

Protestantism in the Origins of Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Servitude and Slavery

by

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For my Dad with love.

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ABSTRACT

Seventeenth-century Barbados drew on centuries of Christian tradition to help develop its reliance on plantation slavery and servitude. The majority of its indentured servants were “cordially loathed” Irish Roman Catholics, but, in the early 1640s they were surpassed by enslaved Africans. To a large degree, the English based their rationale of slavery on Protestant tradition which drew from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scriptural interpretation suggesting that enslavement were possible if the enslaved were infidels. Officials in the English metropole and Barbados created legal distinctions grounded in Christian tradition that maintained African enslavement was biblically sanctioned and, therefore, legitimate. Barbadian colonists prevented Africans from joining the church to protect slavery and plantation industry, and they strongly resisted those who baptized, catechized, or proselytized Africans. Protestant Christian tradition was inextricably linked to the seventeenth-century development of plantation slavery and servitude in the English Caribbean.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Colonial servitude and slavery in Barbados and the English Caribbean significantly drew its institutional and ideological form from Christian tradition and early modern biblical interpretation. English colonial authorities strongly relied on scripture to rationalize Caribbean servitude and enslavement in plantation industry. Irish were often forced or coerced into servitude and Africans were initially enslaved not exclusively because of racial difference, but because of varied degrees of religious infidelity. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was no greater source of division between Europeans and non-Europeans than religion, and indeed between Europeans themselves.¹ In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English context, which is the subject of this paper, differentiating between peoples before African slavery is best exemplified by English interactions with Ireland. As far back as 1155, the first and only English pope, Adrian IV, used a papal bull to grant Henry II the right to conquer Ireland in order to “enlarge the bounds of the church” and “declare the truth of the Christian faith to ignorant and barbarous [Irish] nations.” Importantly, the bull had more severe motives “to extirpate the plants of evil from the fields of the Lord.”² Because Ireland was generally pagan and lacked a strong Christian presence, the English disparaged the Irish not just as different from themselves, but as evil, inferior, animalistic heathens who deserved to have their land taken from them and ruled over by someone with Christian competence and sensibility.³ In his unflattering *Topography of Ireland*, Gerald of Wales described the Irish as an inferior “race” because of their general

¹ Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10; Nicholas M. Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650-1780* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 2.

² Adrian IV, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. Ernest F. Henderson (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), 10.

³ Geraldus Cambrensis, Thomas Forester, trans., *Topography of Ireland* (Cambridge, ON: Medieval Latin Series, 2000), 68-71.

ignorance of Christian faith and values, suggesting that race had much more to do with malleable cultural practices than immutable, inherited skin colour.⁴ After travelling to Ireland through the 1180s and '90s, Gerald persistently referenced biblical allegories such as idleness, deceit, sloth, and barbarism to portray the Irish as distinctly different from the Christian. If England civilized Ireland by Christianizing it, so was the belief, then these negative traits would disappear. If Ireland were Christian, it would no longer host an alien "race" of people living in "another world ... secluded from civilized nations."⁵ Gerald's account and opinions of the country remained an authoritative source on the Irish people and culture well into the eighteenth century, such that sixteenth-century English colonizers used his writing to support England's bloody colonization of Ireland and forced servitude of its people.⁶

When England began its sixteenth-century colonization of Ireland, much of the country had long since been converted to Catholicism, but this had little effect on how colonizers and the English public saw Ireland. Henry VIII's Protestant Reformation created the impression that Ireland was not only treasonous for remaining Catholic, but also heretical for disavowing Protestantism and the king as head of the church. As Adrian IV and Henry II used religion to simultaneously diminish and distinguish the Irish in the twelfth century, Elizabeth I did the same in the sixteenth century. Negative stereotypes and broad generalizations about the Irish, mostly based in religion, allowed the English to dehumanize them and rationalize their violent colonial subjugation. Irish historian John McGurk explained that the concept of race was a leading factor in Ireland's colonization, but that race in the early modern period was a category that could exist without reference to skin colour, arguing that in the Elizabethan colonization of Ireland, "racism

⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Lavezzo, Kathy. *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 53.

was the cant of conquest.”⁷ The difference between the boundaries of race in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European mind and more modern pseudoscientific constructions of race is that the boundary was impermanent: Skin colour was part of the process of differentiating, but it was not as important to the process of differentiating people as malleable religious belief. Skin colour meant something different to early modern Europeans. People could theoretically become part of another group by converting or adopting the culture, and some people in the seventeenth century took this route as a path toward better treatment, assimilation, and—especially in Africans’ cases—freedom.⁸

When the English arrived in Barbados in the early seventeenth century, the most common form of unfree labour they brought were Irish Roman Catholics.⁹ Irish were unfree in the sense that they were indentured servants who had, to varying degrees, accepted to serve a planter for a number of years (usually five to just under seven) in exchange for a wage, food, and lodging, while others looking for work agreed to indentured servitude if the host agreed to pay for their transatlantic crossing.¹⁰ Many, however, were not there voluntarily and were either kidnapped or forced into servitude in some other way, such as through imprisonment. Forced migration to Barbados for indentured servitude was so common in the seventeenth century that it had earned itself the nickname of being “Barbadosed.”¹¹ Africans, meanwhile, did not arrive in significant

⁷John McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The Burdens of the 1590s Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.

⁸Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 110-111.

⁹Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 69.

¹⁰Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 5; Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes* (London, 1673), 43.

¹¹Jerome S. Handler and Matthew C. Reilly, “Contesting ‘White Slavery’ in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” *New West Indian Guide* 91 (2017): 30-55, 33-36; Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 79-80; Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 5-6; Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 94-98.

numbers until the late 1630s, and until then planters generally preferred Irish labour, despite them being “cordially loathed” Catholics.¹² Richard Ligon, an Englishman who travelled to the island in the late 1640s, told how brutally planters treated their servants, describing several bloody accounts of violence. He recorded that “servants have the worser lives” because of how they were beaten for trivial offences, and gave an example of one being struck “with a cane about the head, till the blood has followed.”¹³ Ligon noted that not all planters were cruel to their servants, but that the violent ones had committed horrors against them that he “did not think one Christian could have done to another.”¹⁴

Planters and colonial authorities in Barbados and the English Caribbean used Protestant Christian tradition to rationalize African enslavement in the development of plantation enterprise.¹⁵ The reason it is so important to emphasize that Christian tradition, and in particular that of Protestantism, played an important role in the development of English Caribbean slavery and servitude is because the Bible itself is an insufficient explanation from where seventeenth-century English Protestants got their beliefs. Benjamin Braude has argued that throughout the early modern period, the printed Bible was not only absent from most Europeans’ lives, but even if it were abundantly available, illiteracy was so high that few could have read it, much less understood it.¹⁶ Despite the tendency to view Christianity as a written religion, the majority of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Protestant Christians learned their beliefs orally, by listening to preachers and repeating what they had heard without ever reading the scripture

¹² Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 69; The first shipments of Africans to Barbados were not until 164, see “Numbers of slaves from Africa disembarking in Barbados, 1627-1700,” *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/1Y7amyFq>.

¹³ Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵ The Barbadian “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes” in 1661 served as a guide for other English colonies such as Jamaica and South Carolina.

¹⁶ Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), 103-142.

themselves.¹⁷ It is in this respect that tradition is a better way to understand how most seventeenth-century English Protestants understood their religion. The Bible informed what preachers may have delivered in their sermons and explained to the masses, but most people who lived by what ecclesiastical authorities told them were not directly informed by the Bible itself. What allowed Barbadian planters to dehumanize others to the extent that it resulted in human beings being legally categorized as “chattels” in 1661 and “real estate” in 1667 was heavily drawn from engrained beliefs stemming from Christian tradition.¹⁸ Ligon, for example, was utterly shocked at the violence he saw inflicted by one Christian onto another, but he was not much concerned with the violence he saw inflicted on non-Christian, African infidel slaves.¹⁹ Whether he read the Bible himself is irrelevant, however, because from wherever he got his opinion on abuse, he privileged abuse on Christians as being “worsor” than abuse on those who were not.²⁰

The language Ligon used in his *True and Exact History of Barbadoes* shows that he separated Africans from Europeans primarily along religious lines rather than just racial ones. He wrote, for example, when discussing the increasing number of Africans on the island, that some had “accounted a strange thing, that the Negres, [were] more then double the numbers of the Christians.”²¹ He did not say that Africans outnumbered Europeans, nor that blacks outnumbered whites: Negres—infidels—outnumbered Christians. When comparing African slaves and indentured servants, he always paid careful attention to distinguish the two as “Negres and

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes,” September 27, 1661, BL 36, Box 1 (1656/57 Jan 16 – 1670), Blathwayt Papers, Huntington Library—subsequent citations simplified to “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes”; “An Act declaring the Negro Slaves of this Island to be Real Estate,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648-1718* (London, 1721), 63.

¹⁹ Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes*, 43.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 46.

Christian servants,” or irreligious, infidel Africans and Christian Europeans.²² Ligon’s distinction shows that whatever *Negres* meant, it was not Christian, and that it was something specifically delineated as *not* Christian. He explained that whenever there was “commotion” on the island, it was “either by Christian servants, or Negre slaves.”²³ He also wrote that planters were obsessed with how bloody and violence-prone their slaves were, and that too many slaves would lead to a planter’s nightmare scenario, describing a situation in which planters were preoccupied with their physical security to the extent that many believed that, at the first opportunity, the infidel slaves would bring “some horrid massacre upon the Christians” and take over the island.²⁴ There is something important in his tone: Planters, as Christians, were afraid of being slaughtered by a godless force that was distinctly non-Christian. In all of Ligon’s writing, “Negre” is synonymous with infidel and used with parallelism to match or counter “Christian servants,” and this was an occurrence that Edward B. Rugemer has identified as a fundamental element of seventeenth-century racialization in Barbados.²⁵

Europeans dividing each other for religious purposes was not something that was invented in Barbados, or even in the broader colonization of the Americas. Like unfree labour, religiously differentiating people was a longstanding tradition.²⁶ What was new about Caribbean colonial labour, however, was the type of labour, its intensity, and the resulting societies that supported it. Due to “unmitigated self-interest” and the creation of a “wilderness of mere materialism,” some historians have argued that Barbados and West Indian colonies in general

²² *Ibid.*, 107.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵ Edward B. Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3 (July, 2013), 431.

²⁶ Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 156-163.

could hardly be described as societies at all, and that they produced nothing but a “disastrous social failure.”²⁷ The Barbadian Thomas Walduck wrote in 1710 that “debauched people” and the colony’s first planters’ “moral bankruptcy” made it the unforgiving economic powerhouse it was.²⁸

Ligon used religion to divide the Barbadian population in half: between enslaved African infidel and Christian Europeans, whether servant or master. Legal historians have recognized this separation as well, showing that this was a convention carried across the Atlantic from ancient and medieval Europe. Whether in the British Isles or mainland Europe, authorities codified eligibility for slavery depending on the slaves’ religious identity, whether they were prisoners of war, or simply enemies of the dominant creed.²⁹ In Barbados, with few exceptions, infidels were Africans who came across the Atlantic to be sold as property into a lifetime of slavery, while servants were Christians, usually Irish but sometimes English, who entered contracts for several years of work in exchange for wages and accommodations. Although Christian servitude sometimes resembled African slavery, what allowed it be so different derived from Protestant tradition informed by biblical scripture.

The King James Bible has many passages that outline the terms under which people may temporarily own the servitude of another, and it also provides the terms under which people may be owned and permanently enslaved. The Curse of Ham is one of the Bible’s most-cited stories

²⁷ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 144.

²⁸ As quoted in Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 340.

²⁹ Sally Hadden, “The Fragmented Laws of Slavery in the Colonial and Revolutionary Eras,” *The Cambridge History of Law in America*, Michael Grossberg and Christopher Tomlins, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 258, 265.

for African slavery.³⁰ Found in Genesis 9, the Curse of Ham was the result of one of Noah's sons, Ham, discovering his father drunk, unconscious, and naked—and then scoffing about it to his brothers. When Noah discovered this, he became so enraged that he put a vengeful curse on his grandson, Ham's son Canaan, making him “dark and ugly,” and for all time Canaan's sons to be a “slave of slaves.”³¹ Another key Bible story that relates to slavery is that of Cain and Abel. Ligon alluded to this story when he described how Barbadian planters thought slaves could never be trusted, owing to the “mark upon these people, which will hardly ever be wip'd off.”³² The mark to which Ligon referred was the one that God put on Cain after he killed his brother, Abel. Cain was jealous of Abel, thinking their father preferred him for everything from his intelligence to his good looks and strong work ethic. One day, while Abel was working the field, the jealous Cain murdered him. “The Lord then set a mark upon Cain lest any finding should kill him,” and banished him to the Land of Nod, somewhere east of Eden.³³ The purpose of the mark was to prevent some vigilante from killing him; God wanted Cain to live out the rest of his days thinking about what he had done, and for everyone he encountered to recognize him for it. The “mark,” although ambiguous, was predominantly interpreted as blackness and supported the opinion, especially among English Caribbean planters, that African distemper owed to them being Cain's descendants.³⁴ Exodus 21 is so specific with regards to servitude and slavery that it makes specific distinctions between the two. Slaves that are temporary can serve for six years, and “in the seventh he shall go out for nothing,” but those consigned to enslavement for life are to be physically marked: “And his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall

³⁰ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage, The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66-67; Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39-41.

³¹ Genesis 9, the book of Genesis.

³² Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 53.

³³ Genesis 4:15.

³⁴ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 33-35.

serve him for ever.”³⁵ Servants did serve an average contract of six years, and, although the preferred method of marking slaves was branding, masters nonetheless marked their slaves in a way that was both physical and permanent.³⁶

Ligon’s way of describing how religion divided Christian servants and infidel slaves introduces some complication, however. It might seem like a contradiction to claim on one hand that Barbadian Christians could enslave infidels but not each other, yet, for most of the seventeenth century, Christians constituted the bulk of the island’s unfree labour. In the words of Colin Kidd, this is why “it is necessary to liberate the historical imagination ... otherwise the pursuit of ethnicity remains trapped within modern categories.”³⁷ In the seventeenth century, the Protestant English did not consider Catholics *true* Christians, but as heretical enemies.³⁸ The English Civil War, in many respects, was a religious conflict between Protestants exhausted by the state’s tolerance of Catholicism and its lingering elements in the Church of England and government, but they also used the war to really assert a renewed *true* Protestant identity and meaning. The aftermath saw incredible acts of violence as the new authorities pursued officials thought to be sympathetic of Catholicism. The state’s fervor to extirpate Catholicism from influential positions culminated in 1645 with the trial and execution of the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud, who “traitorously endeavoured to alter and subvert God’s true religion by law established in this realm, and instead thereof to set up Popish Superstition and Idolatry.”³⁹ Laud was also charged with being a “true” believer of Catholicism and working with

³⁵ Exodus 21:2; Exodus 21:6.

³⁶ Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery*, 5.

³⁷ Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 10.

