the Public Record Office: Adventurers for Land, 1642–1659* (London, 1903), 63, 382; *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1647–1660, Addenda 1625–1660* (London, 1903), 437, 447, 459, 461, 462, 494, 503, 509, 518, 519, 559; Micheál Ó Siochrá, *Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 226–230. It has been argued elsewhere in this book that the state’s transportation policies for the Irish poor in the 1650s followed those developed for the English poor in the early seventeenth century. In truth, the Irish Catholic experience with colonial transportation during the 1650s was exceptional, not derivative, since Ireland itself was being colonized in the wake of its conquest at the hands of the Republic. Through Irish colonization, the English imperial state reduced millions of Irish to poverty through the destructive effects of warfare, the

While the purpose of colonial transportation changed with the advent of English empire-building in the Atlantic, so too did the scale. Before the imperial turn of the Revolution, the City of London and/or the English state sanctioned the transportation of usually small groups of prisoners. By the mid-1650s, with the move to empire in full motion, the state ordered the transportation of thousands of people at a time. In England, the state created a legal framework that bound provincial courts into a national system that would systematically expand the scale of colonial transportation, ordering county JPs to send assize lists to London, where the government could compute the number of felons it might choose to ship to the colonies. Officers from the New Model Army assumed the duties of JPs in 1655, when the Protectorate regime under Oliver Cromwell reorganized England's counties into ten districts governed by major generals. In Ireland, successive amendments to the Act for Settlement made all Catholics subject to transportation who had in any way supported resistance to Parliamentary armies in the 1640s or to the conquering New Model Army in the 1650s; this essentially made the entire Catholic population eligible.¹⁸

In sum, the imperial state's main interest in colonial transportation lay in moral reformation at home, suppressing political dissent in Britain and Ireland, and advancing the conquest and colonization of Ireland; supplying unfree labor to the colonies was important, but not primary, except perhaps for the merchants who profited from the state contracts they received to bring transportees to the colonies. Still, the tens of thousands of people the state did force

large-scale expropriation of Irish Catholic land, and the eviction of Catholic tenants. The state also resorted to manufactured famines to crush tory resistance to colonization. Thus, the problem of Irish poverty in the 1650s that the English state tried to solve partially through transportation was produced directly by the English state through the militant Protestant campaign it waged in Ireland to disenfranchise and/or destroy the Catholic population. In contrast, the pre-imperial English state used transportation in piecemeal fashion and without religious bias to combat the ill-effects of poverty produced by rapid population expansion and the transition to capitalism. In Ireland, the imperial state systematically applied transportation in an almost totally sectarian fashion to the Catholic population it had intentionally impoverished, a population, moreover, that had DECLINED BY 20%, largely due to the violence visited on the country by English empire-builders.

- 18 Peter Wilson Coldham, *Emigrants in Chains: A Social History of Forced Emigration to the Americas of Felons, Destitute Children, Political and Religious Non-Conformists, Vagabonds, Beggars and Other Undesirables 1607–1776* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1992), 49–50; M.A.E. Green, *Calendar of State Papers, Interregnum, 1656–1657* (London, 1883), 324, 343; S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649–1656*, 4 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903, 1965), 4: 33; *An Act for the Attainder of the Rebels in Ireland: At the Parliament Begun at Westminster the 17th Day of September, 1656* (London, 1657).

into colonial bondage, mostly in the West Indies, did help meet the critical need for unfree labor during the West Indian sugar boom which had begun on Barbados in the mid-1640s. Ultimately, transportation reveals the state's critical part in English empire-building; by forcing British and Irish people into servitude across the Atlantic, the state helped subsidize the explosive growth of plantation capitalism and the consolidation of England's imperial interests in the colonization of Ireland and the West Indies.

