

REVIEW ARTICLE

JOHN E. CROWLEY

Image Problems: Visual Representations of Early Modern British Imperialism

Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power. By Niall Ferguson. New York: Basic Books, 2003. 424 pages. \$54.00.

Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire. By David Cannadine. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. \$54.00, \$19.95 paper.

Geography of the Gaze: Urban and Rural Vision in Early Modern Europe. By Renzo Dubhini. Trans. Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. 272 pages. \$34.95 paper.

History of Britain. By Simon Schama. 3 vols. New York: Hyperion, 2000–2002. 450 pages. \$60.00.

Captives: Britain, Empire and the World. By Linda Colley. London: Jonathan Cape, 2002. 464 pages. \$41.95.

The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture. By Roxann Wheeler. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000. 360 pages. \$43.75.

Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting. By Beth Fowkes Tobin. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999. 304 pages. \$29.95 paper.

Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780–1865. By Marcus Wood. New York: Routledge, 2000. 400 pages. \$44.95 paper.

EMPIRES HAVE IMAGE problems. 'Empire' (and its cognates) became the twentieth-century's dire political slur, as in 'Third Reich,' 'Evil Empire,' 'American Imperialism' (a.k.a. 'The Great Satan'). Even Republicans are republican when it comes to disavowing Empire. The British Empire is something of an exception – witness the International Order Daughters of the Empire, United Empire Loyalists' Association, Imperial Oil, the Order of the British Empire, the Imperial War Museum, Niall Ferguson's contrarian best-seller *Empire*, and so on. Yet even in Britain, as an eminent imperial historian has put it, "Empire is blamed for our insularity, our racism, the dominance of patriarchy, the nature of the academic literary canon, the deficiencies of our institutions, the failure of our economy, the lack of entrepreneurial spirit."¹ As anyone who has wandered around the ground floor of the British Museum knows, empires, from their earliest days in the Mesopotamian Valley, try too hard to represent their dominion. Their visual symbols and monumental emblems are often so over-determined as to undercut their assertions of rule.

Surveys of the British Empire

Empires generate enormous quantities of propaganda, most of it for metropolitan rather than colonial consumption. Lavish illustrations easily accompany histories of the British Empire, whether celebratory, denunciatory, or apologetic. A triumphalist coffee-table history of the Empire (published in 1973) illustrated "Elizabeth's adventuresome sailors," "majestic East Indiamen," and "resplendent colonial officers of contingents from every corner of the Empire." The book's designers decided that one illustration was sufficient for the sugar plantations worked by millions of enslaved

¹ Peter Marshall, "Imperial Britain," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23 (1995): 393. He could also have blamed European imperialism for ruining the weather; Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

Africans (a workaday scene where “bundles of freshly cut sugar cane are delivered to a wind-driven crusher by slaves”), but the Armada needed eight pages and ten illustrations.² Jump ahead to recent years, and what a difference! The frontispiece of the 1996 *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* is a painting of “A Patrol under the Command of Captain Fisher Charged by Macoma’s Kafirs in Van Beulen’s Hoek” (emphasis added): now Empire’s visual synecdoche is indigenous resistance.

Popular histories of the British Empire still have lots of illustrations, now chosen with a more critical eye on Empire and more reflexivity about their ideological content. Take Niall Ferguson’s *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*. Most reviews have focused on its tendentious introduction, which they laud or condemn for its seeming apology for that empire’s beneficent effects on world governance. Most reviewers have overlooked how Ferguson’s text weighs the human costs of that empire and how his illustrations emphasize its violence and misery. *Empire’s* first illustration is a two-page scene in which African-Caribbean slaves are tortured while a pipe-smoking overseer has a semi-nude female African-Caribbean pour him a drink. Most reviews of Ferguson’s book have led readers to expect a macro-economic analysis of the Empire’s positive benefits for global economic development. Actual readers will be surprised by ingeniously chosen illustrations—many of them unpublished drawings—which add humanity to the text. Many of these images implicitly satirize the pomposity of British colonizers. Even more show the brutal violence that Britons levelled against each other (as in Australia), against other Europeans (as in Egypt), and against indigenous defenders (as in the Sudan at Omdurman). There is even a *French* cartoon condemning the atrocities of British concentration camps in South Africa.