³⁸ Katharine Gerber, “The Ultimate Sin Christianizing Slaves in Barbados in the Seventeenth Century,” *Slavery and Abolition* (March, 2010): 57-73.

³⁹ John Rushworth, “Historical Collections: The trial of William Laud,” *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 3, 1639-40* (London, 1721), 1365-1381. Retrieved from *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol3/pp1365-1381>.

“secret intelligence” from the Pope to “traitorously and wickedly ... reconcile the Church of England with the Church of Rome.”⁴⁰ Early modern Roman Catholics might have been heretics, but they were Christian heretics and a familiar breed; they were misled Christians who neglected the true Protestant religion, which justified their subjugation on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1650, the same year Ligon returned to England, the Barbadian colonial government moved in the same direction as post-civil war England’s. The Barbadian Assembly required “unanimous profession of the true Religion in this Island [and] condign punishment for the Opposers thereof.”⁴¹ Although “condign punishment” for opposing the true religion went undefined, writers in London provided a hint in 1653, claiming people were forced from their homes and branded and cut, in addition to permanent banishment from the colony.⁴² Both colonists and parliamentarians in London feared “the Outrageous Malice of Papists” operating in the Americas, and so moved to subvert Catholicism “chiefly to the Preservation and Advancement of the true Protestant Religion amongst the said Planters and Inhabitants, and the further Enlargement and Spreading of the Gospel of Christ.”⁴³

The best evidence in support of the English and Barbadian view that Catholicism constituted heresy was in how its planters and slave owners perceived Catholic African slaves. Merchants from Roman Catholic countries, such as France, Portugal, and Spain were required by

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “An Act, Intituled, An Acknowledgement of and Declaration of the Inhabitants of the Island of Barbadoes, of His Majesty’s Right to the Dominions of this Island, and the Right of the Right Honourable Earl of Carlisle, derived from the Said Majesty; and by the Earl of Carlisle, to the Right Honourable the Lord Willoughby of Parham; and also for the unanimous Profession of the true Religion in this Island, and imposing condign Punishment upon of the Opposers thereof,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 48.

⁴² A.B. *A brief relation of the beginning and ending of the troubles of the Barbados, with the true causes thereof: Set forth by A.B. a diligent Observer of the Times*. London, 1653. Early English Books Online, 5.

⁴³ “November 1643: Ordinance for the Government of the Plantations in the West Indies,” *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, edited by C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 331-333. *British History Online*, 2016. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp331-333>.

their own laws to baptize their slaves. Catholic Europeans nevertheless sold slaves throughout the English Caribbean, and Barbadians bought them as readily as they bought unbaptized slaves from British merchants.⁴⁴ Barbadian slave masters were unconcerned about whether their slaves were Catholic because being a Catholic was almost like having no religion at all and planters considered French merchants' slaves' catechization as incomplete—what they were concerned with, however, was whether slaves were followers of the true religion: Protestantism.⁴⁵ It was this distinction that ultimately played a major role in who could be a servant and who could be a slave in seventeenth-century Barbados.

Barbadian planters' and authorities' scriptural interpretations helped them create the brutal complex of seventeenth-century plantation industry. The English were able to subjugate Irish first for being Gaels and pagans in the twelfth century, and then in the early modern period for not being true Christians. Like they had done with the Irish, the English subjugated Africans along similar lines, except instead of accusing them of being unchristian, Africans had no religion at all—they were infidels. This distinction helped English Caribbean planters to position Roman Catholics and Africans into convenient, biblically defined categories of labour. Catholics, who were Christian-like, but not true Christians, were allowed to enter (either forced or voluntary) *slave-like* conditions of indentured servitude for a period no longer than seven years. Africans, meanwhile, were without any familiarity of Christianity at all; not only were they not true Christians, they were irreligious infidels and so could be enslaved for life. Even the fast-tracked proselytizing and catechization Africans received at the hands of hasty Catholic merchants was considered incomplete, allowing Barbadian buyers to enslave them rather than

⁴⁴ K.G. Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 107.

⁴⁵ Gerber, "The Ultimate Sin," 61.

force them into contracts for indentured servitude like those of Irish Catholics'.⁴⁶ Africans, once physically branded, were then a master's property for life, a necessary condition of enslavement prescribed in the book of Exodus.

The origins of slavery in the English Caribbean is a subject that has been traditionally narrow and homogenous. Modern slavery historians might have subtle disagreements about the nature of slavery and dwell on semantics about who was more subjugated than another, but they all more or less agree that slavery is predominantly an economic history inextricably linked to racism—that Europeans enslaved Africans for economic benefit because of the perception that Africans' ethnicity made them inherently inferior. In Alden T. Vaughan's summary of the so-called "origins debate," he claimed that "slavery [and] racism," or "racial prejudice," were "endemic in Europe's American colonies from the sixteenth century on."⁴⁷ Even Nicholas Beasley, whose recent groundbreaking work placed religion at the forefront of English Caribbean history, argued that from the outset, Barbadian and English colonial authorities "were committed to a fundamental racial and cultural stasis."⁴⁸ For all of Beasley's research on the role religion played in colonial slave societies, he downplays it as something that acted alongside racism to shape and define the institution of slavery, not as its apologist or a significant influence in its creation. Like English Caribbean historians, Beasley carefully avoids discussing race and racialization in the English Atlantic, and nowhere in his book on Christianity, ritual, and slavery in the early modern Caribbean does he discuss the fact that pseudoscientific proslavery arguments based on race were absent until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Surprisingly,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 57-61.

⁴⁷ Andrew T. Vaughan, "The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History*, vol. 97, no. 3, "A Sense of Their Own Power": Black Virginians, 1619-1989 (July, 1989): 311-354.

⁴⁸ Beasley, *Christian Ritual*, 6.

Beasley did not consider the effect that Protestant Christian tradition had in colonial authorities' rationalization of subjugating either Africans or Roman Catholics to slavery or servitude.

In the words of David Eltis, slavery history can generally be reduced to “people from one continent forc[ing] those from a second continent to produce a narrow range of consumer goods in a third.”⁴⁹ My research agrees with this thesis, but further explores the idea that Protestant tradition allowed people from the first continent to enslave those on the second. The traditional claim has been what has already been discussed: Europeans believed there was an inherent, racial inferiority attached to blackness, justifying their enslavement. As Winthrop Jordan once argued, it was an “unthinking decision.”⁵⁰ But what drove Europeans to such an “unthinking” conclusion? Scientific racism did not appear until the late eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century it became a popular and growing discipline, especially in the United States, yet there is a contemporary trend that tends to project modern notions about race backwards in time.⁵¹ Ivan Hannaford described contemporary categorizations of race as being so engrained in skin colour and outward appearance that most people suffer from an “optical illusion,” resulting in both scholars and amateurs being “quite unable to conceive of a past that may not have had this framework.”⁵² Hannaford explained that imposing modernity’s racial definitions on the past “blocks out a wide range of thought on human experience and conduct” in favour of an

⁴⁹ David Eltis, “Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 5 (Dec., 1993): 1399-1423, 1399.

⁵⁰ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 44-98.

⁵¹ Beasley, *Christian Ritual*, 6; Jerome S. Handler and Matthew C. Reilly, “Contesting ‘White Slavery’ in the Caribbean: Enslaves Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” *New West Indian Guide* 91 (2017): 30-55; James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no.1 (Jan., 1997): 143-166. Sweet argued that more than anything else, skin colour was what determined a person’s position in the early modern “social hierarchy”; Joyce E. Chaplin, “Race” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddock (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 173.

⁵² Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3-4.

inaccurate, but perhaps more familiar, division of people.⁵³ The evidence points to a more complicated explanation than racism alone: English Christian tradition informed people's views about who was eligible for slavery, and provided several explanations about who these people were and what they looked like.

In his discussion of the 1661 Barbadian slave code, legal historian Bradley Nicholson argued that when the Barbadian Assembly described Africans as heathens, they were justifying the colony's African enslavement with the traditional "natural law rationale for slavery," which was that Christian tradition had long established that Christians could enslave infidels.⁵⁴ The Curse of Ham, for example, said in no convoluted terms that Canaan's sons would be "slaves of slaves," and that Christian tradition gave rise to the idea that his sons could be identified by their dark skin.⁵⁵ Planters and colonial authorities in the seventeenth-century English Caribbean believed that Christians simply could not enslave each other, which formed the longstanding rationale colonists used to bar Africans from entering the church, and which metropolitan English authorities especially fought against in the latter half of the seventeenth century.⁵⁶ If slaves became Christians, English Caribbean colonists argued that plantation industry would fall apart: If Africans lost their Christian infidelity and became like Christian Europeans, if they received the enlightenment Europeans believed Christianity awarded them, the differences between the two would be eliminated, at least enough to prevent enslavement. This is important,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Bradley J. Nicholson, "Legal Borrowing and the Origins of Slave Law in the British Colonies," *The American Journal of Legal History*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan, 1994), 50-51: "The reference to Africans' 'heathenism' is the natural law rationale for slavery."

⁵⁵ Genesis 9:25; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 97.

⁵⁶ "Commission to Edw. Hyde, Lord Chancellor, Thos. Earl of Southampton, Lord Treasurer, Edw. Earl of Manchester, Lord Chamberlain, Theop. Earl of Lincoln, John Earl of Clare, Jas. Earl of Marlborough, Jerome Earl of Portland, Will. Visct. Say and Sele, and others," Dec 1, 1660, Item 2698, vol. 1 (1574-1660), *Colonial State Papers*: 492-493.

and often insufficiently explored in the bulk of slavery historiography. Seventeenth-century slavery in Barbados heavily depended on religious grounds compared to racial ones—but skin colour did play a factor in the earliest forms of English Caribbean slavery in that, to the English, it existed as a biblically defined marker of infidelity and an historical rejection of Christianity, and was not as much an immutable racial characteristic as it is today. This thesis helps underscore the often overlooked reality that early modern English conceptions of race were inextricably interwoven with religious prejudice and the two were mutually reinforcing in the creation of slavery.

Winthrop Jordan, a specialist in American slavery, argued that race and skin colour were the defining factors in the enslavement of Africans.⁵⁷ While skin colour did become a significant factor in the development of English slavery, it was, in large part, because Christian tradition had already helped the Protestant English establish that eligibility for enslavement relied on possessing Christian infidelity signified by dark skin. Legal historian Sally Hadden has argued this, explaining that in the early seventeenth century, according to natural law, those ignorant of Christianity were eligible for slavery, and that philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes agreed, and so did the English colonizers who read him.⁵⁸ Jordan made the case that “For Englishmen, the most arresting characteristic of the newly discovered African was his color,” and attributed this to early modern English ideas of cleanliness and beauty.⁵⁹ But Jordan also recognized that sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Englishmen—before African slavery or American colonization—had relatively benign views of Africans’ blackness.⁶⁰ Why Africans

⁵⁷ Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3-25.

⁵⁸ Hadden, “The Fragmented Laws of Slavery...” 257.

⁵⁹ Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden*, 4-7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

were black was generally thought to have been caused by the sun, and Europeans who travelled to Africa and later the Caribbean feared that if they spent too much time there, they might become black themselves, suggesting that skin colour was thought to be changeable rather than something necessarily immutable.⁶¹ It was not until the sixteenth century that religious thinkers began to sway general opinion that Africans' blackness was the result of divine will, and they began citing various biblical passages that supported them.⁶² The book of Jeremiah 13:23, for example, in a passage about inheriting treachery asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to evil."⁶³ According to Jordan, this question inspired the Elizabethan-era expression "to wash in Ethiop white," meaning to indulge in an exercise of futility or attempt the impossible.⁶⁴ Blackness was, according to sixteenth-century English Protestant tradition, something that carried a wickedness and dirtiness applied by God himself, and which could not be rid of, no matter how hard anyone tried.⁶⁵ Africans were not alleged to be inferior because they were black, rather God made them black to warn Christians of their many treacheries. It was on this basis that Barbadian and English authorities realized that biblical condonation of slavery would help them enslave Africans rather than press them into servitude like they did with Christians.

For all its strengths, Jordan's influential work on the origins of race and slavery lacks a major discussion of religion's vital and constant role in the puzzle of slavery's origins. If

⁶¹ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1984), 213-240; Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 8.

⁶² David Brion Davis, "Constructing Race: A Reflection." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997): 7-18.

⁶³ Jeremiah 13:23; the book of Jeremiah.

⁶⁴ Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 9; Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 106; Jeremiah 13:23, the book of Jeremiah (King James Version): "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

⁶⁵ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 106.

Africans' blackness in the sixteenth century could "hardly be said to have drawn the attention of Englishmen or indeed Europeans generally," then skin colour alone is too simple an explanation as a catalyst in the development of African slavery.⁶⁶ Joyce E. Chaplin argued that "race was Atlantic," and that connotations of inferiority or superiority attached to immutable skin color, were largely absent from European history until the seventeenth century onward.⁶⁷ Englishmen and other Europeans, for example, did not discover Africa in the 1500s—Europeans had direct interactions with Africa throughout antiquity and the medieval period, yet skin colour was not a basis on which contemporaries judged Africans in a way that might resemble modern characteristics of racism.⁶⁸ Indeed, the Iberian peninsula was invaded by "blacke Moores," a culture that was, according to Jordan, much more "highly civilized" than either the Spanish or Portuguese at the time.⁶⁹ Benjamin Braude, however, has argued that Europeans rediscovered Africa at the same time they discovered the Americas, and that Africa's rediscovery coincided with the European Enlightenment, bringing new perspectives on the nature of race, culture, and religion, and the relatedness of the three that blended them together.⁷⁰

Africans' eligibility for slavery in the seventeenth century was an effect of Protestant Christian tradition rather than a standalone ethnic prejudice. Toward the end of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, religious thinkers began to point out that blackness was not something that was merely an interesting curiosity, but a result of various punishments and cautions from God—such as the irrevocable mark of warning God applied to Cain, and the eternal enslavement of Canaan and his cursed African descendants.⁷¹ These biblical

⁶⁶ As quoted in Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 7.

⁶⁷ Chaplin, "Race," 173-174.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 5.

⁷⁰ Braude, "The Sons of Noah..." 104.

⁷¹ Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 97.

interpretations, conveyed through oral tradition and independent biblical reading by those who could, helped form the basis on which planters and authorities developed plantation slavery, and my research attempts to show that Protestant Christian tradition was crucial to the origins of slavery and servitude in Barbados and the wider English Atlantic world.