Early English imperial expansion in the Atlantic also helped drive capitalist innovations in the trade and exploitation of unfree labor. In the colonial transportation system devised by the imperial state, people were not just sent to the colonies to work—they were sold into servitude, a form of bondage that most would experience on cash crop plantations. As recent research has revealed, most unskilled indentured servants who worked on mid-seventeenth century Chesapeake and West Indian plantations were largely deceived into service by “spirits” or “kidnappers,” who by hook or crook or flat out coercion lured or forced young people aboard ships from which they could not alight until they reached their colonial destination. Although economic historians have portrayed indentured servitude as a contractual relationship between master and servant, those who had been spirited away to the colonies had their contracts of service imposed upon them, either by colonial authorities or through a bargain struck between the ship's master and a planter, making the worker's consent irrelevant. The worker could be sold and sold again for any reason, again without their consent, for the time stipulated in the contract, which, depending upon the age of the person in question, ranged usually from four to ten years. As these contracts and colonial estate law held, the worker would serve as the property of their master or masters for the amount of time contractually stipulated; servants were therefore legally recognized among the “goods and chattels” possessed by their masters. As the historian John Wareing has found, spirits and kidnappers supplied mainstream merchants and ship captains with the bulk of the servants they sold into colonial servitude in the mid-seventeenth century. State transportation added another link in the servant supply chain, which was forged mostly through coercion and deception. Recognizing the vital role that spirits and the state played in the servant trade has important repercussions, as it casts a dubious light on the way economic historians have described indentured servitude as an institution based on voluntary migration and a market-driven contractual relationship between equally informed, consenting parties.¹⁹

19 John Wareing, “The Regulation and Organisation of the Trade in Indentured Servants for the American Colonies in London, 1645–1718, and the Career of William Haverland,

Indentured servitude was a temporary form of chattel bondage, and the minority of historians who have perceptively described it in this way have done well to note how the accretion of colonial labor law over the course of the seventeenth century defined it as such. Even more importantly, these historians have recognized how the chattel dimensions of servitude laid the legal foundation for the buying and selling of colonial workers, a foundation upon which the most inhuman form of bondage in world history would rise, racialized chattel slavery in the English Atlantic. But the emphasis on colonial law's part in the construction of involuntary chattel bondage has obscured the part played by the imperial state. First, most people transported by the state did not have a choice in the matter, and even the felons who selected plantation labor over the gallows can hardly be described as doing so without duress; moreover, given the high mortality rates of servants and slaves in the Chesapeake and West Indies, choosing a rake over a noose often meant a prolonged death sentence. Secondly, in the colonial transportation system, the state figured as the first agent in the chattelization of the transported; the state sold each transported person to a merchant contractor; the contractor in turn, via the ship master they employed to trade in the colonies, sold the person at a profit to a colonial planter, who could then re-sell the servant at their discretion. Despite what most economic historians have written, indentured servants themselves and not just their contractual time, were being bought and sold, as planters gained bodily control of the servants they purchased as "goods and chattels." As I have written elsewhere, those forced to labor in such conditions often referred to themselves revealingly as "bond slaves." Through its innovative transportation policies, the young imperial state played a formative part in fashioning the involuntary, chattel dimensions of colonial servitude, where indentured laborers often conceived of themselves, non-metaphorically, as slaves.²⁰

Emigration Agent," (PhD Diss., University of London, 2000); "Violently Taken Away or Cheatingly Duckoyed": The Illicit Recruitment in London of Indentured Servants for the American colonies, 1645–1718," *London Journal* vol. 26, no. 2 (2001): 1–22. For more on servant plantation labor, see my "Indentured Servitude in the Seventeenth Century Atlantic: A Brief Survey of the Literature," *History Compass* (2013), 1–10.