Academic histories of the British Empire tend to be shy of illustrations. Perhaps they fear contamination from the images’ provenance in propaganda. Most of the illustrations in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* are maps and photographs, apparently to reassure readers of their visual objectivity. Yet the *Illustrated History’s* excellent chapter on “Art and the Empire” sug-

² *The Horizon History of the British Empire*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (n.p.: American Heritage, 1973) 12, 14, 43, 55.

gests how much more might have been done with visual materials throughout the volume: "Members of the dominant groups invariably use art as a device to explain and justify their power, to express the mystique of rulers, and to illustrate their knowledge and command of the natural world."³ Similarly, the *Oxford History of the British Empire* treats Art (without illustrations) in its volume on Historiography rather than as an integral part of the Empire's history.⁴ The most important recent history of the British Empire, P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins's *British Imperialism*,⁵ has tables, but no illustrations. Hopkins argues elsewhere for a reassertion of "the hard political and economic questions that were once central to imperial history" as the way to write global histories addressing ethnicity, region, and capital without privileging the nation-state. He sneers at the narrow emphasis on "representations" in most recent cultural histories of imperialism: "For many younger historians the only point in studying European imperialism is to unmask the derogatory racial stereotypes encoded in the modernizing myths of the Enlightenment.... By studying images and symbols, scholars can avoid grappling with reality while being *au courant* in doubting its existence."⁶ Hopkins might have conceded that analyses of visual images would have reinforced his own interpretation. *British Imperialism's* analysis depends utterly on a sociological account of "gentlemanly capitalism" whose crucial term is the cultural adjective, not the economic noun. To give some life to "gentlemanly capitalism"—"a concept so vague that it is in danger of losing any

³ John M. MacKenzie, "Art and the Empire," in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, ed. P.J. Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 296. For a model of what might have been done with photographs, see James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997). On the ineluctable visibility of imperial culture, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995). For an introduction to the use of visual evidence in historical analysis, see Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001).

⁴ Jeffrey Auerbach, "Art and Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume 5: *Historiography*, ed. Robin W. Winks and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 571–83.

⁵ 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1993).

⁶ "Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History," *Past and Present* 164 (1999): 199.

real explanatory power"⁷—Cain and Hopkins might have considered, for example, cartoons satirizing such capitalists by Samuel Rowlandson, George Cruickshank, and *Punch*. David Cannadine shows what might be done, by demonstrating the visual logic of *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*. His shrewdly chosen photographs of colonizers and colonized, in pompously identical poses throughout the Empire, are like shots at historiographic fish in a barrel.

The Gaze

Looking—well, 'gazing'—at people is now interpreted for its imperialist/masculinist potential. The *locus classicus* for understanding the 'gaze' in cultural history is Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*.⁸ Foucault's "gaze" (*regard* in the French original) really did involve seeing with one's eyes; it was not a metaphor for perception. But Foucault had a lesson to teach beyond the history of medicine—"the descriptive formula is also a revealing gesture"—and it has been learned only too well. Mary Louise Pratt has shown how Europeans became defensively aware of this potential. Her concept of "anti-conquest" refers to "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.... The main protagonist of the anti-conquest [was] ... the seeing man ... he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess." *Imperial Eyes's* bountiful illustrations show how much travel accounts relied on visual representations of their subjects. But astonishingly for a study that resists "circumscrib[ing] travel writing as a genre," that yearns "to suggest its heterogeneity and its interactions with other kinds of expression," and that relies on a visual metaphor for its topic, Pratt's illustrations are merely isomorphic with the texts she analyzes. They give the same details as the texts they originally accompanied. Pratt discusses few of them, and their captions often specify what a reader could identify independently; for example, "Natural phenomena of South America, as seen by the La Condamine expedi-

⁷ David Cannadine, "The Empire Strikes Back," *Past and Present* 147 (1995): 190.

⁸ Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975) 196; Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: Une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963).

tion. At bottom left stands the volcano Cotopaxi, snow-covered and erupting; bottom right depicts the 'phenomenon of the arc of the moon' projected on the mountainsides; upper right depicts the 'phenomenon of the triple rainbow, seen for the first time in Pambamarca and later in various mountains.'⁹ What kind of analysis is that?

The term 'gaze' has become cant in cultural history. For example: Renzo Dubbini's thorough history of early modern topographical visualization, *Geography of the Gaze*, has no reference to Foucault, yet the publisher apparently decided that the po-mo term (translated from the milder *sguardo* in the original Italian title) would be eye-catching. The ideological 'gaze' too often serves as an overdetermined metonymy of Eurocentric assertions of cultural superiority over the Other. The term is often a sign of intellectual laziness. Ironically, many analyses of the proprietary/imperialist/sexist/racist 'gaze' are visually incurious. An article on "Racism, Imperialism, and the Traveler's Gaze in Eighteenth-Century England," for instance, makes no specific reference to scenes seen, so of course it has no illustrations.¹⁰ Compare that indifference with Barbara Maria Stafford's great *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840*,¹¹ which lusciously demonstrates and explains how pictures became crucial to travel accounts.