Historians have generally avoided the Christian influence on slavery by predominantly framing it as an economic history, and have suggested the early modern Caribbean was devoid of societies from which complex social histories could emerge.⁷² In large part, this problem is simply because of a lack of existing sources. There are too few primary accounts of the everyday experience of slaves and servants, or even from slave owners or people who lived in the colonies.⁷³ Most Caribbean histories concerning seventeenth-century slavery and servitude heavily rely on what Ligon describes in his book, which is certainly an excellent source, but is risky in that it is one of a kind. There is no known source that compares in comprehensiveness to what Ligon produced, and, as such, it must be carefully considered. In addition to Ligon, my research relies extensively on legal records and government documents. I make extensive use of the Calendar of Colonial State Papers, as well as individual acts from the Barbadian Assembly, including its 1661 comprehensive slave and servant codes, as well as Barbadian petitions and correspondence between the colony and parliamentarians in England. I also rely on scripture from the King James Bible, especially where it concerns racial inheritance, the conditions of and distinctions between servitude and slavery, and what shall become of those who refused or

⁷² McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 340. These kinds of claims are to do with European, resident colonial societies and do not consider slave societies because of a lack of reliable slave sources; Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 143-145. Sweet downplays the extent to which capitalism and English and American slavery were linked.

⁷³ Jerome S. Handler, “Custom and Law: The status of enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Barbados,” *Slavery and Abolition* 37:2 (2016): 233-255, doi:10.1080/0144039X.2015.1123436.

rejected baptism and then explore how these elements influenced seventeenth-century Barbadian slave laws.

The first chapter addresses how religion served as the primary boundary between sameness and otherness in early modern England by focusing on the English subjugation of Irish on religious grounds. The Irish, despite their skin colour being indistinguishable from other Europeans, suffered centuries of varying degrees of English subjugation and violence on the basis of religion. England's medieval forays into Ireland owed to the Pope's instruction to conquer and subdue the island in the name of Christianity; in the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII left the Roman Catholic church and initiated his Protestant Reformation, Ireland was again subjected to violent English subjugation because of religion.⁷⁴ Ireland remained Catholic to the admonishment of the English crown, and Elizabeth I sought to colonize Ireland and solve the problem of heretical Irish Catholics through violence.⁷⁵ The colonization model and brutality that Elizabeth's agents used in Ireland served as a trial for what would appear across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century, and Catholic Irish prisoners were sent away to toil on Barbadian plantations, where they served as the bulk of the colony's labour force until the 1640s when their numbers were surpassed by African slaves.⁷⁶

Chapter two explores the role of Protestantism in the development of Barbadian slave law. Figures such as Richard Ligon and the planters with whom he spoke viewed slavery and servitude as something God explicitly condoned; they knew that religion played a central role in maintaining the bustling sugar industry because they believed that Christians could not enslave

⁷⁴ Adrian IV, *Select Historical Documents*, 10.

⁷⁵ As concerned as English monarchs were with Ireland being a potential a French or Spanish staging ground for an invasion of England, the biggest threat in Ireland was its Roman Catholicism.

⁷⁶ Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 53; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 69.

Christians, and made it a top priority to keep slaves from entering the church as a matter of self-preservation.⁷⁷ The Barbadian Assembly passed “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes” in 1661, which was the first comprehensive slave code in the English Caribbean. Although there were many reasons for the Assembly to introduce such legislation, its main concern was with Africans’ “Heathenish” nature.⁷⁸ Africans, “being created men without their knowledge of God” made them infidels, a “Brutish and an uncertaine and dangerous kind of People,” which gave slave owners “the right rule of reason and order” to govern them as they did “other goods and Chattels.”⁷⁹ Further, the Barbadian slave code, like Ligon, distinguished infidel Africans from Christian Europeans by warning severe physical punishments should any African “offer any violence to any Christian,” enshrining a legal distinction between infidel Africans and Christian Europeans.⁸⁰ Further emphasis on protecting Christians comes from the replacement of a 1652 law which doled out harsh punishments on Africans who struck masters; the 1661 code kept the 1652 law, but replaced the word “master” with “Christian,” suggesting how important religious distinction had become in Barbados by the 1650s.⁸¹ Distinctions between people based on skin colour simply do not exist in the code, but there are repeated religious distinctions; this is not to say, of course, that skin colour had no effect on enslavement. Race in the development of slavery was an effect of the earliest forms of enslavement in Barbados, but it was not the cause—being black was what the English alleged was a biblical distinction rather than an exclusively racial one.

⁷⁷ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 50.

⁷⁸ “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes,”; Rugemer noted that in the code’s preamble, Africans are to be punished according to their “race” in “Mastery and Race...,” 441, adding that in the second half the seventeenth century there is a distinct emergence of the earliest forms of racial prejudice, that is prejudice based on skin colour; Nicholson, “Legal Borrowing and the Origins of Slave Law in the British Colonies,” 50-51.

⁷⁹ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 50.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race...,” 441.

The chapter then parses relevant biblical evidence in support of enslavement, and how legislation and colonials viewed slavery as based in Protestant Christian tradition. While the Bible is often ambiguous about “marks” and other physical traits found in excerpts concerning slavery, its proponents had sophisticated and convincing scriptural evidence that those physical distinctions were, in fact, darkened skin and blackness. This offers support to why white servants could never be truly enslaved; Barbadians and other English Caribbean colonists almost exclusively contended that Christians could not enslave each other. Even though servants were more often than not heretical Catholics, they were still Christians—albeit bastardized—and as such could not be enslaved as could African infidels, who were “created men without their knowledge of God.”⁸²

Chapter three explores the complexity of who was a “true” Christian and who was not in the eyes of the Barbadian ruling class by paying attention to the particularities of Barbadian society and setting it within the larger context of the English Civil War. Following the regicide of Charles I, England’s new authorities went on a metaphorical witch hunt in the name of defining true Protestantism and extirpating Catholicism and alleged Catholic sympathizers from positions of power, culminating in the treason trial and execution of the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁸³ Barbadian officials had maintained an official stance of neutrality throughout the civil war so as not to sour relations with the eventual winner, which they feared would have a devastating effect on the sugar industry.⁸⁴ The consequences of purging alleged Roman Catholic sympathizers in England, however, spilled into the English Caribbean, and particularly Barbados, which fully embraced the new government and its determination to eliminate “the

⁸² “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

⁸³ Rushworth, “Historical Collections: The trial of William Laud,” 1365-1381.

⁸⁴ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 37.

Outrageous Malice of Papists.”⁸⁵ Parliament put a new emphasis on “the Preservation and Advancement of the true Protestant Religion amongst the said planters and Inhabitants” of the English Caribbean.⁸⁶ The Barbadian government followed suit and went into high fever with religious laws enforcing “true” religious instruction. In 1650, the Barbadian Assembly passed similar legislation to that which had been passed in London, calling for “the unanimous Profession of the true Religion in this island [and the] condign Punishment upon the Opposers thereof.”⁸⁷ These kinds of laws rippled throughout the English Caribbean in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In Barbados, the 1650s and 1660s, after the Restoration, saw acts concerning the uniformity of common prayer and how families ought to pray in both the morning and evening, as well as acts brought against Quakers and others who officials accused of opposing the true Protestant religion and insidiously catechizing Africans. Authorities were furious with Quakers’ consistent interactions with slaves, which planters feared would inspire rebellion, and which led to them suppressing Quakers as strongly as they did Roman Catholic influence and abolitionists’ attempts to baptize slaves.⁸⁸

Whether someone was an adherent of what English and Barbadian authorities had proclaimed the true Protestant religion in seventeenth-century Barbados helped determine their status as either free or unfree.⁸⁹ The boundary of difference was not exclusively dependent on or

⁸⁵ "November 1643: Ordinance for the Government of the Plantations in the West Indies," *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 331-333. *British History Online*, 2016, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp331-333>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “An Act, Intituled, An Acknowledgement of and Declaration of the Inhabitants of the Island of Barbadoes, of His Majesty’s Right to the Dominions of this Island, and the Right of the Right Honourable Earl of Carlisle, derived from the Said Majesty; and by the Earl of Carlisle, to the Right Honourable the Lord Willoughby of Parham; and also for the unanimous Profession of the true Religion in this Island, and imposing condign Punishment upon of the Opposers thereof,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, (1666), 48.

⁸⁸ “Governor Endecott, in the name and by order of the General Court, to the King,” Feb 11, 1661, Item 26, in *Colonial State Papers*, Vol 5 (1661-1668), 8-10. All subsequent *Colonial State Papers* citations were found in the *Colonial State Papers* online database.

⁸⁹ Beasley, *Christian Ritual*, 2.

caused by race for its own sake, as it became in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; a person could transcend an undesirable place in society by converting, and this was not only realized by white, subjected Catholics, but by enslaved Africans, too. Although there were fewer than 200 known African conversions to Protestantism between 1650 and 1715, some Africans recognized that one path to freedom and legitimacy in Barbados could come through religion.⁹⁰ It is important to note these conversions were unlikely to have been inspired by divine revelations, but rather a desire to attain the lack of religious persecution Barbadian Protestants enjoyed.⁹¹

In seventeenth-century Barbados, if a person could confirm themselves as a true follower of the true religion, that person could have achieved legitimacy in the eyes of the planter class, indicating that religion was an important component in deciding who was eligible for slavery and who was not. The English viewed Africans' darker skin as what biblical scripture called either a mark, curse, or ugliness imposed on them by God. Africans, in large part, were eligible for enslavement because they were marked infidels, victims of God's wrath descended from the treacherous characters presented in the Bible, and who therefore lived without any knowledge of God or the Christian faith. This helped to allow slavery's proponents to create the distinction between a slave and a servant. Roman Catholics and other heretics, meanwhile, were forced into servitude because, despite being bastardized Christians who were not *truly* Christian, they were *Christian-like*. As Hilary Beckles has argued, in most cases servants and slaves were treated much the same.⁹² Seventeenth-century servants and slaves were victims of incredible violence often for the same reasons: Neither followed the true Protestant religion. Servants, however, were released, matching the Bible's instructions, after six years. The condition of slavery,

⁹⁰ Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 110.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados. 1627-1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 5-11.

meanwhile, was inheritable, and, unless manumitted, slaves remained property for their whole lives—something else the Bible allowed, so long as certain conditions were met, such as physically marking the slave as property. Protestant Christian tradition had extraordinary influence on seventeenth-century slavery and servitude in Barbados, and the following three chapters will help readers understand how English Caribbean colonizers used “true Protestant religion” to expand industry and protect themselves and the plantation model that sustained them.

CHAPTER 2 THE GENESIS OF DIFFERENCE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND AND BARBADOS

Michael Guasco noted that in order for us to properly understand the past, “we need to know as much about the before as we do the after.”¹ We know that Barbados was infamous for its startlingly efficient pioneering of brutally horrific, dehumanizing, and racist plantation models, but it cannot take credit for why one group of people could act authoritatively, forcefully, and oppressively over another. It is without any doubt true that by the eighteenth century, racist attitudes as we currently understand them (discrimination based on rigid, unchangeable inheritable skin colour and physical traits) were fully entrenched and that racism was used to justify the continued suppression and enslavement of Africans in Barbados and the English Caribbean.² But what must be more clearly understood is that, in Guasco’s terms, there was a significant “before” in Barbados, when racial divisions were better defined by standards other than skin colour. Before African slavery was normalized and replaced white servitude as the dominant unfree workforce, how were ‘racial’ differences understood without skin colour and how did they take shape—did they exist at all? In the words of Colin Kidd, to answer this question, “it is necessary to liberate the historical imagination ... otherwise the pursuit of ethnicity remains trapped within modern categories.”³ Contemporary definitions of racism do not include nationality or religious belief, but in early modern England, both nationality and religion were inextricably linked to what today might be called race.⁴ In sixteenth- and seventeenth-

¹ Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 10.

² Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 248.

³ Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

⁴ David Brion Davis, “Construction Race: A Reflection,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997), 7-18.

century England, nationality and religion combined to function as a person's race as opposed to the present, where race depends almost exclusively on skin colour.⁵ It was along these lines that Europeans imagined difference between each other and justified all kinds of racialized superiority and righteousness based on nationality and religion.

On a generally homogeneous, white-skinned continent where African slavery remained illegal throughout the entire early modern period, there was no diversity of skin colours enabling people to regularly discriminate on the basis of race—discrimination relied much more heavily on changeable conditions such as religion and culture.⁶ This does not mean there were no African slaves in Europe, however. It is important to recognize that as early as the sixteenth century, English and Spanish mariners commonly brought Africans to markets in Europe for enslavement, and that slaves were bought and sold illegally throughout the early modern period. By the mid-eighteenth century, slaves in England numbered at least 14,000 despite it being illegal.⁷

What allowed English officials to support African enslavement was not Africans' skin colour by itself, but their skin colour as a biblical precondition for religious infidelity. The Privy Council in 1596, for example, had sympathy for those who believed African slavery might help businesses looking for reliable workers. The council argued that African labour could help "Christian people that perishe for want of service," and believed it could achieve this by

⁵ Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 10. Kidd argues that skin colour in sixteenth-century England was not an important factor in determining "race" when compared to nationality and religion.

⁶ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 118; Guasco argues that in early modern England and the "Tudor world," "Africans may have numbered only in the hundreds ... as both human subjects and physical objects."

⁷ It is important to note that while slavery remained illegal in Europe, African slaves did exist. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were at least 14,000 African slaves in England alone; see Michael Tugendhat, *Liberty Intact: Human Rights in English Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 112; Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 96-120.

enslaving infidels from Africa.⁸ Five years later, in 1601, the Privy Council rationalized that African enslavement in England would be reasonable because “most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel.”⁹ This type of reasoning, a quarter century before England colonized Barbados, would form an historically overlooked—but essential—part of the development of England’s transatlantic slave trade, and helped create Barbadian colonists’ moral reasoning for sustaining African slavery throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The consequences of religious infidelity in early modern England did not only affect Africans, however; it played an integral role in Barbados’ first iteration of unfree labour: Catholic indentured servitude.

Before the sugar revolution of the 1640s, Barbadian planters predominantly used the indentured servitude of Irish Catholics as unfree workers on plantations.¹⁰ In doing so, planters and government authorities often treated “cordially loathed” servants just as horrifically as they would African slaves.¹¹ Richard Ligon, an English traveller to the island in the late 1640s, recorded that “servants have the worsser lives,” owing to them being “put to very hard labour, ill lodging, and their dyet [being] very sleight,” and beaten mercilessly for faults “not worth the speaking of.”¹² Ligon noted his shock at planters’ violence,” writing that he had “seen such cruelty there done to Servants, as I did not think one Christian could have done to another.”¹³ He notably did not express outrage (or anything negative at all) toward slaves’ treatment, suggesting

⁸ Great Britain, Public Record Office, Privy Council 2/21, f. 304, 306, as quoted in Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 118.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 57, 69. Ireland described as a “prime supply” of servants.

¹¹ Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 1-11; Davies, K.G. *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 180; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 69.

¹² Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes* (London: The Prince’s Armes, 1657), 43-44.

¹³ Ibid., 44.

it was acceptable for Christians to abuse infidels but not each other. For Ligon, it seems that acknowledging violence against slaves was an everyday reality unworthy of comment. His surprise at violence against Christians, however, raises an important point: In the seventeenth-century British Atlantic, and particularly Barbados, religious belief played a pivotal role in defining servitude and slavery. Christians could be forced into servitude, but they could not be enslaved, and being Christian afforded servants a degree of better treatment and rights.¹⁴ Catholics, and Irish Catholics in particular, were sent to Barbados for indentured servitude in large part due to England's longstanding religious prejudice against Ireland.