- 20 Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). For more work on the chattel nature of indentured servitude and its import in the development of racialized chattel slavery in the Atlantic plantation complex, see Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* 2: 1–147; Hilary McD. Beckles, "The Colours of Property: Brown, White and Black Chattels and their Responses on the Caribbean Frontier," *Slavery & Abolition* vol. 15, no. 2 (1994): 36–51; "The Concept of 'White Slavery' in the English Caribbean During the Early

Conscription

In a tradition that stretched back to the middle ages, the state claimed the right to conscript or impress its subjects for landed military service in the case of domestic insurrection or foreign invasion. Impressment for foreign wars had no constitutional mandate. By the 1620s, however, English parliaments were giving their tacit consent to the unpopular practice, which had already begun to stir violent resistance. During the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and the English Civil Wars (1638–1651), both Royalist and Parliamentary armies resorted to conscription to field the ranks of “the foot” or the infantry. Each side in the conflict could argue that such coercion fell within the just tradition of raising armies to put down domestic insurrections, although the scale of conscription that marked military recruitment during these conflicts dwarfed all previous initiatives.²¹

The exploding demand for unfree military labor had dramatic political consequences. By the end of the First Civil War (1642–1646), the Levellers, a popular republican movement that attracted both civilians and soldiers from Parliament’s New Model Army, had organized mass opposition to impressment in principle, and not just for present military purposes. Leveller campaigns in the late 1640s drew hundreds of thousands of subscribers who signed petitions that placed the demand to end conscription alongside calls for the abolition of established religion, the House of Lords, and the monarchy, among other reforms. The Levellers likened the condition of pressed soldiers to “Turkish galley slaves.” Although scholars of the Revolution have written volumes about the

Seventeenth Century,” in John Brewer and Susan Staves, ed., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London: Routledge, 1996); Warren M. Billings, “The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 99 (1991): 45–62; John Donoghue, *‘Fire under the Ashes’: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution*, Chapters 6 and 7. Newman, *A New World of Labor*, Chapters 4 and 5.

- 21 During the famous Petition of Right debates in the House of Commons, participants recognized both the illegality and alleged necessity of the press for soldiers for service abroad. See J.G.A. Pocock, “Propriety, Liberty and Valor: Ideology, Rhetoric and Speech in the 1628 Debates in the House of Commons,” in D.N. DeLuna, Perry Anderson, and Glenn Burgess, eds., *The Political Imagination in History: Essays Concerning J.G.A. Pocock* (Dexter, MI: Owlworks Press, 2006), 252–256. For more work on infantry conscription before and during the English Revolution, see Ian Gentles, *New Model Army in England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1645–1653* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992, 1994), 31–32; “Why Men Fought in the British Civil Wars,” *History Teacher* vol. 26, no. 4 (1993); H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* [edited and prepared by Christopher Hill] (London: Cresset Press, 1961), 14, 143, 147, 101, 299, 352, 462, 530.

political language of slavery and freedom during the conflict, the Levellers were doing more than applying vivid linguistic devices to articulate their opposition to impressment. The members of the radical movement actually understood conscription as a material consequence of political tyranny, as an embodied form of political slavery. The references to bondage were therefore literal, not metaphorical: "We entreat you," pled the Levellers, "to consider what difference there is between binding a man to an oar as a galley-slave in Turkey or Argiere, and pressing of men to serve in your war." The state's forcing men to work and kill against their will through conscription thus figured for the Levellers as one of the worst violations of the republican axiom of government by consent. Conscription also destroyed the classic republican virtue of citizen armies, perverting them into the mercenary instruments of tyrants who fought for gold and glory rather than the noble end of commonwealth liberty. Although the Levellers failed to convince the New Model generals to abolish impressment, they did guarantee that army conscription would not be employed in the service of foreign wars. The promise, as we will see, was not kept.²²

Although unpopular, most regarded naval impressment as a necessary evil, although the sailors themselves found it both unnecessary and evil. Like conscription for the army, forcing men into the navy had medieval roots. But there were important differences between the two forms of impressment. The state, as the Levellers decried in their petitions, had long targeted the poor when pressing men to serve in the infantry. Forced service in the army thus served the state in two ways (while also revealing the class bias that defined state interests): first, it got men into the ranks to provide the needed military labor; secondly, it turned allegedly idle, criminally-prone and potentially seditious poor young men from social and political problems into state assets. Naval impressment, in contrast, did not target the poor as such, although many if not most men pressed into sea-borne service did not possess much in the way of material wealth. Sailors, unlike foot soldiers, represented skilled labor, and to effectively man a potent navy, press gangs went in search of seasoned, able-bodied