Few of the classic postcolonial studies of imperialist culture make much use of visual evidence. Yet their arguments depend on visual metaphors—of images, prospects, representations, surveys, views—for asserting the import of their evidence. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*¹²—not about imperialism (until its penultimate chapter on "The New Metropolis") but crucial to

⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 7, pl. 5; for her occasional commentaries, see pl. 20, 24-26, 28-29, 31. For a model use of explanatory and interpretative captions for illustrations, see Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993).

¹⁰ Margaret Hunt, *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993): 333-57.

¹¹ (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1984).

¹² (New York: Oxford UP, 1973); see especially 120-26. For Williams's influence on post-colonial studies, see *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

the hermeneutics of cultural studies privileging that topic—is all about power over the British landscape, but deals not at all with British landscape painting, which came to the fore in the period whose literary works he so exclusively studied. John Barrell and Ann Bermingham have enriched his interpretation by explaining how carefully the picturesque aesthetic of British landscape painting masked the social costs of agricultural ‘improvement’ and rural industrialization.¹³ Edward Said considers orientalism as a “discourse,” thus neglecting its extravagant representation in the visual arts. For instance, in discussing the Napoleonic *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–28)—the Ur-encyclopedia of orientalism—Said never mentions, much less analyzes, the twenty-three volumes’ hundreds of prints of monuments, topography, street scenes, costumes, material culture, and natural history. Far more effectively than most of its articles, which tend toward the monographic, the *Description*’s illustrations fulfilled Napoleon’s ambition “to take the whole of Egypt.”¹⁴ Such textual truncation of evidence is also a shortcoming of Benedict Anderson’s comparably influential book on nationalisms as imagined communities. Visualization is a part of most people’s imagination, but only in the revised edition of his book did Anderson introduce visual topics—maps, museums, and paintings.¹⁵ He assigns visualization to medieval “imagined reality,” while weirdly overlooking prints as cogs in “print capitalism,” his *deus ex machina* for the “origins of national consciousness.” Engravings, etchings, woodcuts, aquatints, lithographs, and so on, are not called “prints” for nothing, and the early modern period was the great era for their social expansion and for their technical and artistic development. Prints were even more readily understood than newspapers

¹³ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980); Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986).

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 3, 80. John M. MacKenzie considers a wide range of extra-literary arts—including painting, architecture, and music—to emphasize inter-cultural dialectics in the construction of orientalism; *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995). See also D.A. Washbrook, “Orientalism and Occident: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire,” in *Historiography*, ed. Winks and Low 596–609.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991) 22–23, 170–85.

by a nascent reading public, and figured mightily in early modern political/religious propaganda.¹⁶

Imagined Imperial Landscapes 1450–1750

Visualizing empires does not require seeing them. For most of the early modern period (say, 1450–1750), first-hand, topographic representations of what Europeans had seen overseas had little authority (fig. 1). Illustrations gained truthfulness from according with their textual context. This truth was usually a tautology because the illustrations depended on stay-at-home artists imagining overseas scenes, people, and objects from reading their textual descriptions. Such artists forthrightly represented relations between colonizers and colonized in didactic, hierarchical schema of ontologically ordained dominance and subordination. Scholars have used the emblematic priorities in these images to sharpen focus on their themes, such as Stephen Greenblatt's "communication and cultural difference," "the go-between," "signs of possession," "the conjunction of domesticity and horror," and "cultural hybridity" in *Marvelous Possessions*.¹⁷ From the late fifteenth through the mid-eighteenth century, European empires lent themselves beautifully to iconic representations in visual culture. Frontispieces and title-pages make up a goldmine of representations of imperial ontologies. A sophisticated, richly illustrated, iconographic historiography has surveyed, analyzed, and interpreted the prints, maps, drawings, paintings, sculpture, and architecture of the initial centuries of European imperialism. The paragon of such works was the catalogue for a 1976 exhibition marking the independence of the United States—a typically contradictory monument to European imperialism, marking its first successful overthrow, albeit by Europeans.¹⁸

¹⁶ William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968) chap. 2–6; David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973).

¹⁷ *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 67, 69, 84, 144, pl. 3.

¹⁸ Hugh Honour, *The European Vision of America* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975).