England's position that the Irish were culturally backward and that they adhered to the wrong faith helped them justify their violent subjugation. As Kidd has argued, in seventeenth-century Britain, and indeed in its West Indian colonies, "ethnic matters pertained by definition to the province of religion."¹⁵ An example of Kidd's argument in action exists in John McGurk's claim that racism was a core element in the Elizabethan invasion and occupation of Ireland."¹⁶ The racism to which McGurk referred was grounded in religion, not race. Irish heresy was the primary line of difference between them and the English, and many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English thinkers categorically refused to acknowledge the Irish as true Christians of any kind—doing so would have meant recognizing in them a semblance of civility.¹⁷ English

¹⁴ Ibid., 50. A common view in Barbados and the British West Indies was that Christians could not enslave each other. Richard Ligon recorded one of the best examples of this opinion; when he spoke to "the Master of the Plantation" about the prospects of converting a particularly curious slave, the master explained that Barbadians "were governed by the Lawes of *England*, and by those Lawes, we could not make a Christian a slave." After a point of further discussion, the master confirmed that a slave, "being once a Christian, he could no more account him a slave." England's relentlessly tried to get Barbadians and other West Indian colonists to convert slaves throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but met consistently met stiff opposition. For Barbadian servant rights, see "An Act for the good Governing of Servants, and Ordering the Rights between Masters and Servants (1661)," *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648-1718* (London, 1721), 22-29.

¹⁵ Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 34-35.

¹⁶ McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The Burdens of the 1590s Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 16-19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

discrimination on the basis of religion resulted in broad generalizations resembling contemporary racialization, such as “curious, surprised, hostile, censorious, nationalistic, reforming ... and brutal.”¹⁸ It was in Ireland, too, where England began its most aspirational colonial scheme before the Americas. After centuries of England’s monarchs and ruling classes believing that Ireland was by rite subservient to the English throne, Ireland became the focus of England’s colonial goals, and its people the most attractive source of unfree labour in Barbados and other seventeenth-century West Indian colonial projects.¹⁹

The political elements of England’s Irish forays lie outside the scope of this argument; my research looks at how the particular form of early modern racism or prejudice that McGurk and Kidd identified against Catholics in Britain and Ireland continued in Barbados. Since at least the twelfth century, the English believed the Irish to be an inferior and barbarous people dwelling on an uncultivated land over which they held no legitimate claim. “For the Irish the land belonged to the group, and the kingship was elective,” contrasting a “fundamental difference about landholding, inheritance, and tenure” with England.²⁰ Sixteenth-century Ireland was also a place “confined to locality,” where “nature, pristine and primeval, framed the lives of a great number of the inhabitants.”²¹ Ireland’s population, in contrast with other European maritime nations, lived “sheltered” in the undiscovered interior and “drew their concepts of space and time from direct experience of their environment.”²² To a foreigner, sixteenth-century Ireland lacked

¹⁸ As quoted in McGurk, 18.

¹⁹ McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*, 4, 53. See also John Patrick Montaña, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22, 30, 62-63; S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland, 1460-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 264-265. See Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 69 for a discussion of “cordially loathed” Irish Catholics as “the largest block” of servants in Barbados.

²⁰ John Patrick Montaña, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

²¹ Lennon, Colm. *Sixteenth-Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, Ltd., 1994), 1-4.

²² *Ibid.*

cities, towns, roads, and sophisticated trade such that most domestic economy and travel relied on a familiarity with Ireland's internal rivers and lakes. "In 1500, the taming of the physical environment and the overcoming of its attendant perils were scarcely dreamed of."²³ The English, however, lived together in identifiable population centres, extensively traded commodities domestically and with Europe along comparatively well-maintained and identifiable trade routes, and fashioned and cultivated the earth into what an ordered landscape, a cornerstone of English civilization.²⁴ Most sixteenth-century English, and Europeans in general, associated wild, unkempt, disorganized land as wasted space inhabited by animals presided over by the devil—untamed land was the origin of all earthly evil, and it was man's job to ensure it was tilled. Interpretations of Genesis 2:4-9 suggest that after God made the Earth, he realized it was wild and unkempt because "there was not a man to till the ground."²⁵ It was after he saw this that "he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."²⁶ Land clearing was therefore necessary to maintain a healthy, safe, and civil Christian society. Sixteenth-century England saw an unprecedented rise in the popularization of botany, gardening, landscaping, ditch-digging, deforestation, and road building while Ireland looked much the same as it had in the medieval period.²⁷

The untamed Irish environment clashed not only with English notions of civility, but also conflicted with medieval and early modern Christian consensus. In 1155, when Pope Adrian IV

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Montaña, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*, 23.

²⁵ Genesis 2:5, the book of Genesis.

²⁶ Genesis 2:7, the book of Genesis; other biblical passages concerning land and ownership can be found in Jeremiah 27:5, which explains that land belongs to those who believe in God; Psalm 89 refers to the world belonging to those who fear and revere God.

²⁷ Williams, Michael. *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 162-164. See also, Montaña, 23-25. For a more complete history of English land clearing, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see Lennon, *Sixteenth Century Ireland*, 1-4, for more detail on Irish geography in the sixteenth century.

accepted and actively encouraged Henry II's lordship over Ireland by decree in a papal bull, his goal was to "enlarge the bounds of the church, to declare the truth of the Christian faith to ignorant and barbarous [Irish] nations, and to extirpate the plants of evil from the fields of the Lord."²⁸ Christianizing Ireland had political connotations as well, but here the focus is on England's historical justifications for Irish subjugation—whatever political reasons England had for exercising power over the Irish, they were always accompanied and justified by claims of racialized and cultural superiority based on religion. When Gerald of Wales travelled to Ireland in 1184 and published a detailed account of his visit in 1188, his *Topography of Ireland* became England's authoritative source on the Irish people and remained a hugely influential text until at least the seventeenth century.²⁹

Gerald repeatedly described the Irish as "idle" and therefore "truly barbarous." In one particular passage catered specifically to describe the "character, customs, and habits of this people," Gerald based his conviction of Irish inferiority on their inseparable connection to the land, saying that their inferiority was due to being so far removed "from civilized nations," and that it was "another world" entirely separate from the rest. The Irish could "learn nothing, and practice nothing but the barbarism in which they are born and bred, and which sticks to them like a second nature."³⁰ Gerald lamented that Irish "beards grew in an enormously uncouth manner," and that "they wear but little woolen ... all black," and, as if to mock Irish mental capabilities, he likened their dress to "being that of the sheep in this country." The Irish "want of civilization" was "shown in their dress and mental culture, mak[ing] them a barbarous people ... that has not

²⁸ Laudabiliter. Giraldus Cambrensis

²⁹ S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland, 1460-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39, 264-265.

³⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis, Thomas Forester, trans., *Topography of Ireland* (Cambridge, ON: Medieval Latin Series, 2000), 68-71.

departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life.”³¹ In matters of industry, Gerald wrote that the Irish were “worthless,” “abandon[ed] to idleness, and immersed in sloth, their greatest delight is to be exempt from toil, their richest possession the enjoyment of liberty,” which he used as evidence for the lack of agriculture, cultivation, and prospecting in Ireland. Gerald titled and devoted a whole chapter of his *Topography of Ireland* to “their abominable treachery,” saying that the Irish “are given to treachery more than any other nation.” The reason for this was primarily religious; “they never keep the faith they have pledged, neither fear nor shame withholding them.” He also claimed that in trusting the Irish, even after their word was given, a treaty or alliance signed, or whatever oath sworn, “begins your time to fear” their “endeavour to do you injury” by “relying in the fullness of your security.” They would then use their “wickedness” and “weapons of deceit,” much to the other’s demise.³²

Even though Gerald of Wales lived nearly five hundred years before England’s colonial projects the Americas and Ireland, he was the prime “apologist” for the sixteenth-century English subjugation of the Irish.³³ During the late sixteenth century, English colonial goals in Ireland were justified with the ideas expressed in Gerald’s *Topography of Ireland*; the land was untamed and disorderly, and so were the “barbarous” unchristian people who lived on it. The true faith, once delivered by England, would have theoretically civilized the Irish and turned the geography into an ordered landscape. Sir Humphrey Gilbert encouraged Elizabeth I that in colonizing Ireland, England would better prepare itself for English colonial endeavours in the New World.³⁴ Gilbert and other sixteenth-century colonial architects like Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 76.

³³ Lavezzo, Kathy. *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 53.

³⁴ Montañó, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*, 61.

Bacon saw Ireland's native Gaelic population and undeveloped wilderness as the same as North America's aboriginals and vast unsettled territory, justifying the subjugation of the uncivil, inferior, Irish and reinforcing English religious superiority.³⁵ Attempts to colonize Ireland in the 1570s and early 1580s served as a "trial run" for both Gilbert and Raleigh who would, respectively, in 1583 claim Newfoundland for England and, in 1585, found Roanoke Colony for the same in South Carolina.³⁶ In drafting the charter for Raleigh to establish an English colony in the Americas, Elizabeth used the same language to describe North American aboriginals that was used for the Irish; she gave Raleigh "free libertie and licence" to "discover, search, finde out, and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands, countries, and territories, not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People."³⁷ Because these territories, whether in Ireland or the Americas, were inhabited by a people perceived as inferior and unchristian, people without cultivation or the civility of familiar Christian religion, England asserted that it had every right to usurp and tame the land as well as those who lived on it. Like the Irish, aboriginals in the Americas were not just perceived as inferior because of racial differences, they were inferior because they were not Christian, and some even thought North American aboriginals were the Jewish Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.³⁸

Servant Irish Catholics were more visibly similar to their English masters than were African slaves, which helped them in terms of the violence to which they were subjected. The hardest and most brutal punishments, for example, were reserved exclusively for African slaves.

³⁵ S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland, 1460-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 265.

³⁶ McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*, 6.

³⁷ Elizabeth I, "Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh: 1584," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law History and Diplomacy*, Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th_century/raleigh.asp.

³⁸ Connolly, *Contested Island*, 265; Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997): 103-142, 105.

On plantations, white servants found themselves with shreds of power by holding minor positions of oversight above their African counterparts.³⁹ Despite these same white servants being intensely distrusted and abused in the years and decades leading up to a majority population of African slaves, their visual sameness and *more* familiar cultural practices helped elevate them to still an unequal position, but a position *more* equal than slaves'. Still inferior to the masters, however, white servants were delegated power over slaves, but slaves were never delegated power over anyone. Meanwhile in England, Catholics and the Irish continued to be labeled unchristian and therefore animalistic and uncivilized.⁴⁰ In Barbados, these labels fell off or grew less important as the African population grew to outnumber Europeans. Crucially, early seventeenth-century Barbados demonstrates that the early modern British idea of race was fluid and permeable.

Unlike in the Caribbean and British North America, England's plantations in Ireland were significantly larger than pieces of private property. They were vast provincial territories with varying forms of governance usually headed by a single person granted with royal authority. What they did have in common, however, was subjugation based on religion. Those who ruled over English plantations in Ireland also had similar goals to planters who would go to the Americas—exploitation of both people and land for lucrative crops and rich mineral extraction. One of these planters was Thomas Smith, who Elizabeth I gave a royal grant to run a large plantation in Ireland in 1571. Smith was explicit in his opinion of the Irish and his justifications for bringing them under English control into forced, unfree servitude. If England hoped to be successful in colonizing Ireland and to “reform so barbarous a nation,” Smith

³⁹ Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1997), 230.

⁴⁰ Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 34.

believed its people could not be afforded personal rights nor ownership of land.⁴¹ With more resources at their disposal, the Irish were better prepared to resist colonial efforts and their accompanying violence than were Irish servants in Barbados and elsewhere. While on a bloody campaign to enforce English supremacy in Ireland, an English official described an image that would become all-too common in Barbados and other British West Indian colonies under slavery: To instill fear and command subservience, lining the path to Sir Humphrey Gilbert's command tent were Irish heads mounted on pikes. S. J. Connolly argued that "these deliberately planned instances of exemplary terror" reflected English views of the Irish as "an inferior race" who could only understand terrifying violence.⁴² The physical and ideological violence inflicted upon the Irish during the English colonization of Ireland was, in many respects, identical to the violent subjugation and justifications used for the atrocities committed against Irish servants in the Caribbean and African slaves.⁴³ Irish historian Nicholas Canny argued a similar line in his book on the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland over the course of the 1560s and 1570s. Precisely because of perceived Irish racial inferiority rooted in religion, English colonizers were free "from all normal ethical restraints," enabling them to violently subjugate Irish and New World aboriginals.⁴⁴ Rebellion in Ireland, just like in Barbados, accompanied English colonial violence—a significant difference, however, was success. Smith's son, also a planter responsible for cultivating and subjugating Irish land and people for economic advantage, was brutally murdered in a rebellion—speaking to the brutality that Irish servants on English plantations both

⁴¹ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 57. See also, Connolly, *Contested Island*, 166-167. Smith writes to the crown about the "Irish race."

⁴² Connolly, *Contested Island*, 265.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), 127-134.

received and reciprocated when given the chance. Smith's father, Thomas, also was eventually killed during a rebellion of Irish servants.⁴⁵

When the English first settled Barbados in 1625 they brought the same unfree servitude and violence with them that they had developed in Ireland. Violent subjugation, however, was not an autonomously created work model developed independently in Barbados; English colonizers made violent subjugation into an established tradition in Ireland by using it as a tool to keep order through fear, and to efficiently keep plantations productive. "Cordially loathed" Irish servants in Barbados were treated no differently than they were by English colonizers in Ireland, and often had just as little or no choice to serve there.⁴⁶ In response to the incredible demand for servants in Barbados to build, maintain, and work its plantations, so many servants who were sent there unwillingly were considered "Barbadosed."⁴⁷ There were many ways of being Barbadosed, too: in the mid-seventeenth century, most were prisoners taken during the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland, but many servants were also kidnapped by so-called "spirits," people who had earned the nickname by wisping people away from busy English ports for profit.⁴⁸ Barbadosed and involuntary servants were subjected to the harshest treatments among indentured labourers in Barbados. Trevor Burnard speculated that a likely cause for this was that many Barbadian planters were veterans of Cromwell's 1649-1653 Irish invasion, and they were deeply suspicious of them for being "heretics, potential rebels, and traitors."⁴⁹ The line between

⁴⁵ Connolly, *Contested Island*, 57.

⁴⁶ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 69.

⁴⁷ Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference*. (Athens, GA: the University of Georgia Press), 2013, 5-6.

⁴⁸ Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 35; Shaw, *Every Day Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 5-6; Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 79.

⁴⁹ Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 33-35.

servant and slave was legal: It was complicated and shared many similarities, but it was also distinct in that servants were temporary and held rights—slaves, however, were bound for life and had no rights at all, relying instead on planters’ discretion for what was acceptable treatment.