22 'Argiere' referred to in the quotation is now spelled Algiers. There is a vast body of work on the language of freedom and slavery in the political discourse of the English Revolution. For illuminating entry points, see Jonathan Scott, "What were Commonwealth Principles?" *Historical Journal* vol. 47, no. 3 (2004): 591–613; Quentin Skinner, "John Milton and the Politics of Slavery," in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Renaissance Virtues*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2: 286–308. For the Leveller quotes, see Richard Overton (?) and William Walwyn (?), *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* (London, 1646), 16. For more on the Leveller opposition to impressment, see Donoghue, *Fire under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution*, 184–185, 187, 190–194, 196.

seamen. Pressing “land men,” however, that is men without sailing experience, was regarded as an outright affront to English liberty. With that said, sailors, as well as their families, friends, and neighbors, in other words, the people who made up the maritime working-classes of England, did not make such distinctions, and resisted the press gang with consistent vigor. During the English Civil Wars, both sides pressed thousands of men into their navies at unprecedented rates, which ultimately disrupted the tenuous stasis that gave naval impressment at least the thin veneer of legitimacy that its army counterpart had never enjoyed. In fact, it was a sea captain from a prominent maritime family, Thomas Rainsborough, who led the Leveller charge against impressment at the famous Putney Debates. Rainsborough and his Leveller colleagues joined their opposition to infantry impressment with a campaign against naval impressment as well, demonstrating the growing conflict between popular perceptions of political liberty and the military demands of the early modern state.²³

As with colonial transportation, the imperial turn of the English Revolution had a revolutionary impact on the practice of military conscription, which the state, for the first time, would use in the service of empire building in the Atlantic world. But unlike the productive labor that state transportation mobilized for colonial plantations, conscription raised the constructive, military labor necessary for colonial conquest. In early 1649, as we have seen, the revolutionary government set out to conquer Catholic Ireland, an imperial initiative that required the mass mobilization of military labor. The soldiers of the New Model Army resisted forced service in Ireland for an array of reasons, not the least of which was the republican conviction that the state had no right to compel its own people to fight abroad without their consent. In the spring of 1649, several mutinies broke out in the army to protest the impending invasion. They were easily crushed and the New Model Army, under the command of General Oliver Cromwell, began its Irish campaign that August. Due to battle, disease, exposure, and malnutrition, the ranks of the infantry quickly thinned. As a result, throughout the period of the conquest (1649–1660), the Irish garrison was continually replenished with pressed troops, many of whom arrived without arms or uniforms and were barely fit to serve. The garrison, however,

23 For naval impressment in the English Revolution and the seventeenth century more generally, see Bernard Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution 1648–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 58, 122, 258–259, 263; Brunsman, *Evil Necessity*, 20–25. For the Levellers on naval impressment, see *An Agreement of the Free People of England* (London, 1649), Clause 11. For Rainsborough in particular, see Whitney R.D. Jones, *Thomas Rainborowe: Civil War Seamen, Siegemaster, and Radical* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2005).

managed to hang on in the face of continued tory opposition, achieving a key objective of the imperial state, which also realized another of its objectives through the Irish press, ridding England of thousands of allegedly idle and morally degenerate men and boys in the pursuit of puritan-styled social reformation.²⁴