Figure 1: Word and image: Columbus arrives in India. This image illustrated Christopher Columbus's published account of his arrival in islands near Cipango (Marco Polo's name for Japan) in the Indies. The colonizing intent is apparent in labelling the place ("Insula Hyspana"), in describing its peoples as needing rule (being naked), and in promising wealth (mutual proffering of goods). But the scene is the visual equivalent of an anachronism: its implication that Columbus's crews rowed across the Atlantic arose from the image's being lifted (minus the "Indians") from an earlier Venetian work about Mediterranean commerce. Christopher Columbus, *De Insulis Inventis* (Basel, 1493). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Landscape

W.J.T. Mitchell has linked the "rise of landscape" in European art with the expansion of European empires overseas: "imperialism has been the *non-dit* of art-historical accounts of landscape."¹⁹ The chronology fits, but the geography does not. If the "rise of landscape" had to do with any empire, it was the Holy Roman. For most of the early modern period, landscape art was an underused resource of European imperialism in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Landscape art was initially strongest in Italy, then in the Netherlands. Spanish officials in Naples, Rome, and Antwerp could readily have recruited Italian and Flemish artists to represent the new kingdoms overseas, but they did not.²⁰ Dutch culture had enormous potential commercially and artistically for the production of imperial landscapes, and some of it was realized. But the strongest imperial theme in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Dutch art was the condemnation of Spanish tyranny and atrocities against innocent peoples overseas, in parallel with Dutch experience at home.²¹ While the Dutch colonized Brazil in the 1630s and 1640s, Prince Maurits led the largest European artistic and scientific expedition overseas before the British Pacific voyages of exploration in the 1760s. Two of the expedition's artists, Frans Post and Albert Eckhout, produced the most impressive body of European colonial landscape art thus far.²² But they were exceptions proving the rule. Landscape art *could* be used for the appropriation of colonies; it just wasn't very much—until British artists began to create a global landscape in the middle of the eighteenth century.

¹⁹ "Gombrich and the Rise of Landscape," *The Culture of Consumption 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995) 105.

²⁰ Philip II commissioned the Flemish artist Anton van den Wyngaerde to paint first-hand topographical views of cities throughout his Iberian realms, but there was no corresponding visual survey of Spanish dominions overseas; see *Spanish Cities of the Golden Age: The Views of Anton van den Wyngaerde*, ed. Richard L. Kagan (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989); and Kagan's *Urban Images of the Hispanic World 1493-1793* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000).

²¹ Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001).

²² *A Humanist Prince in Europe and Brazil: Johan Maurits Van Nassau-Steyl 1604-1679*, ed. E van den Boogaart, H.R. Hoetink, and P.J.P. Whitehead (The Hague: Johan Maurits van Nassau Stichting, 1979).

As readers of his *Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*²³ will know, no historian uses visual evidence to more telling effect than Simon Schama. So it is no surprise how much illustrations enrich the narrative of his three-volume *History of Britain*. The book's conjunction with a television series had everything to do with its rich visual information, but Schama's strict reliance on contemporaneous visual evidence keeps pulling the reader/viewer back from anachronism. His second volume, *The British Wars 1603–1776*, starts with a demonstration of how the sixty-seven maps in John Speed's *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (1611) enabled putative Britons to imagine the spaces of their realm. As Speed's title indicated, the seventeenth-century British 'empire' was a contentious dominion in the British Isles, not overseas realms. British—at this point, largely English—places overseas were discrete 'plantations,' lacking the joint coherence and direct dominion from the capital implied by 'empire.' In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'empire' was usually a term to emphasize England's (later Britain's) independence from foreign rulers, rather than its power overseas.

The term 'empire' enhances a historical subject, but for the period before 1750 the term is more aptly used infrequently and facetiously: *As if!* For all the historiographic care to determine when the 'First' Empire ended and the 'Second' one began,²⁴ it is debatable whether the first Empire was an empire. The term 'British Empire' figured in the titles of fewer than twenty publications in English before 1750, while publications titled with 'plantation' and 'colony' (and their cognates) numbered in the thousands. The exception proving the rule is Ireland—governed imperially from England by Lords Lieutenant, landlords, Poynings Law, and a standing army in peacetime—but seldom included in histories of the British Empire until recently, except as an irritating problem in definition.

²³ (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988).

²⁴ P.J. Marshall, "The First British Empire," in *Historiography*, ed. Winks and Low 43–53; Nicholas Canny, "The Origins of Empire: An Introduction," and David Armitage, "Literature and Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Canny (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 1–33, 99–123; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 170–98.