Irish or Briton, the overwhelming majority of servants were in Barbados voluntarily and possessed clearly defined contracts upheld by law.⁵⁰ Servants could even sue their masters for injustice, and failure to uphold their contracts were often successful—slaves, with there being only one recorded exception, had no contract and almost no means to appeal their mistreatment.⁵¹ Shaw’s argument that some Irish and Britons were kidnapped into forced servitude is certainly an important subtlety to the demographics of unfree labour, but it cannot be considered significant to the overall number of indentured servants in Barbados or elsewhere in the British Americas. Hilary McD Beckles summarized that Barbadian servants were mostly “voluntary migrants” motivated by the “unmitigated self-interest” that reflected sixteenth-century Britain’s “capitalist socioeconomic culture.”⁵² In the aftermath of the English Civil War, there were fewer opportunities for perceived gainful or lucrative employment as there were in Barbados, which, between 1640 and 1660 attracted nearly 100,000 migrants from Britain, or 82% of all British immigration to the Americas.⁵³

Ligon described in the late 1640s that Barbadians were “divided into three sorts of men: Masters, Servants, and Slaves.”⁵⁴ These “sorts” of people encompassed all Barbadian lives and were, with very few exceptions, non-negotiable. Masters were always on top and slaves were

⁵⁰ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 161, 164-165.

⁵¹ Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 91. See also; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003 (1998)), 1, 8, 27.

⁵² Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados*, 1-2.

⁵³ Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 33.

⁵⁴ Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes*, 43.

always at the bottom; unlike slaves, however, servants were theoretically able to improve their conditions once they had completed their servitude—a key marker between servant and slave, in that servants were temporary and slaves were permanent. Servants occupied a complicated middle ground wherein they existed somewhere between a slave and a hired worker, but were neither fully one or the other.⁵⁵

These “three sorts” of people were indeed distinct from one another. Their statuses were fixed in place, one on top of the other, and they existed without any significant social mobility, either up or downward. Each “sort” was conscious of their position in the social hierarchy and was consigned to that position either for life or for as long as they remained in Barbados—a planter could return to England if a venture had failed, but failed planters typically remained members of the landed gentry, and therefore maintained their social status thanks to their personal, inherited, or familial wealth. If they survived to the end of their contract, servants generally remained servants typically by renewing their labour when it expired, either with the same planter or with another, or they returned to work in England—slaves, meanwhile, were enslaved for life. There was no trip back to Africa, and there was certainly no deciding to renew their slavery with another, nicer planter down the road.

Barbadian planters were generally white Protestant men from the English gentry; servants were mostly “cordially loathed” male Irish Catholics.⁵⁶ Servitude was overwhelmingly voluntary or punishment for criminals who had exchanged prison time or fines for work, and some were debtors or men in search of adventure. Slaves, however, possessed none of the servants’ characteristics; they were African prisoners that European slave traders bought or traded from West African kingdoms to sell to Caribbean and American planters—they had no say in where

⁵⁵ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 155-169.

⁵⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 57, 69. Ireland described as a “prime supply” of servants.

they went, to whom they were sold, or for how long they worked.⁵⁷ Despite there being three distinct sorts of Barbadian people, Ligon failed to realize or neglected to explain that those three sorts of people could actually be further reduced to two. A person's place in the Barbadian social order was best explained not by social status, nor by their skin colour, but by their religion. Barbadians were not only Master, Servant, or Slave, they were either a Christian or they were not. As more and more black Africans came to Barbados for enslavement, Barbadian perceptions of the Irish began to change.⁵⁸ Religion was the key signifier between people. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Irish, though still allegedly inferior because of their Catholicism, were no longer described as irreligious barbarians like they were in the decades leading up to and immediately following Barbadian settlement. Alongside Africans, Catholic Irish and Protestant English were not so easy to distinguish from each other. Suddenly, there was an unmistakable familiarity with a longstanding religious foe.

Over the duration of his almost three-year stay in Barbados, Ligon visited and was hosted at several plantations, big and small. Historians consider his *True and Exact History of Barbadoes* to be an authoritative record of mid seventeenth-century Barbados' natural environment and economic and social conditions. There are certainly historiographical problems in Ligon's work concerning his potential biases and whether his conclusions were correct, but, nevertheless, the source remains one of the most-cited primary sources in early modern Barbadian history.⁵⁹ When Ligon recorded that he "truly" had "never seen much cruelty done to servants as I did not think one Christian could have done to another," there is little doubt that

⁵⁷ John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 (1992)), 97.

⁵⁸ See Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 33 about British migration to Barbados in steep decline after the 1650s.

⁵⁹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 29. Dunn, a pioneer of Barbadian history, for example, describes Ligon as "an acute observer but a crude cartographer." He also doubts some of his population numbers but, overall, Dunn and others consider Ligon vital to understanding seventeenth-century Barbados.

what Ligon observed was real to him.⁶⁰ Whether servants were treated *worse* than slaves is not the point. What is important here is that, by the late 1640s, Roman Catholics appear to have been recognized as Christians. The Protestant English gentleman, Richard Ligon described Barbadian servants as a single group of Christians, knowing they mostly Irish Catholics. Barely a generation earlier, Ireland's apparent lack of Christianity justified the violent subjugation of its people, but in 1647, Irish Catholic servants in Barbados were considered at least Christian-like to a Protestant Englishman. For centuries, England was papally encouraged to Christianize Ireland, yet just before the mid-seventeenth century, Ligon, a learned English gentleman in Barbados, recorded and published that Catholic servants were treated badly by the hands of their fellow Christian masters.⁶¹ Ligon simply categorized servants as one homogenous group of Christian people, despite not even a full generation before when Irish Catholics were not by any measure considered Christian to Protestant England or its colonizers. Ligon's observation suggests a dramatic shift in religious thinking had occurred; Catholic servants were more Christian than were African infidels who lacked any knowledge of Christianity at all, and thus were more familiar in both faith and appearance.

McCusker and Menard noted that in the New World, especially in the English Caribbean, there was one overt difference between the traditional bondage that had existed in England for centuries versus that which took shape in the colonies: Caribbean planters developed a horrifically "callous disregard for human life and dignity" such that had never been seen

⁶⁰ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 43.

⁶¹ It is possible, though very unlikely, that Ligon was writing about how English servants were treated while ignoring Irish servants. Ligon consistently describes groups of people with accuracy; he never distinguishes to which nationality a servant belongs, which seems to be a deliberate choice—to Ligon, servants were a homogenous group of Christians contracted for labour by Christian masters. It must be assumed, then, that the servants described in *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes* are a diverse group of nationalities, which other historians included in this paper have agreed consisted primarily of Irish.

before.⁶² The callous disregard planters directed toward human life and dignity in sixteenth-century Ireland shared many similarities to the disgust that planters had for the Irish in Barbados and then, as African slavery became more popular, for enslaved Africans.⁶³

The Irish were “barbarous” “heathens” inferior to the English in every conceivable way, allowing the English to violently subjugate them at home and in Barbados.⁶⁴ In the absence of apparent racial differences, like skin colour, subjugation stemmed from religion, nationality, and culture.⁶⁵ By the mid-seventeenth century, however, Protestant and Catholic servants had become Christian and Christian-like—in Barbados, the line of difference between Protestant and Catholic had gradually changed; Ligon and Barbadian planters described them as one, and so did the Barbadian government (represented by the island’s wealthiest planters) which, in 1661, passed an “Act for the Good Governing of Servants and Ordering the Rights Between Masters and Servants” and an “Act for Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.” In these pieces of legislation, servants were described as Christians, but there still remained an important distinction between the two: only Protestantism was the true religion, and Catholicism continued to be suppressed.

European discrimination based on race was virtually nonexistent before the early medieval period.⁶⁶ Europeans did not significantly encounter African slavery until Christians retook the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors, where they discovered Moorish African slaves. But even after Christian reconquest, discrimination based on race was confined there for centuries

⁶² Quoting John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard. *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 144. The violence the authors refer to include the treatment of European indentured servants and enslaved Africans.

⁶³ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71.

⁶⁴ Geraldus Cambrensis, *Topography of Ireland*, 68-71.

⁶⁵ Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 34.

⁶⁶ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60-61.

and failed to take hold in either Spain or Portugal, nor did it spread through Europe. Like Christian discrimination between its own denominations, Muslim enslavement of Africans had less to do with ethnicity than it did with religion. The Quran “gave religious sanction to the enslavement of infidels ... a perpetual status unless a master chose to manumit a particular person.”⁶⁷ These conditions, as far as scripture dictated, were indiscriminate about race. Although more than ten times as many Africans were enslaved in the Arab world than Europeans, the fact that over a million Europeans were captured and forced into Arab slavery emphasizes that the original underlying justification for slavery in Abrahamic religions was not skin colour, but religion.⁶⁸ This was also true for both the Protestant and Catholic denominations of Christianity, as we have seen between the English and Irish, and then in Barbados between Christians and Africans.

In the French context, the *Code Noir* was a French legal code drafted in 1685 by King Louis XIV to regulate slavery, strictly enforce Catholicism as the only acceptable religion, and expel all Jews from French colonies. Despite its reputation coming from the regulation of African enslavement, many historians have recognized the *Code Noir* “exhibited a greater concern with heretical Jews and Protestants than with race or slavery.”⁶⁹ The first sentence of the code explains that its purpose was a direct response to its “officers” in the “American islands” who needed royal “authority” and “justice to maintain the discipline of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman church.”⁷⁰ The “need to regulate status and condition of the slaves” was secondary.

⁶⁷ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 60-61; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 97.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Davis estimates that the Barbary pirates kidnapped over a million people from Western Europe, Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, and Iceland from between the medieval period and the early nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003 (1998)), 26.

⁷⁰ Louis XIV, “The ‘Code Noir’ (Paris, 1685),” John Garrigus, trans., *Anthology of Louisiana Literature*. http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/louisiana_anthology/texts/louis_xiv/louis_xiv--code_noir_english.html.

This does not undermine the *Code Noir*'s discrimination against Africans, but shows that its prescriptions based on skin colour were religiously inspired. The code's primary objective, prefaced in its first article, was to "evict all the Jews" and expel and punish "the declared enemies of the Christian name." Those who refused to leave within three months would "face confiscation of body and property," meaning that *anyone* who failed to obey, regardless of skin colour, would lose their possessions and be subject to enslavement or imprisonment.⁷¹

Early modern theologians and lawmakers had significant difficulty reconciling conflicting biblical passages to inform policy, resulting in moral, social, and economic policies that were inconsistently applied throughout European empires and indeed across individual British colonies.⁷² When particular biblical passages supported particular goals, the Bible could be interpreted to support those goals. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the same was true for the reverse: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionists cited the same scripture to oppose slavery that its proponents used to develop it.⁷³

The Curse of Ham was the most popular biblical justification for African slavery.⁷⁴ Found in the Book of Genesis's ninth chapter, Noah put a curse on his youngest son Ham for seeing him naked and unconscious from drinking. When Ham went into Noah's tent and discovered his father's condition, he went back outside and told his two brothers what he saw. The brothers, without Ham, then took a garment and walked backwards into the tent to cover Noah's body without seeing his nakedness. When Noah awoke and learned what had happened, he was so enraged at Ham for seeing him that way that he spitefully decided to put a curse on his

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

⁷³ James D.B. De Bow, "Slavery and the Bible" *De Bow's Review* (Sept. 1850), 9, in Paul Finkelman (editor), *Defending Slavery: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 108.

⁷⁴ Goldberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 1.

grandson—Ham’s son—Canaan. “Cursed be Canaan,” Noah said, “the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” But Canaan was not only cursed to be a slave to his family, but also to God. The curse further describes Noah’s directive for God to “enlarge Japheth,” another of his sons, and for him to dwell in God’s tent where Canaan would follow in slavery.⁷⁵ Although there is no mention of skin colour in this passage, the Curse of Ham’s connection to slavery is powerful. According to Noah, the entire world was empty save for himself and his sons, and it was from these three sons and their families that the entire world would be repopulated. Andrew Curran argues that it was precisely this statement that “would have far-reaching consequences for Africans.”⁷⁶ Ham’s first son, Kush, went on to populate and rule a part of Africa that became Nubia, and later Ethiopia and Sudan. This provided early modern Christians and Muslims with enough information to declare Ham and all of his descendants black or dark skinned.⁷⁷

There are several scriptural contradictions even in something as apparently straightforward as this, emphasizing the impossible task early modern thinkers faced when interpreting God’s will.⁷⁸ The Bible, for example, describes Kush as “the first great king on earth” who was so great and loved a ruler thanks to “the grace of the Lord.” How damned did the Bible really intend Canaan and his sons to be if the Lord’s grace supposedly gave Kush a powerful and respected kingdom? And how enslaved can someone be if they are also a king over such a kingdom? Despite these contradictions, early modern Europeans relied on the Bible to further African slavery.⁷⁹ What is difficult to reconcile is that Europeans just as easily could have

⁷⁵ Genesis 9.

⁷⁶ Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 78.

⁷⁷ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 66-67.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 66-67.

used the same scripture to make Africans kings, but doing so might have not been as immediately lucrative.

European servitude in Barbados built and sustained the success of the colony's first decades.⁸⁰ Without the tradition of human bondage in the form of indentured servitude it is highly unlikely that English colonies could have survived. Barbados and the broader English Caribbean were significantly lacking in aboriginals to use for labour, necessitating the English to bring workers of their own.⁸¹ Even as African slaves were becoming increasingly common in Barbados, some planters were steadily requesting a formalized servant trade with England and, at best, showed disinterest to outright opposition toward expanding African slavery.⁸² Planters predicted that with a healthy stream of Europeans, they would be able to mimic economic success in England. A servant trade would "create and reproduce a laboring class," "provide a loyal core of men for military defense," "attract merchants to the colonies," and "guarantee a flow of useful technological skills from Europe."⁸³ But Barbadian planters, despite their efforts and English parliamentary support to increase their numbers of Christian servants, were not getting the numbers they wanted. To make matters worse, there was an economic recession in the 1630s thanks to poor-quality exports in tobacco and cotton. When Peter Hay sent his first shipment of tobacco to England in 1637, John Winthrop informed him that "Your tobaco of Barbados of all the tobaco that cometh to England is accompted the worst."⁸⁴ Barbadian planters were desperate to profit, and seeing the success of Portuguese sugar in Brazil, wanted to see if they could master it as well. Fortunately for Barbados, the Dutch-Brazilian sugar industry was

⁸⁰ Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, 195.

⁸¹ Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery*, 1-3.

⁸² Burnard, 34.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31, 36-37.