In 1653, with the surrender of Ormonde's army, the state could shift more of its resources from Ireland to the naval war that had erupted with the United Provinces the previous year. We have already discussed how the Dutch war originated in the wider empire-building context of the Navigation Act, but we have not addressed how it resulted in the biggest naval build-up to that point in English history. The build-up required dozens of new ships and tens of thousands more men. During the duration of the Dutch War (1652–1654), the English navy grew by an average of ten thousand men a year, most of them pressed into service through Parliamentary ordinances. Able bodied seamen were in increasingly short supply, due to a declining population and the expansion of England's merchant marine, which grew in proportion to the nation's rapidly globalizing commercial interests. Ironically, the English navy also had to compete with its Dutch counterpart for the service of English seamen, since conditions and pay on the ships of the United Provinces were comparatively much better. As the maritime historian Denver Brunsman has written, the English sailor Edward Coxere, whom the press gangs forced out of hiding in maritime London and onto an English vessel in the Dutch war, had actually served more time on Dutch as compared to English ships; he found it necessary to relearn the language of sailing in English because he had absorbed it so deeply in Dutch. The Dutch, who eschewed the practice of impressment, had grown their powerful navy through positive incentives rather than through the coercive means employed by the English, which occasioned continual resistance on the part of English seamen and their friends, families, and neighbors. The Dutch, however, fell to the English in 1654, a victory made possible in part through the press gang, the subjects of which usually fought well once they resigned to their fate aboard ship. But back on land, resistance resumed in more organized form, as sailors rioted twice during the war on Tower Hill, the site of the Navy Office, to claim back pay and to protest illegal impressments in

24 Chris Durston, "‘Let Ireland be Quiet’: Opposition in England to the Cromwellian Conquest of Ireland," *History Workshop Journal* vol. 21 (1986): 105–112; Henry Denne, *The Levellers Design Discovered: or, the Anatomie of the Late Unhappy Mutiny Presented unto the Soldiery of the Army* (London, 1649); G.E. Aylmer, *The Levellers in the English Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 44–45; Dunlop, ed., *Ireland under the Commonwealth*, 2: 50, 133–134.

some of the worst urban unrest London had seen since the outbreak of the English Revolution.²⁵

With the victorious conclusion of the Dutch War, the English Commonwealth quickly turned from its fiercest Protestant rival to its most powerful Catholic adversary, plotting an ambitious course of imperial expansion in the Spanish Caribbean that came to be known as the Western Design. Regime-change, however, occurred within the imperial state late in the Dutch war, when army officers led by Major General Oliver Cromwell conspired to dissolve two successive republican governments over the course of 1653. By December of that year, Cromwell had been declared Lord Protector, assuming full command over the nation's armed forces until a new Parliament could be called. Cromwell, a devoted admirer of Sir Walter Raleigh, was easily convinced by the slave trader and colonial investor Martin Noell and several in his circle to move quickly to undertake the conquest of the Spanish West Indies. As the sugar boom continued to explode across the English Caribbean, Noell and his cohort argued that such a "western design" would have apocalyptic consequences, progressing the Protestant Reformation at the expense of the antichristian power of Catholic Spain by violently depriving it of the source of its imperial strength, the wealth it derived from its American colonies. Pillaging gold and silver through privateering would not be enough; the English needed to "gain ground" in the Caribbean, as Cromwell declared, by conquering Spanish colonies. After deliberating where to strike, Cromwell and the Protectorate Council of State, advised by Noell and company and heavily under the influence of army officers close to Cromwell, chose Hispaniola as the chief target.²⁶

The Western Design required the mobilization of a transatlantic invasion force, which in turn called for another, extensive campaign to conscript the constructive military labor necessary for imperial expansion. Impressment for the West Indian expedition, moreover, would take place hard on the heels of the campaigns ordered for the Dutch War and as others continued to man the imperial garrison in Ireland. As we have seen, the state's claim to dominion over the bodies of its subjects for military service had expanded in proportion to its imperial ambitions, although the claim itself had been contested by soldiers, sailors, and hundreds of thousands of Leveller supporters at the very

25 Brunsmann, *Evil Necessity*, 24; Capp, *Cromwell's Navy*, 9, 289. For Levellers holding up the Dutch non-impressment policy as an example for English reformers to follow, see *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* (London, 1646), 16.