Yet militant Protestants, such as John Winthrop, really wanted to put their City on a hill in Ireland, not Massachusetts.

For most of the period of the putative 'First British Empire'—before the American Revolution—there was little imperialism, except fitfully in wartime, but lots of jealousy over protecting local commercial monopolies. The successive campaigns against Louisbourg mark the change from a congeries of British colonies in an "extended polity"²⁵ to an imperialism energized from the metropolis. Louisbourg was taken in 1745 by an expeditionary force of French-hating Yankees—Britain's top generals being preoccupied at home that year. The 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle returned the fortress intact to France in exchange for captured Fort Saint George (Madras) in India. The 1758 expedition to Louisbourg marked a new priority for imperatives of empire: it blew up the fortress to deny France its strategic linchpin in North America, whatever its fate diplomatically. And Louisbourg was only a preliminary objective in the campaign's territorial strategy: to drive the French out of North America.

Schama's third volume, *The Fate of Empire 1776–2000*, links the history of the home islands inexorably with their colonization overseas. He initiates this fateful connection by ingeniously, and unexpectedly, illustrating Britons' contemporaneous marvel at exotic landscapes within Britain itself: the Lake District, the Hebrides, mountaintop castles in North Wales.²⁶ From the 1750s onward, colonial scenes figured crucially in the reorientation of British landscape art from the idealized to the topographic. A rich art history describes the development of this topographic art of empire. Bernard Smith took the lead over forty years ago with *European Vision and the South Pacific*, first published in 1960: "European control of the world required a landscape practice that could first survey and

²⁵ Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States 1607–1788* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

²⁶ *Fate of Empire* 11, 14. On the topographic imperative in British visual experience, see Barbara Maria Stafford, "Toward Romantic Landscape Perception: Illustrated Travels and the Rise of 'Singularity' as an Aesthetic Category," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 10 (1981): 17–75; Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989).

describe, then evoke in new settlers an emotional engagement with the land that they had alienated from its aboriginal occupants.²⁷ British art of India has been particularly well served by the studies of Mildred Archer showing the application of British picturesque aesthetics there.²⁸ Studies of early British landscapes of the colonies that became Canada focus on the work of military topographers in individual provinces.²⁹ Artistically speaking, even the United States remained a part of the global British landscape until the 1820s.³⁰ The chief shortcoming in this rich literature is that the individual studies—with the notable exceptions of Smith's and Stafford's work, and Michael Jacobs's more cursory *Painted Voyage*—take national rather than imperial or global perspectives on their subjects, so that the connections in their parallel stories are missed.³¹ The diplomatic outcome of the Seven Years' War gave Great Britain a global empire over non-British peoples in Canada, Bengal, the Trans-Appalachian West of North America, and before long Australia. Army and naval officers took the lead in visually representing a benign imperial landscape of places gained by conquest and ruled by standing armies—Pratt's "anti-conquest" (fig. 2).

²⁷ 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985). See also Smith's *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1992), with its crucial essay, "Art in the Service of Science and Travel" 1–40.

²⁸ *Early Views of India: The Picturesque Journeys of Thomas and William Daniell 1786–1794, The Complete Aquatints* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980); *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760–1860* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982).

²⁹ Paul A. Hachey, *The New Brunswick Landscape Print 1760–1880* (Fredericton, NB: Beaverbrook Art Gallery, 1980); Mary Spurling, *Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia 1749–1848* (Halifax, NS: Mount Saint Vincent University, 1981); Daniel W. Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2000).

³⁰ *Views and Visitors: American Landscape Before 1830*, ed. Edward J. Nygren (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).

³¹ Michael Jacobs, *The Painted Voyage: Art, Travel and Exploration 1564–1875* (London: British Museum Press, 1995). Other partial exceptions are comparative histories of landscape in Anglo-settler nations; see Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) and Elizabeth Johns et al., *New Worlds from Old: Nineteenth-Century Australian and American Landscapes* (Hartford and Canberra: Wadsworth Atheneum and National Gallery of Australia, 1998).