⁸⁴ John Winthrop, as quoted in Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 53.

feeling increasingly vulnerable to the Portuguese, making them willing to teach the English how to grow and refine sugar in exchange for shipping it to Europe on Dutch ships.⁸⁵

Accompanying sugar production was an incredible demand for round-the-clock meticulous, exhausting, and brutal labour. To produce sugar effectively, planters required large numbers of unskilled but careful and efficient labourers; they also needed to train labourers for skilled tasks such as boiling, distilling, and potting.⁸⁶ When Barbadians learned how to produce sugar, whether from the Dutch at home, by travelling to Brazil, or a combination of both, they were also exposed to massive-scale African slavery for the first time. Richard Dunn noted that Barbadian planters discovered several advantages to enslaving Africans over depending on indentured European servitude. One was that slaves brought from Africa were better suited to demanding agricultural work in Barbados' hot climate compared to Europeans, who tended to die in droves. Richard Sheridan argued that this was because of Africans' comparative "immunity to malaria and yellow fever" which gave Africans a significant advantage over Europeans in terms of life expectancy.⁸⁷ While Europeans became sick and died, Africans were acclimatized to tropical diseases. Planters and masters who used Africans for manual labour and menial tasks also benefited greatly from African slavery for this very reason. Another advantage was that, according to Dunn, "black slaves performed the required tasks more patiently than white servants."⁸⁸ Even after sugar production took over as the dominant Barbadian export, the colony's rice planters, too, were particularly pleased with West African slaves because of their familiarity with rice cultivation.⁸⁹ Perhaps best expressed by Jordan, the weight of the benefits

⁸⁵ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 149.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸⁷ Richard B. Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy," chap. 3 in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, edited by Jack P. Greene and J.R. Poole (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 53.

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 73.

⁸⁹ Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy," 53.

that slavery provided to the Barbadian economy were so obvious that, to planters, its adoption was an “unthinking decision.”⁹⁰

Many slavery historians argue that Barbados was “hardly a society at all,” at least not in the sense that it resembled any kind of European society of the period.⁹¹ Dunn called Barbados a “disastrous social failure,” and McCusker and Menard called it a “wilderness of mere materialism.”⁹² Beckles’ claim that every motive taken in Barbados was inspired by “unmitigated self-interest” and sixteenth-century British “capitalist socioeconomic culture” combined to create a vivid picture of subjugation—black and white. From England’s earliest Barbadian settlement to its introduction of African slavery, religious discrimination lied at the core of its labourers’ subjugation. The Irish could be subjugated with violence because, although now recognized as Christian, they were not *true* Christians—they were still heretics for being Catholic rather than Protestant. Africans, meanwhile, could be enslaved because of biblical condonation and infidelity. By the 1640s, there were enough Africans in Barbados to stir European fears of being outnumbered. No longer were the Irish, or servants generally, considered as dangerous as before because they held Christian-life beliefs, just not the right ones. Africans, meanwhile, were enslaved because they lacked Christianity altogether.

By the 1660s, African slavery had replaced indentured servitude as the most common form of unfree labour in Barbados.⁹³ The answer to why the English chose to enslave Africans lies in economic self-interest; the Bible described Africans as both damned to eternal slavery to the faithful and as revered kings. Because it was in their interest, the English preferred the former interpretation and so began the slave trade without delay. McCusker and Menard provide

⁹⁰ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 97.

⁹¹ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144.

⁹² Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 340; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144.

⁹³ Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 33-34.

population figures that double from 1640 to 1650, and again by 1660; the sugar revolution of the 1640s “exploded” the number of Africans in Barbados from a sparse few in the 1630s to about 13,000 in the 1640s. The Barbadian slave population grew to at least 27,000 in the following decade and by 1660, more than tripled to over 50,000. To put these numbers in perspective, Europeans never reached more than 30,000 at their highest in 1650. While slave numbers only grew as time went on, Europeans after 1650 dropped to 20,000 in 1680, and then stagnated around 13,000 in the early eighteenth century.⁹⁴

European Barbadians—masters and servants—saw themselves being steadily outnumbered by African slaves and reacted fearfully while using religious language to justify their tightening control. It seems that to some extent, Protestant masters trusted Catholic servants to help police Africans on their plantations, probably because, despite their religious differences, they shared a common culture and had a more familiar appearance. Richard Ligon observed as early as the late 1640s that Barbados was a fearful place by the way that homes were “built like forts to defend against uproar or commotion ... caused by Negro slaves.”⁹⁵ He further noted that despite the abundance of fish available to the island’s palette, few planters fished for fear of leaving their “Negroes for too long” without proper supervision.⁹⁶ They feared that if slaves knew their master was absent, they might conspire a successful rebellion. In 1661, the Barbadian government declared Africans “Heathenish, Brutish, and an uncertaine and dangerous kind of people.”⁹⁷ The government also proclaimed that because Africans were “created men without the knowledge of God,” steps had to be taken to ensure not only their safety, but everyone’s.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁴ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 151.

⁹⁵ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 34. Also mentions Christian servants in quote.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁷ “An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes,” September 27, 1661, BL 36, Box 1 (1656/57 Jan 16 – 1670), *Blathwayt Papers*, Huntington Library.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

ungodly, barbarous slaves needed to be controlled with an iron fist, otherwise the island would slip into rebellious dissent against its enlightened Christian masters—much like English fears of the “untamed” and “wild” Irish discussed earlier.

English religious discrimination in the seventeenth century was grounded in religious belief, nationality, and culture. In the British context, this is best seen through centuries of violence against Ireland, culminating in the Reformation and sixteenth-century colonial projects. Although there were undeniable imperialistic political elements to English interests in Ireland, these goals were rationalized with religion and economic incentive. Every action that England took against the Irish was done in the name of and for religion. Before Ireland was Christianized, the English were justified in subduing pagan Gaels. When Ireland was Catholic, the English validated their actions against them for resisting Protestantism. Ireland’s lack of an ordered landscape was caused by its lack of adherence to the correct faith and it was because of England’s relationship with God and rationalized biblical interpretations that granted it the authority to settle Ireland and subjugate its people. Irish subjugation continued in Barbados as the majority of its indentured servants.

It was not until Africans were introduced in Barbados that the Irish were quickly reconsidered. As slave populations increased, Barbadians reclassified Irish servants as Christians, like themselves, while African slaves became the unchristian others. Religion, again, justified African enslavement thanks to the Curse of Ham. The Barbadian government created laws heavily restricting “heathenish” Africans and explained that these laws were necessary precisely because they had no knowledge whatsoever of the Christian faith or God. Because Africans were ignorant of Christianity, they were inferior to those who were not. This was all too convenient for Barbadian planters; scripture aligned perfectly with their selfish economic goals, enabling a clear path toward slavery and visual racism, the legacy of which continues today.

CHAPTER 3 PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN TRADITION, SCRIPTURE, AND SUBJUGATION

Historians have too often tended to secularize the origins of slavery in the English Americas, ignoring how English elites and slaveholders drew on biblical tradition and religious differences to determine who was eligible for enslavement and the form that the English system of slavery should take. While historians have written extensively about religion and slavery elsewhere, virtually no historical work exists that specifically analyzes religion's function in the development of Barbadian slavery, or recognizes that, in the seventeenth century, the plantation model it developed and spread throughout the British Caribbean relied much more on religious than racial discrimination.¹ Gary Puckrein has made some important connections between religion and slavery in his book *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700*, but they are not realized to their full potential.² Andrew Curran's book, *The Anatomy of Blackness*, delves into the creation of race from a history of science perspective by following early modern Europeans' racial and religious theories more broadly.³ Nicholas Beasley, who has written extensively on religion in the early British Caribbean, has argued that religion had many connections to slavery, but like others, he has not discussed how religion was a catalyst for the development of the institution of English slavery, preferring the argument that racism based on skin colour was slavery's causal factor.⁴

¹ Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 6.

² Gary Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 166-169.

³ Andrew Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁴ Nicholas M. Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650-1780* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 2.

Even recent slavery specialists who focus on seventeenth-century English slavery generally, and who stress the role of Barbados in its development have neglected religion's role in the subject's origins. Michael Guasco, for example, argued that many sixteenth-century English theologians saw that Africans' dark skin "was clearly a spiritual rather than a physical matter," though he did not discuss how these common ideas might have influenced the development of slavery as an institution in either Barbados or the wider English Atlantic.⁵ In Jenny Shaw's contribution to the history of unfree labour in the English Caribbean, she argued that in the seventeenth century, "bifurcation based solely on race was far from inevitable" because England and its colonies were "still preoccupied with cultural markers of difference" rather than ethnic ones. Shaw argued that religion was "of paramount importance" in establishing difference in the seventeenth-century English Atlantic, particularly for Barbadians, but, like Guasco, she did not discuss religion's role in specifically developing Barbadian slavery.⁶ Although Simon Newman engaged with the 1661 comprehensive Barbadian slave code, the first of its kind in the English empire, throughout his book *A New World of Labor*, he did not consider the code's religious implications, or address how the Barbadian Assembly might have been influenced by centuries of biblical tradition in drafting it. Despite Newman's work being new, it is largely a traditional restatement of decades of slavery scholarship, with renewed emphasis on the controversial idea of white slaves.⁷ For Newman, a system of class-based exploitation rather than religion served as the basis for establishing English slavery.

⁵ Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 63.

⁶ Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 6.

⁷ Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 13-14, 71-108. See Jerome S. Handler and Matthew C. Reilly, "Contesting 'White Slavery' in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *New West Indian Guide* 91 (2017), 30-35: In contrast to Newman, some slavery historians insist that white slavery did not exist. This argument depends on slavery being a racist creation and, as such, white Europeans could not be racist toward each other as they could with Africans.

I position my research alongside Guasco's and Shaw's, building on their more general claims about the role of religion and Christian tradition in the development of slavery, and I use the framework Kidd established of religion in the early seventeenth century functioning as race does in the present. Religion was the primary line of difference between Europeans in the seventeenth century and, in the British context, discrimination against both the Irish and Africans was rationalized on this basis. Although African enslavement was to some extent based on skin colour, it was far more nuanced than that. In the seventeenth century, skin colour was a prerequisite for enslavement in the English Atlantic largely rooted in Protestant Christian tradition, rather than an exclusive racial trait that could be wholly separated from religion. Similar to why there was a distinction between servants and slaves, it was because Protestant tradition supported the idea that dark-skinned people bore the mark of sin and sedition that the English believed Africans could be subjugated and enslaved, not because of racial theories of inherent, biological inferiority.⁸ Although scripture never said Christians could not enslave one another, Protestant tradition had established such a belief, and resulted in planters resisting government and monarchical attempts to have slaves brought into the fold of Christianity in the latter half of the seventeenth century. English officials were fighting with Barbadians and their other colonies trying to get them to baptize their slaves and instruct their them in the faith. Planters, however, believed conversion would ruin their lucrative plantation industry and successfully resisted as they were convinced that biblical tradition barred Christians from enslaving each other. Their belief was so powerful that the majority of slaves in the British Caribbean remained excluded from the church for the entire early modern period.⁹

⁸ Ibid., 248.

⁹ Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 112.

After the English Civil War, the colony's planter-dominated assembly and government in England began enacting strict legislation to enforce adherence to what both called the "true" Protestant religion. Religious legislation in Barbados was sporadic before the English Civil War, but this does not mean that religion had no influence on its settlers beforehand. By the time Barbados was first settled in 1627, sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century government officials were already considering using Africans as a means to help business owners complaining of a lack of steady labourers, and they cited Africans' infidelity as justification for doing so.¹⁰

One of the most important pieces of legislation in Barbados following the English Civil War was the 1661 "Act for the ordering and better Governing of Nergoes," which I argue was inspired by English Christian tradition rooted in biblical scripture.¹¹ The act, or, as slavery historians usually refer to it, the Barbadian comprehensive slave code, does not contain verbatim quotations from the Bible, but it does seem to have been significantly influenced by its instruction. The code deals with Africans and Christians as separate people, for example, and alludes to Protestant tradition as the reason why Christians had both moral authority and responsibility over Africans.¹² With so much emphasis on Christian tradition throughout the seventeenth century, including its strict regulation following the Restoration on both sides of the Atlantic, it is perplexing that so many slavery historians have avoided discussing religion's supportive role in the origins of plantation slavery, which was grounded in Barbados, or to what extent it influenced Barbadian and English Atlantic slave laws.

¹⁰ Great Britain, Public Record Office, Privy Council 2/21, f. 304, 306, as quoted in Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 118.

¹¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 238-239.

¹² "An Act for the better ordering and Governing of Negroes," September 27, 1661, BL 36, Box 1 (1656/57 Jan 16 – 1670), Blathwayt Papers, Huntington Library.

In Barbados, the colony that started large-scale plantation industry in the English Caribbean, planters and authorities used religion in tandem with economic interest to create and reinforce exploitative plantation systems by helping planters rationalize their divisions between labourers. Starting in the 1650s, the Barbadian Assembly began legislating a number of laws in which the colonial government passed religious orders in an attempt to protect both Christians and plantation industry.¹³ Protestant Christian tradition helped to allow those driven by “unmitigated self-interest” to make the “unthinking decision” to enslave Africans for economic advantage, and, as the number of Africans outnumbered the Christian population in Barbados, the religious divide between them became more pronounced.¹⁴

In 1638, Barbados’ whole population was just six thousand, of which two thousand were servants and two hundred were slaves.¹⁵ In the 1640s, as the Barbadian economy transitioned to the labour-intensive staple crop of sugar, the overall population doubled, while at the same time there was a European exodus to other Caribbean islands.¹⁶ In the decades between 1640 and about 1680, there was simultaneously an unprecedented influx of Africans and departure of Europeans.¹⁷ Although the number of European migrants to Barbados increased compared to the

¹³ *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648-1718* (London, 1721); “Journal of Lords of Trade and Plantations,” Oct 8, 1680, Item 1535, Vol 10 (1677-1680), *Colonial State Papers*, 611-612; “An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718* (London, 1721), 106. Barbadian laws concerning religion and slaves during the second half of the seventeenth century were focused on Christian supremacy being essential to the security of the Barbadian economy.

¹⁴ Quoting McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 144; quoting Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 97.

¹⁵ Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700*. (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 31. Puckrein’s population numbers also corroborate those recorded in Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 55.

¹⁶ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 75.

¹⁷ Mark S. Quintanilla, “Late Seventeenth-Century Indentured Servants in Barbados.” *The Journal of Caribbean History*; Jan 1, 1993; 27, 2; 114.

colony's earlier days, too few arrived to compete with the number of incoming Africans.¹⁸ At least twelve thousand Europeans left between 1645 and 1666, and by 1680 slaves outnumbered Europeans by more than two to one.¹⁹ The slave population was more than double that of servants by 1653, when twenty thousand African slaves dwarfed the colony's eight thousand servants.²⁰ So many servants had emigrated from the colony, and more were leaving by the day, that in 1667 the representatives of Barbados petitioned to the king that they be allowed to begin freely trading for Scottish servants in addition to the Irish "because many thousands have been drained hence."²¹ An important development was taking place: In the second half of the seventeenth century, the steadily increasing number of Africans in Barbados made 'Christian' synonymous with whiteness.²² For the first time, English colonists were exposed to challenging numbers of people who looked very different from them. Until colonists had to contend with significant numbers of people who were so visually different from them, the traditional form of differentiating people on the basis of religion was challenged. As slavery became more common in Barbados, and with Christians becoming outnumbered, Barbadians began passing more religious laws designed to reinforce slavery and maintain Christian supremacy.