26 Bodleian Library Rawl Ms A 30.171; Firth, ed., *Clarke Papers*, 3: 203–206; S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649–1660*, 4 vols. (London, 1894–1903), 3: 159.

moment of the imperial state's creation. The tension reached a breaking point as the West Indian armada prepared to embark, with navy and army mutinies bringing the conflict between the the imperial state, via the political economy of capitalism and the civic virtue of republican citizenship, into bold relief. The Protectorate had continued to withhold sailors' pay from the Dutch War while it had renewed the naval press for the Western Design without Parliament's consent, an illegal act. It had also impressed "land men" for naval service, another illegal act that also revealed how desperate the navy's labor needs had become. Finding friends in high places, the sailors, led by the republican radical Admiral John Lawson, mutinied at Portsmouth in October 1654. The mutineers demanded back pay, better conditions, and "that they not be imprested to serve...apprehending it to be inconsistent with the principles of freedom and liberty, to force men to serve in military employment, either by sea or by land." The government broke the mutiny by delivering back pay, although later that December in Portsmouth, they faced another mutiny, this time by the army.²⁷

As the fleet readied to drop anchor and sail for the Caribbean, the soldiers, mostly pressed out of English jails, assembled on the Portsmouth docks. When the signal to board was fired the soldiers ran away and hid anywhere in the town that they could. Their officers eventually reassembled the troops on the docks, although it took armed force, including the intervention of General Henry Desborough, who used the backside of his horse, to force the men up the gangplanks and onto their ships. As one officer reported, having been given no arms or uniforms, they justifiably feared they were being transported beyond the seas into bondage. Once the ships set sail, another mutiny occurred when soldiers conspired to take command of a ship to divert it to the Isle of Wight. Dropping anchor in the Caribbean in February, the press for the infantry continued, although most servants in Barbados and other English controlled islands, saw military service in a superior light to slave labor on sugar plantations. Planters complained bitterly that they were being deprived of invaluable labor and of Protestant servants whose service they hoped to rely upon should Irish and African laborers choose to rise up, which they did indeed do the next year following this disruption to the plantation regime. General Robert Venables remained unmoved, dismissing the planters as a "company of whining geese."

27 Henderson, ed., *The Clarke Papers*, 5: 115, 190, 200; John Jeafferson, ed., *Middlesex County Records*, 4 vols. (London: Middlesex Co. Records Society, 1888), 3: 224; Green, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Interregnum* (1653–1654), 319; Capp, *Cromwell's Navy*, 136–138; *The Humble Petition of the Seamen* (London, 1654).

The invasion of Hispaniola ended in disaster, largely due to Venables' incompetence. Regrouping, Venables in conjunction with Admiral William Penn, the naval commander, chose Spanish Jamaica as the next target. The English carried Jamaica easily, as the Spanish had only provided the island with meager defenses. English officers, awarded land for their services, pressed their soldiers into plantation work to grow food and cash crops. The soldiers mutinied again, believing that their original fear of being enslaved had come to fruition. With scant provisions in an unfamiliar climate that made the soldiers prone to disease, Jamaica quickly turned into a death trap for the English soldiers forced to labor there. As one soldier described the scene, "there were many dead, their carcasses lying unburied in the highways and among bushes...many of them that were alive walked like ghosts or dead men, who as I went through the town, lay groaning and crying out, 'Bread, for the Lord's sake!'"²⁸

In all, six of the seven thousand troops, the great majority pressed into service, died during the year-long campaign the English waged in the West Indies. In a manner of decades, however, the island would become the richest spot in the English empire, with profits derived from sugar and slaves. In the long run, the immediate failures of Cromwell's transatlantic armada would be eclipsed by the great success of English empire building in Jamaica, a project that, as one Western Design veteran wrote, had aimed at the "utter extirpation of all idle, profane, irreligious ones...sent over as soldiers and servants into this new conquered commonwealth."²⁹

Conclusion

The early modern English imperial state first took shape in 1649 with the conquest and colonization of Ireland and quickly assumed transatlantic dimensions through subsequent legislation and force of arms. While the state had invested very little in the way of colonial development in the Atlantic for most of the seventeenth century, the Plantation Act of 1650 declared Parliament's

28 British Library Egerton Mss 2648 fos. 247; Firth, ed., *Venables' Narrative*, Appendix D, 142–143; Thomas Birch, ed., *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, 7 vols. (London, 1742), 4: 151; quote from Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 4: 216.