Figure 2: Picturesque invasion: General James Wolfe's failed attack on French entrenchments at Beauport (31 July 1759) is dominated visually by the Montmorency Falls, the scenic cliché of British Quebec. An adjutant of Wolfe, Captain Hervey Smyth, drew the scene "on the spot" as part of a series of engravings, *Six Views of the Most Remarkable Places in the Gulf and River of St. Lawrence* (1760), dedicated to William Pitt, Britain's strategist in the Seven Years' War. They were incorporated in the *Scenographia Americana: Or, a Collection of Views of North America and the West Indies*, a twenty-eight print series of wartime landscapes from Montreal to Guadeloupe, compiled by Paul Sandby, Drawing Master at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, and the most important topographic landscape artist in eighteenth-century Britain. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Science

The effort to create a benign image of imperial expansion is apparent in the Admiralty's sponsoring crucial scientific explorations after 1760. All of them carried artists to record natural history. First-hand representations of overseas flora and fauna—unlike landscapes—had abounded from the beginnings of early modern European colonization (fig. 3). Because art and science were inextricable in the early modern period, art historians have long interested themselves in these materials.³² But until the 1970s historians of science usually used these illustrations as they were originally intended: to show things. The chief critical concern focused on the respective image's visual accuracy.³³ Some histories of natural history still use illustrations straightforwardly as objective evidence, as in "this is how things looked."³⁴ But now there is more emphasis on how illustrations contributed crucially to the broader work of science in constructing, legitimizing, and motivating empire.³⁵ The exemplary figure was Joseph Banks: he had a clear sense of how the expansion of the British empire could be put to scientific advantage, and vice versa.³⁶ His insistence that artists (along with himself) accompany Captain James Cook's first Pacific voyage was the catalyst for the reorientation of the British public's expectations from reports of overseas lands: they had to be illustrated topographically.

Cartography, of course, was the essential science for early modern European imperialism: it located and claimed places for

³² For examples, see Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*; Honour, *European Vision of America*; Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*.

³³ Victoria Dickenson, *Drawn from Life: Science and Art in the Portrayal of the New World* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998).

³⁴ Thus Grove's learned and sophisticated *Green Imperialism* uses topographic representations of colonial landscapes to show the extent of deforestation and the benefits of reserves in particular locales; see pls. 66, 92, 99, 139, 180, 207, 270, 272.

³⁵ Dian Kriz, "Curiosities, Commodities, and Transplanted Bodies in Hans Sloane's *Natural History of Jamaica*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 57 (2000): 35–78; Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001); for a review of this literature, see Richard Drayton, "Science, Medicine, and the British Empire," in *Historiography*, ed. Winks and Low 264–76.

³⁶ *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, ed. David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).



Figure 3: The innocence of empire: cherubic research assistants aid Maria Sibylla Merian with her collections. Surinam was synonymous with a superabundance of butterflies. Merian (1647–1717) stayed there with her daughter from 1699 to 1701 to paint and catalogue them for her sumptuously illustrated *Dissertatio de generatioine et metamorphosisibus insectorum Surinamensium* (Amsterdam, 1719), whose frontispiece is shown here. She had left her husband in their native Germany in order to join the Labadists, a Dutch pietistic sect—a transformation which she likened to the emergence of a butterfly from its chrysalis, and which acquainted her with Surinam's lepidopterous opportunities. She had distinguished lineage as an artist of colonization: her father worked with Johan Theodore De Bry on the largest and most highly illustrated series of accounts of early modern European explorations and colonization, the *Grands Voyages* (to the Americas and Africa) and *Petits Voyages* (to Asia), married De Bry's eldest daughter, and completed the *Collectioes Peregrinationum in Indiam* (1624) after De Bry's death. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

dominion. It is practically impossible to write the history of cartography without illustrations: historians of maps ineluctably see their evidence and pride themselves on their visual expertise. But even more so than historians of science, cartographic historians have tended to evaluate their visual evidence for its objective accuracy. Until recently the history of cartography was primarily the history of the improvement of geographic knowledge. Now, however, the most prestigious work bears on how maps and mapping shaped political projects and were shaped by them. Simon Ryan has traced how a cartographic imperative mitigated many disappointments during British colonization of Australia. Mathew Edney has explained why British cartographers' most ambitious project lay overseas rather than at home, as they literally plotted an empire in India. And Glyndwr Williams has plumbed the unfathomable recurrence of Britons to Arctic exploration in North America.²⁷ Rather than disabusing Britons of their imaginings, cartographers provided them their most easily imagined Empire: the one on which the sun never set.

Empire and Political Culture

Early modern British political culture richly expressed itself visually. The *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*²⁸ is the bibliographic monument to this richness. The *Catalogue's* approximately seventeen thousand entries for the period from 1320 to 1832 provide invaluable minute explanations of each print's references to contemporary politics, social issues, and personalities. But the *Catalogue's* larger dimensions also bear on visual aspects of Britain's political culture. The rate of publication for political prints increased dramatically in the middle third of the eighteenth century (from fewer than twenty per year, to over one hundred), and their issues were increasingly imperial—both developments in

²⁷ Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); Mathew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997); Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason* (London: Harper Collins, 2001).