By 1660, Africans outnumbered the total number of Europeans in Barbados for the first time, and, from then on, the number of Europeans steadily declined while the number of imported Africans continued to grow.²³ Notably, the comprehensive Barbadian slave code was

¹⁸ Ibid.; "Numbers of slaves from Africa disembarking in Barbados, 1627-1700," *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/1Y7amyFq>.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves* 75, 88.

²⁰ Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1997), 231.

²¹ "Petition of the Representatives of Barbados to the King," Sept 5, 1667, Item 1565, Vol 5 (1661-1668), *Colonial State Papers*, 145.

²² Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes* (London: The Prince's Armes, 1657), 43.

²³ Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 25; Edward B. Rugemer, "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July, 2013), 434.

passed in 1661, just as European-Barbadians were first outnumbered. One reason for the decline in the number of Europeans in the colony was because they were pushed out by the colony's richest planters' monopolization of power.²⁴ By 1680, 175 "big planters" (those owning more than 60 slaves) represented 6.9% of Barbados' overall number of planters, but between them they owned more than half of the island's land, servants, and slaves.²⁵ By 1650, this "master class" of big planters had "taken charge" and established a "perfectly articulated colonial aristocracy" that controlled every conceivable aspect of Barbadian life—from industry to politics.²⁶ While the number of servants slightly increased in the 1640s, the number of new slaves surpassed incoming servants by more than two times.²⁷ Most Barbadians were concerned with the number of Africans coming to the island, and one observer declared "the Island may be ruined by the Negroes."²⁸ If the number of Christians in Barbados did not increase, he predicted the colony "would soon be inhabited only by the Masters of great plantations and their Blacks."²⁹ But Christian servants did not arrive in the numbers the observer had hoped. Larger sugar works required intense labour that Europeans were either unable or unwilling to perform, at least not as efficiently as acclimatized Africans, contributing to big planters' preference for African slavery, and resulting in more Europeans leaving.³⁰

Indentured servants were incredibly difficult to manage; they frequently died or became debilitatingly ill, and they often complained about the climate and poor working conditions.

²⁴ Larry Gragg, "Puritans in Paradise: The New England Migration to Barbados, 1640-1660." *The Journal of Caribbean History*; Jan 1, 1988; 21, 2; 154. Gragg argues that "rapid consolidation of the island's limited acreage" forced the "emigration of thousands of small-scale planters," mostly to Jamaica, Trinidad, and New England.

²⁵ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁷ Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 32; *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*: between 1641 and 1650, just over 25,000 slaves arrived in Barbados.

²⁸ "An Account of the English Sugar Plantations," Jan 23, 1668, Item 1679, in *Colonial State Papers*, Vol 5 (1661-1668), 541-542.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Puckrein, *Little England*, 146-159.

They were also “cordially loathed” for their heresy, and, being Christian-like, they had more inconvenient legal protections than slaves, contributing even more to big planters’ preference for slaves.³¹ With small planters dwindling due to the Barbadian elites’ consolidation of power, and with the number of Africans steadily growing, it is important to recognize that the face of subjugation itself changed. No longer were Catholic servants as unchristian as they had been in previous decades, they were now Christian-like.³² This does not mean that servants were not subjected to horrific abuses—the evidence for that is plenty—what it suggests, however, is that to justify enslavement on such an enormous scale, Christianity came to mean whiteness.³³ Christians could not enslave each other in Barbados because Christian tradition prevented, but they could enslave African because of their infidelity.³⁴ Although Catholics remained heretical and continued to be subjected to the shocking violence that the English traveller Richard Ligon described, Barbadians nevertheless saw a familiarity in them as being somewhat Christian, albeit not the right or true kind.³⁵

Ligon vividly described how in the late-1640s, Barbadian Christians were terrified that infidel Africans might rebel against them. He explained, “Where they think they have power or advantages,” Africans were prone to “bloody” violence, which worried Christians that they might “commit some horrid massacre upon on the Christians” and take the island for

³¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 69.

³² *Ibid.*, 69; see Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 43 for servants described as equals in Christian faith, despite different denominations between masters and servants. Religious difference changed to reflect Christian and non-Christian. Catholics were still subjugated for being heretics, they were more similar than different when compared to Africans who totally lacked knowledge of Christianity.

³³ See Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 43-46. Ligon describes the population as consisting of “*Negroes*, being more than double the numbers of the Christians,” suggesting that *Negroe* meant African, black, and irreligious, and *Christian* meant European, white, and, of course, Christian.

³⁴ Davies, *The North Atlantic World*, 107. Strictly in the British Atlantic; in French colonies, the ‘Code Noir’ dictated that slaves in all French colonies were required to become baptized Catholics. Colonial officials forced French planters to suspend operations on holy days and to educate their slaves in Catholicism and its rites.

³⁵ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 43.

themselves.³⁶ Planters were so terrified of violent rebellion that houses were “built in manner of fortifications,” with “Lines, Bulwarks, and Bastions to defend themselves.”³⁷ The 1661 comprehensive slave code ordered that all “Negroe houses” be “searched diligently and effectually once every fourteen days for Clubbs, Wooden Swords and other mischievous weapons.”³⁸ There was also a system in place to alert other planters of an uprising: “If any tumult or disorder be in the Island,” the planter under siege would “discharge a Musquet” to alert neighbours. The neighbour would then do the same to give “Alarum to the whole Island; for, upon report of that, the next shoots, and so the next, and next, till it go through the whole Island.”³⁹ According to Ligon, fear of rebellion was also a factor in why planters did not take advantage of plentiful fish stocks surrounding the island; most planters were too nervous to leave their plantations to fish themselves or trust their slaves with a boat. Ligon noted that an exception to this was Humphrey Walrond, who sent his slaves out to sea under the watchful eyes of Christian servants “twice or thrice a week,” suggesting that although servants were disliked, too, their Christianity, however heretical, gave them some familiarity and trust compared to infidel slaves.⁴⁰

Fear of slaves regularly accompanied petitions for more servants, as well. The 1661 comprehensive slave code concluded that the number of Africans in Barbados had “very much increased and growne” so quickly that the colony could no longer be “safely Governed” unless “a considerable Number of Christian servants” were brought to the island. The Barbadian

³⁶ Ibid., 46.

³⁷ Ibid., 29.

³⁸ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

³⁹ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35. Servants’ whiteness also gave them familiarity with masters. It is important to remember, however, that seventeenth-century Protestant tradition associated blackness with treachery, and that blackness was a curse or mark from God to serve as a reminder to Christians not to trust them. So while servants’ whiteness was certainly more familiar to masters, the distinction took on a religious rather than a racial connotation.

Assembly chastised the “the Richest men of the Island” who were more interested in “present profit” than long-term Christian growth, “and so consequently their own Publique Safety.”⁴¹ For security reasons, the Assembly then required that within 12 months every freeholder “provide himselfe of a Christian Servant for every Twenty Acres of Land that hee enjoys.” Failure to comply resulted in a fine of 3,000 pounds of Muscovado sugar, although few complied and paid the fine instead.⁴² In a 1667 petition, the Barbadian government requested that thousands of servants be sent immediately to the colony in order to provide “both Comodity and security to the Planter.”⁴³ Fear of African slaves had entered the colony’s legal process, too, as the Barbadian legislature passed “An Act to Prevent Depopulation” in 1671. The expressed purpose of this act was to keep the “safety and prosperity of this island,” which did “chiefly depend in the number and strength of Christian inhabitants,” and a 1676 law banned planters from using slaves as skilled labourers in an attempt attract more Christian servants to work on the island.⁴⁴

There are few acknowledgements among primary sources that the violent institution of slavery itself might have been a causal factor for violent slave rebellion. Instead, seventeenth-century Barbadians generally believed that “uncertaine” Africans were predisposed to barbaric behaviours, and this view had its roots in Protestant Christian tradition.⁴⁵ The Barbadian comprehensive slave code labeled Africans as naturally “Heathenish, Brutish and ... dangerous”

⁴¹ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Petition of the Representatives of Barbados to the King,” Sep 5, 1667, CO 1/21, fol. 207r., *The National Archives: Public Record Office*.

⁴⁴ “An Act to Prevent Depopulations,” quoted in Puckrein, *Little England*, 143; “An Act to Prevent Depopulations,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648-1718* (London, 1721), 88; “The Assembly of Barbadoes to the Gentlemen Planters in London,” June 16, 1671, Item 562, Vol 7 (1669-1674), *Colonial State Papers*, 230-231; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 241.

⁴⁵ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes”; “Uncertaine” in the seventeenth century meant “Devoid of, lacking in, certainty or settled character; liable to change or accident,” “un'certain, adj.”. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/Entry/210207?result=1&rskey=NfIRiT&>.

people who simply could not help themselves from committing “many heinous and grievous crimes.”⁴⁶ One likely reason for this common belief is found in scripture. According to the book of Genesis, Cain was humanity’s first murderer. While working in the fields one day, Cain killed his brother, Abel. God, in response, banished him to the Land of Nod, but before doing so “the Lord set a mark upon Cain....”⁴⁷ The “mark” God left on Cain was not specified, but predominant early modern belief was that this “mark” was blackness, making Cain what Colin Kidd called the “primal ancestor of all black people.”⁴⁸ Ligon certainly believed this, writing that “there be a mark upon these people, which will hardly ever be wip’d off, as of their cruelties when they have advantages.”⁴⁹ Scripture described Cain as the first murderer in human history for killing his brother in cold blood when he found an advantage. Christian tradition, however, established that Cain was marked with blackness, and that God made people black to warn others of their violent, jealous, and murderous tendencies.⁵⁰ The Barbadian Assembly’s fixation on Africans’ inherent disposition toward violence suggests that Christian tradition was very much a part of their decision making with respect to slavery.

By the 1670s, the primary function of servants and smaller planters’ want for them was security from the increasing number of infidel Africans as, in addition to their labour, servants were required to serve in the militia.⁵¹ The militia was composed of both Protestant and Catholic servants, as well as other denominations, showing that despite planters’ and officials’ open hostility and distaste for heretical non-Protestants, their Christianity nonetheless connected them

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Genesis 4:15-16.

⁴⁸ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 33-35.

⁴⁹ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 53.

⁵⁰ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 21-22.

⁵¹ Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 38-39; “Petition of the Deputy Governor, Council, and Assembly of Barbadoes to the King,” Oct 21, 1670, Item 299, Vol 7 (1669-1674), *Colonial State Papers*, 116-117.

as much as it split them apart. Although Irish servants were stereotyped as “lazy, drunken, and opposed to the Protestant colonial interest,” this did not stop them from serving side-by-side with abusive Protestant masters in providing Christian security against infidel slave rebellion and unrest.⁵² Protestants and Catholics shared more cultural and religious similarities with each other than they did with Africans, and it seems that Barbadians overcame these differences when it was convenient, especially in matters of security.

Richard Dunn argued that the 1661 Barbadian slave code is the most important surviving piece of legislation from the seventeenth-century Caribbean.⁵³ In the Barbadian Assembly’s own words, the code was needed to improve the “many good Lawes and Ordinance” already in place for the “Governing, regulating and ordering” of African slaves in Barbados.⁵⁴ The text also somewhat clarified the reasoning behind the Assembly’s desire to update the laws to a more comprehensive code, explaining that existing legislation had “not met the effect been desired” and that “many clauses” were “imperfect and not truly representing the true constitution of this government in relation to their slaves.”⁵⁵ Although the code did not define what it meant by “true,” there are many clues as to what “true constitution” might have been.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) gives several definitions for “true” in the seventeenth century, but its most common usage reflected positive character traits, such as being honourable, virtuous, trustworthy, and honest, or that a person was unfeigned in action, feeling and sincerity. The OED also defines “true” in the seventeenth century as pertaining to being “in accordance with reality” with respect to “a statement, idea, [or] belief,” and quotes scripture from the King James Bible, suggesting that “true” in the early modern period often carried

⁵² Beckles, *White Servitude, Black Slavery*, 38.

⁵³ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 238-239

⁵⁴ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

religious connotations.⁵⁶ The OED, for example, specifically quotes Genesis 42:10, in which Joseph claimed “We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.”⁵⁷ Here, Joseph was speaking to his brethren from the Land of Canaan in Africa, whom he accused of being untrustworthy spies who needed to prove themselves worthy of his trust. Another example the OED uses for proper seventeenth-century use comes from Proverbs 14:25, “A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies,” which also suggests the word’s religious implications.⁵⁸ Given this usage, it would not be foolish to assume that “true constitution” implied a proper adherence to Protestantism, its traditions, or even to the Protestant English crown.

The slave code read that “in all the Body of the Law” there was “no Tract to guide Us where to walk, nor any Rule set us how to Governe such Slaves.”⁵⁹ Because there was nothing in the English body of law or any historical precedent to guide officials in governing slaves, it appears that Barbadian officials were inspired in large part by Christian tradition to guide them instead. Alan Watson has argued that slave laws in the Americas were mostly drawn ancient Roman tradition or invented ad hoc.⁶⁰ While there are plenty of similarities between early modern and ancient Roman slavery, they appear far more circumstantial than qualitative; Barbadians specifically mention Christian sensibility as justification for slavery and consistently relied on Christian traditions and scripture to rationalize their actions. Bradley Nicholson has also cited English legal tradition as being a potential source for branding in the colonies, citing that runaway servants and rogues were typically branded on the left shoulder with the letter

⁵⁶ “true, adj., n., adv., and int.”. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/view/Entry/206884?rskey=pKuG2U&result=1&isAdvanced=false>

⁵⁷ Genesis 42:10.

⁵⁸ Proverbs 14:25.

⁵⁹ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

⁶⁰ Alan Watson, *Slave Law in the Americas* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 63-76.

“R.”⁶¹ They outlined, for example, the organization of slaves and standardized planter and slave’s reciprocal responsibilities using religious language and allusions. Unlike previous acts that dealt with slavery, and which neglected religion entirely, the comprehensive code of 1661 made religion a priority. Slaves were “created men without their knowledge of God,” and the code proclaimed “Negroes an Heathenish, Brutish and an uncertaine and dangerous kind of People.”⁶² This declaration legitimized African subjugation in Barbados and, by extension, the rest of the English Atlantic. The comprehensive code made it abundantly clear that under no circumstances were Africans to be Christians; they were distinctly others because of heathenish, religious infidelity rather than skin colour, strongly suggesting that the “true constitution” of the Barbadian Assembly was adhering to true Protestant, Christian tradition and its accompanying authority. An important line in the code supports Christian authority by claiming that slaves needed planters “to Protect them” as they did “mens other goods and chattels.”⁶³ This was not meant generally, either; the Assembly was very specific about what slaves needed protecting from: “Wee will know by the right rule of reason and order wee are not to leave them [the slaves] to the Arbitrary, Cruell and ouragious will of every evil disposed person.”⁶⁴

To underscore the importance of Christianity to the Barbadian Assembly, in the same year that the comprehensive slave code became law, just a few months later, it repealed a law that ordered the “profession of the true Religion in this Island,” and which imposed “condign Punishment upon the Opposers thereof.”⁶⁵ At first glance it appears as though by repealing this law, legislators were less concerned than before about religion. The earlier law, however,

⁶¹ Bradley J. Nicholson, “Legal Borrowing and the Origins of Slave Law in the British Colonies,” *The American Journal of Legal History*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan, 1994), 44.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *The Laws of Barbadoes*, 48.

emphasized Protestantism as the colony's "true Religion"; it is more likely that repealing this law shows that while Protestantism remained Barbados' true religion, legislators were not as concerned with denominational differences between themselves and their majority Catholic servants as they were previously.⁶⁶ Crucially, repealing this law signaled that Christianity in Barbados was no longer exclusively Protestant and that officials recognized that heretical servants were at least more Christian than infidel Africans. The key distinction between people in Barbados had become definitively Christian and infidel.