29 Firth, ed., *Venables' Narrative*, 20, 28, 34, 45, Appendix B, 116–122, Appendix E, 156; I.S., *A Brief and Perfect Journal of the Late Proceedings and Success of the English Army in the West Indies*, 6, 16, 24; Carla Gardina Pestana, "English Character and the Fiasco of the Western Design," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* vol. 3, no. (2005): 5; Bodleian Library Rawlinson Mss A 36 fos. 368, 374–376; 37 fols. 31–32; 53 fol. 284.

sovereign authority over all the colonies. The following year, the Navigation Act created an imperial trade zone excluding foreign competition. Revealing what became a perennial disconnect between the imperial state and colonial governments, colonists objected to the political “slavery” that the state’s initiatives allegedly subjected them to, including the prohibition of the trade with Dutch slavers that had helped make sugar production profitable in the West Indies. The imperial state responded by sending fleets across the Atlantic to force colonial governments into submission, although with only limited success, as colonists continued to trade with foreign merchants. The Dutch too, objected to the Navigation Acts, which led in 1652 to a naval war which the English won in the spring of 1654, a victory that in turn ensured the rise of a profitable English slave trade to the West Indies. That December, the state embarked upon its most ambitious imperial initiative to date, the conquest of the Spanish Caribbean, which despite heavy losses, led to the capture of Jamaica, which eventually became the crown jewel in England’s Atlantic empire.

The English state’s new commitment to Atlantic empire-building in the mid-seventeenth century depended upon its ability to command various forms of unfree labor. In its infancy, the imperial state pursued English moral reformation and the colonization of Catholic Ireland, two policies that revolutionized the practice of colonial transportation and sent tens of thousands of people against their will into colonial bondage. As the state recognized, colonial transportation supplied West Indian sugar planters with cheap labor to supplement the expanding African slave labor force that had made plantation capitalism so profitable. But while the imperial state succeeded in mobilizing productive plantation labor, empire building also required the mobilization of constructive labor through military conscription. Without impressing tens of thousands of men to serve in the Irish conquest, the Dutch War, and the Western Design to the Spanish Caribbean, English empire building in the Atlantic would have ground to a halt. In this way, the state’s coercive mobilization of constructive military labor proved indispensable to the success of its imperial projects around the Atlantic. Importantly, to ensure the success of transportation and conscription as instruments of empire building, the state had to overcome the objections of its own people and the armed resistance of those it had conquered in Ireland. In England, the state circumvented popular republican resistance by expanding its sovereign claims, for the first time, to the bodies and labor power of its own subjects for the purpose of imperial expansion in the Atlantic. In Ireland, the state overcame Catholic resistance through manufactured famine, violent force, and the political terrorism of subjecting non-combatants to colonial transportation. As few scholars have

noted, transportation also helped lay the chattel foundations for colonial bondage in the English Atlantic. The state's commercial policies abetted this process as well, promoting the proliferation of racialized slavery by fostering "free trade" legislation that expanded English participation in the transatlantic slave trade. As this chapter has demonstrated, by sanctioning the sale of Africans into perpetual slavery and coercing the constructive and productive labor of its own subjects, the state assisted in the creation of an unfree colonial labor system during a critical period of capital formation in the English plantation complex. Within this context, the state also helped to fashion the central paradox of English imperial ideology, that a freedom loving empire could be built on the foundation of forced labor and slavery.