²⁸ 11 vols., ed. Frederick George Stephens and Mary Dorothy George (London: British Museum, 1870–1954).

parallel with British popular politics.³⁹ From the 1750s onward British political culture increasingly related colonial matters to each other in global terms that amounted to an imperial perspective.⁴⁰

But as historians turned in the 1960s to studying British popular politics—a solecism for the preceding Namierite paradigm of politics as an oligarchic web overlaying Parliament—they seldom used these prints even for illustrations, much less as evidence with its own possibilities for analysis. E.P. Thompson's instant classic, *The Making of the English Working Class*,⁴¹ had only two illustrations—and merely as frontispieces to chapters. (Ever the path breaker, a decade later Thompson ensured that his *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*⁴² would have a series of prints evoking both patrician and plebian cultures of his subject.) Before the 1990s visual materials were usually incidental and supplementary to the history of British political culture. John Brewer's crucial *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*⁴³ forcefully schematized his argument with prints on the cover and title page, but in the text itself there was only a single print. Brewer's subsequent work has been a bellwether. He edited a useful collection of eighteenth-century British prints relevant to popular politics, but it illustrated issues familiar from traditional political narratives.⁴⁴ His *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, however, is a masterful, wholly original, linking of artistic creation, marketing, and power through visual

³⁹ Peter D.G. Thomas, *The American Revolution (The English Satirical Print 1600–1832)* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003); Timothy Clayton, *The English Print 1688–1802* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

⁴⁰ On the origins of a more recognizably imperial empire in the period from the 1750s to the 1780—from the Seven Years' War to the aftermath of the American War of Independence, see P.J. Marshall, "Britain Without America—A Second Empire?" in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Marshall 576–95; C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989).

⁴¹ (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

⁴² (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

⁴³ (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976).

⁴⁴ *The Common People and Politics, 1750–1790s (The English Satirical Print 1600–1832)* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986).

evidence.⁴⁵ Few of the book's 241 illustrations are merely isomorphic; nearly every one has an explicitly identified but subtle contribution to make.

Now, with cultural studies urging that culture be understood as political and that politics be understood by its culture, the most important histories of British eighteenth-century political life often use visual materials at the crux of their analyses. Much of the success of Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*⁴⁶—easily the most important book on eighteenth-century British political culture in over a decade—depended on her showing how visual culture worked in creating British loyalties. As an icon, Britannia needed to be seen, and Colley shows her in many guises: as a subaltern to Christ, as a mauled of the French rooster, as a recipient of tribute from the colonies. An elaborate visual martyrology painfully reminded Britons of the Protestant crux of their patriotism. Innumerable prints demeaned the Catholic French as an effeminate, impoverished Other, who provided a reliable counter-type for British identities.⁴⁷ Colley takes stereotypes seriously: the more flagrant, the better. The triumph of her method comes in the chapter on "Womanpower," in which eleven brilliantly chosen illustrations manifest the conflicts arising from women's claims to be patriots too. The forthrightly propagandistic intent of these images shrewdly complements the subtlety of her analysis of the conflicts, tensions, and diversity of British identities.

Colley's most recent book, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World*⁴⁸ integrates its seventy-five illustrations even more closely with her analysis. The book ingeniously shows how Britons learned about their increasingly global empire from the microcosmic experiences of Britons captured in the Mediterranean, North America, and India. The illustrations enable today's reader to visualize events from Tangiers to Bombay as their eighteenth-century counterparts might have, and to appreciate the diverse ways that colonized peo-

⁴⁵ (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997).

⁴⁶ (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992).

⁴⁷ Michael Duffy, *The Englishman and the Foreigner (The English Satirical Print 1600-1832)* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986).

⁴⁸ The American edition is stirring, and more accurately, retitled as *Captives: The Story of Britain's Pursuit of Empire and How Its Soldiers and Civilians Were Held Captive by the Dream of Global Supremacy* (New York: Pantheon, 2003).

ples could be seen and represented. In keeping with the book's topic, the most frequent scenes are military: the most striking images are of the tiger as a metonymy of India, a measure of military respect simultaneously granted and withheld. The accumulation of captivity narratives combined individuals' episodic failure into an epic of Britain's imperial triumph.

Subject Peoples

In every context examined by Colley, the rankest racism was textual, not visual—which ought to perplex us, because European racism depends on seeing people. Precisely because visual images simplify experience and schematize meaning they are important as evidence of Europeans' understandings and dealings with indigenous peoples. Propagandistic visual images reinforce the ideological functions of social constructions of race, ethnicity, and social status. Images are hard to argue with because their points are vivid but their assumptions inexplicit: they can co-opt tacit agreement in the immediacy of perception.

Though images symbolized, allegorized, and schematized appearances, they also indicated Europeans' conflicts, contradictions, and uncertainties in trying to understand peoples different from themselves (within as well as without Europe). Roxann Wheeler uses this potential effectively in studying eighteenth-century Britons' ways of understanding differences of appearance. Until the late eighteenth century, culture (especially religion), geography (especially climate), civility (especially architecture), and material culture (especially clothing) were usually more telling than somatic features in determining visual representations. Paradoxically, skin colour figured more forcefully in textual descriptions: consciously or not, British literary culture undertook a project to make apparent race important. Beth Fowkes Tobin (like Wheeler, a professor of English) gives priority to visual evidence to tell a complementary story in *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting*. She cleverly shows how artists literally domesticated the Empire by having Black servants as staffage in Britons' portraiture. Her other thematic chapters deal with comparably unconventional but illuminating topics, such as Anglo-Indian family portraits and cross-dressing between British officers and Mohawk warriors. Her most valuable chapter considers the Italian artist Agostino Brunias, recruited from France by British imperial officials to paint first-hand a series of genre paintings of

African-Caribbeans in plantation settings. These paintings took a new ethnographic interest in the dress, leisure, and marketing of their subjects, and presented them in ways that contradicted the oppression of their servitude.

It was no coincidence that Brunias made his paintings just as the anti-slavery movement gained strength in Britain. A large proportion, but by no means all, of the images in Marcus Wood's *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* could be categorized as abolitionist in message. This badly needed book examines a wide variety of materials—prints, maps, book and magazine illustrations, children's literature, playing cards, and high-art paintings and sculpture—with a sophisticated, problem-raising eye. As his title suggests, Wood wants to understand ignorance: how people represented the utterly unfamiliar and how they connived to ignore what they knew about. He concentrates on four sub-topics in the illustration of slavery—"the middle passage, slave/flight escape, the popular imagery generated by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and slave torture/'punishment'." He also outlines three further sub-topics whose visual evidence still needs analysis: slave resistance and rebellion, documentary and topographic art of slave life, and Africa and the slave trade there. Compared with Wood's book, the multi-volume *The Image of the Black in Western Art*⁴⁰ is monumentally more impressive, tracing its subject from Pharaonic Egypt to World War I. But its methodology is outdated and its problem questionable: an essentialist history ('The Image,' 'The Black') of an iconographic theme—Black Africans—in high art. Have Black Africans been a stable category of people throughout Western history, or does this history force its subjects into one? With these caveats in mind, there is much to be learned from Hugh Honour's characteristically rich commentary on the modern period, when apparent race had hard-

⁴⁰ Vol. 1: Jean Vercoutter, Jean Leclant, Frank M. Snowden, Jr., and Jehan Desanges, *From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Rome Empire* (New York: William Morrow, 1976); vol. 2: *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery,"* pt. 1, Jean Devisse, *From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood*, pt. 2, Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, *Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World (Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century)*, trans. William Granger Ryan (New York: William Morrow, 1979); vol. 4: Hugh Honour, *From the American Revolution to World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989).

ened as a social category. Regrettably, the volume most relevant to this essay—on the early modern period—remains unpublished.

Invoking Jürgen Habermas as its titular deity, an enormous cultural history about the expansion of a public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe has developed.⁵⁰ This history concentrates on the associational world of drinking spots, salons, and the theater, as providing sounding boards for a reading public. The simultaneous development of a *viewing* public has been much less studied.⁵¹ But the crucial role of illustrations in eighteenth-century British imperial culture points to its parallel importance. Topographic landscape art helped Britons to understand a rapidly enlarging British world. A global British landscape developed visually in the era of the Seven Years' War, ranging from marchlands in Scotland and Ireland to ones overseas in North America, the Caribbean, India, and the South Pacific. It was a mode of appropriation. Historians have only recently begun to give these representations the attention they deserve as assertions of British imperialism.

⁵⁰ For a survey of this literature, see James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

⁵¹ The most useful studies here are Clayton, *English Print, Brewer, Pleasures of the Imagination*, and Thomas Tolley, *Painting the Cannon's Roar: Music, the Visual Arts and the Rise of an Attentive Public in the Age of Haydn, c. 1750 to c. 1810* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).