Given the emphasis the Barbadian Assembly placed on Africans' heathenism and, for the sake of security, tolerance of Catholicism among servants, it seems appropriate that—to a large extent—the government's "true constitution" was to uphold Christian tradition in its lawmaking. In the 1650s, Catholic suppression became so lax, for example, that a French priest, Father Antoine Biet, commented that Catholics could practice without fear of persecution so long as they avoided proselytizing and kept to themselves.⁶⁷ Scripture was simultaneously vague and direct enough to provide the instructions its interpreters wanted. In the case of African slavery, Barbadian planters and legislators driven by "materialism" and a "callous disregard for human life and dignity" in the pursuit of "capitalist" economic "unmitigated self-interest" used Christian scripture to rationalize the African subjugation they made essential to the development of the plantation complex.⁶⁸

Someone critical of Christianity's role in Barbadians' rationalization of slavery, however, might point to the Bible's Acts 17:26. In this particular passage, Paul explains to the Athenians

⁶⁶ "An Act Concerning Morning and Evening Prayer in Families."

⁶⁷ Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 77.

⁶⁸ Quoting McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144; Beckles, *White Servitude, Black Slavery*, 1.

that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”⁶⁹ If the Bible proclaims the earth is for everyone to inhabit, and that all people are of the same blood, how could it possibly justify claims of white superiority or African slavery?⁷⁰ Another criticism might be that the Curse of Ham receives far too much attention for condoning slavery, especially considering that nowhere does it specifically mention anybody’s skin colour. The answer to these criticisms lies in exactly the difficulty in accurately interpreting indirect and contradictory scripture. While it is true that the Curse of Ham does not explicitly mention skin colour, there are the idea that Canaan and his descendants were black stemmed from both Christian and Jewish tradition. Historian of religions, David Goldenberg argued ‘Ham’ itself derived from “a Hebrew root meaning ‘dark,’ ‘brown,’ or ‘black,’” meaning that the Curse of Ham should literally be understood as one on blackness.⁷¹ This explanation was the most widely accepted in the early modern period because it answered both where dark skin came from and provided the name’s etymology. It was further supported by scripture; in Genesis 9, where the Curse of Ham is presented, the Hebrew version records Noah as telling Ham: “You prevented me from doing that which is done in the dark, therefore may you be dark and ugly.” Noah then consigned his grandson, Ham, and all his sons thereafter to be a “slave of slaves” for eternity.⁷² It is important to note that, whatever scholars thought of the Curse of Ham’s role in justifying slavery, it was longstanding and pervasive in the broader early modern English world; as late as 1787, for example, Scottish poet Robert Burns published what would become one of his most famous

⁶⁹ Acts 17:26.

⁷⁰ Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 74-87. See Curran’s discussion of “monogenesis,” an excellent addition to the early modern European debate about the origins of blackness and the justifications of slavery.

⁷¹ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 105.

⁷² *Ibid.*

poems, “The Ordination.” One particular sentence bears significance to the discussion: “How graceless Ham leugh at his dad,/Which made Canaan a nigger.”⁷³

If Ham’s sons and all future generations were condemned to slavery, Genesis 10 left no doubt in those who used scripture as justification for African enslavement. Kush was Ham’s oldest and most successful son. He “began to be mighty upon the earth,” becoming king of the Land of Kush (modern Ethiopia and Sudan), and later expanded his kingdom and greatness throughout Africa. The Bible claims that it was Kush himself who populated the continent with dark-skinned people.⁷⁴ The Bible also describes Kush and his laudability: By God’s grace, he became an expert hunter and earned the respect and admiration of everyone he encountered. Kush became the first great king of a sprawling benevolent, dark-skinned African kingdom by the Lord’s will alone.⁷⁵ Despite the positive way in which the Bible consistently portrays Kush, Barbadians appear to have relied on the traditional Christian interpretation that Genesis 10 condoned slavery, therefore enslaving his people was scripturally justified. They just as easily could have interpreted the story of Kush to mean that Africans were as capable of forming moral kingdoms as Europeans, but they did not because that was not Christian tradition. When early modern Christians needed scripture to support their secular goals, they had an affinity for finding the justifications they wanted in the Bible. Whether the Bible contradicted itself was of no concern to them; Christians who wanted biblically sanctioned authority found that scripture presented them “with tempting opportunities to obtain wealth or power,” and slavery was no exception.⁷⁶ If scripture treated Africans as equals in Genesis 10, but also condemned them to

⁷³ Robert Burns, *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, edited by Nathan Haskell Dole (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Co., 1900), 73; Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 64-70; George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 43-47.

⁷⁴ Genesis 10:6-11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 25.

slavery as in the Curse of Ham from Genesis 9, because slavery offered wealth and power, Christians preferred the latter interpretation.

Baptizing slaves was an exceptionally rare practice in seventeenth-century Barbados, and the comprehensive slave code did not explicitly prevent it from happening.⁷⁷ This was in stark contrast to the French Caribbean, where slaveholders were legally bound in 1685 by the “Code Noir” to baptize their slaves.⁷⁸ The Barbadian comprehensive slave code, however, repeatedly emphasized that slaves were not Christians and slaveholders were legally barred from allowing their slaves any form of rest or “leave” on “Sabbath” or “Holy days,” just one of many methods to keep slaves ignorant of Christianity. Anyone caught violating this law would receive a fine paid in 500 pounds of Muscovado sugar; as an incentive to report, half would go to the person who informed authorities.⁷⁹ The French, on the other hand, mandated that *all* slaves and slaveholders had to stop work of any kind “from the hour of midnight until the other midnight.”⁸⁰ Similar to Barbados, anyone who disobeyed the law did so “on pain of fine and discretionary punishment of masters and confiscation of the sugar, and of the said slaves who will be caught by the officers of their work.”⁸¹

Preventing slaves from becoming Christians allowed Barbadians to circumvent an essential scriptural dictate. Mark 16:15-16 is the clearest Biblical passage that urges believers to spread the faith among all those without it: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that

⁷⁷ Christopher Hodgkins, *Reforming Empire: Protestant Colonialism and Conscience in British Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 132; Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 110-113.

⁷⁸ Louis XIV, “The ‘Code Noir’ (Paris, 1685),” John Garrigus, trans., *Anthology of Louisiana Literature*. http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/louisiana_anthology/texts/louis_xiv/louis_xiv--code_noir_english.html. See article VI.

⁷⁹ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

⁸⁰ “Code Noir,” article IV.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

believeth not shall be damned.”⁸² Barbadians, however, preferred to keep slaves as *creatures* to expand the wealth and power they enjoyed from the sugar industry. If slaves were baptized, according to Mark, they would be saved rather than damned—and according to theologians, saved persons could not be enslaved.⁸³ This reasoning is consistent throughout the early modern English Atlantic, not just in Barbados. With the arrival of a shipment of would-be slaves to Virginia in 1619, one who was Christian was exempt from slavery, and a Christian African by the name of John Philip who was part of an English vessel’s crew testified against a colonist in 1624.⁸⁴ John Philip’s testimony was taken as credibly as a white person’s because he was Christian. In the seventeenth century, eligibility for enslavement absolutely depended on a person’s religious belief; it was theologically unacceptable for Christians to enslave other Christians, and Richard Ligon recorded an excellent example of Christians’ inability to enslave one another in the late 1640s.

Ligon was working for the “publick works” in Barbados, felling trees to make way for a new roadway to a church. He was using a compass to make sure that the road pointed in the right direction when “this *Negre Sambo*” approached him. Sambo, “seeing the needle wag, desired to know the reasoning of its stirring, and whether it were alive.”⁸⁵ Ligon explained that, in fact, the compass was not alive and told him how it worked. He said that the needle, “being of iron,” was attracted to the “huge Rocks of Loadstone that were in the North part of the world,” causing the needle to always point north and guide its holder. “This point of Philosophy was a little too hard for him, and so he stood in a strange mute,” according to Ligon. After a time, once Ligon resumed axing a tree, Sambo used the compass a bit for himself. Learning north, east, south, and

⁸² Mark 16:15-16.

⁸³ Puckrein, *Little England*, 167.

⁸⁴ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 202-203.

⁸⁵ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 49.

west “perfectly ... by heart,” he went into the “greatest admiration that ever I saw a man.” Sambo was so impressed with what he had learned that he “gave over his questions, and desired me, that he might be made a Christian.” When Ligon asked him why he wanted to become a Christian, Sambo said that “to be a Christian, was to be endured with all those knowledges he wanted.”⁸⁶ Ligon “promised to do him my best endeavour.” Later that day, Ligon spoke to Sambo’s master about had happened that afternoon. He explained

... that poor Sambo desired much to be a Christian. But his answer was, That the people of that Island were governed by the Lawes of *England*, and by those Lawes, we could not make a Christian a Slave. I told him, my request was far different from that, for I desired to make a Slave a Christian. His answer was, That it was true, there was a great difference in that: But, being once a Christian, he could no more account him a Slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as Slaves, by making them Christians; and by that means should open such a gap, as all the Planters in the Island would curse him. So I struck mute, and poor *Sambo* was kept out of the Church; as ingenious, as honest, and as a good natur’d poor soul, as ever wore black, or eat green.⁸⁷

It is unclear which “Lawes of England” Sambo’s master referred to. As the preamble to the comprehensive slave code made clear, nothing “in all the Body of the Law” of England dealt with slavery. If English law had laid some foundation for enslavement, then it is likely that Barbadians would have tried their best to follow it. Instead, lacking existing legislation, Barbadians took it upon themselves to legitimize slavery by legal means, relying on “incipient Protestant traditions” combined with the “peculiarities of English common law” to prevent Christians from enslaving each other.⁸⁸ While they did this, the Church of England was trying to figure out whether slaves could be baptized and welcomed into the faith without compromising colonial industry. The church’s goal was also King Charles II’s; in 1660, he urged the Council of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 217.

Foreign Plantations “to consider how the natives and slaves may be invited and made capable of baptism in the Christian faith.”⁸⁹ As Ligon’s history describes, Barbadian slaveholders did not agree with either the King or the Church. As far as British slaveholders were concerned, slavery and Christianity were simply untenable. Two years after the comprehensive slave code became law, the Barbadian Assembly defeated a motion “recommending the christening of negro children and instruction of all adult negroes.”⁹⁰ While ministers and government officials in England tried to convince colonials that slaves could become Christians, slaveholders remained stubbornly unconvinced.⁹¹ So determined were Barbadians to keep slaves away from Christianity that in 1676, the Assembly banned Quakers from bringing Africans, enslaved or not, to their meetings. The egalitarian nature of Quakerism alarmed the colony’s Protestant authority, especially with respect to slaves, such that if “Negroes” were “taught in their Principles ... the safety of this Island may be much hazarded.”⁹²

In the absence of deeper scholarship connecting religion and slavery in Barbados, exactly why Barbadians disagreed so vehemently with the Church and royal opinion about Christianizing their slaves remains uncertain. The French and Spanish did not have the same philosophical problems with slavery; both required slaveholders to ensure their slaves were baptized and practicing Christians upon threat of severe punishment for their owners. One possible explanation for why these laws did not also develop for the British falls back on the comprehensive slave code: if the “true constitution” of the Barbadian government was religious, then their decision making concerning Christian enslavement was more consistent with the Bible

⁸⁹ “Commission to Edw. Hyde, Lord Chancellor, Thos. Earl of Southampton, Lord Treasurer, Edw. Earl of Manchester, Lord Chamberlain, Theop. Earl of Lincoln, John Earl of Clare, Jas. Earl of Marlborough, Jerome Earl of Portland, Will. Visct. Say and Sele, and others,” Dec 1, 1660, Item 2698, Vol 1 (1574-1660), 492-493, 493.

⁹⁰ “An Act Recommending the Christening of Negro Children and Instruction of all Adult Negroes,” (1663).

⁹¹ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 218.

⁹² “An Act to prevent People called Quakers from bringing Negroes to their Meeting,” (1676).

than the crown's or the Church of England's. It is also possible that they were responding to Charles II's rumoured Catholic sympathies, considering that on his deathbed he converted to Catholicism. If Barbadians relied on Protestant tradition informed by scripture to justify African enslavement to the extent I have argued, it would only make sense that they also relied on it to keep slaves out of the faith in order to maintain the wealth and power the plantation system brought them. The Book of Mark 16:15-16 preaches without any confusion that anyone who is baptized and believes will be saved, and that anyone who does not believe will be damned.⁹³ Based on the actions of Barbadian slaveholders, it seems that they took this declaration very seriously—if slaves were Christianized, they would have been saved from the brutality of slavery, and the plantation model that gave planters power and authority would have been significantly reduced.⁹⁴

The comprehensive slave code was vague on direct scriptural references, but it did share many parallels with the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy—sections of the Bible that respectively outline the conditions for slavery (including punishments and restitution) and very primitive civil law—such that it would be difficult to conclude that the former was not in some capacity influenced by the latter, most likely through long-held Protestant tradition. Exodus, for example, provided clear distinctions between temporary and lifetime slavery. The Barbadian Assembly reflected the scripture by legally separating the two; there was an act for governing slaves and an act for governing servants.⁹⁵ Exodus 21:2-6 outlined that servants could serve a maximum of six full years, “and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.”⁹⁶ Notably, the

⁹³ Mark 16:15-16.

⁹⁴ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 50.

⁹⁵ In 1661, the Barbadian Assembly passed two acts on the same day which served to clearly distinguish slavery from indentured servitude: “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes” for slavery and “An Act for the Good Governing of Servants and Ordering of the Rights Between Masters and Servants” for servitude.

⁹⁶ Exodus 21:2.

average contract of an indentured Barbadian servant was 6.75 years, and the comprehensive code dictated that any servant who possessed a runaway slave would serve the slave's proper owner for seven years upon completion of his current contract.⁹⁷ If slaves were to serve for life, however, "his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever."⁹⁸ Slaves—but not indentured servants—were marked as a matter of course in Barbados. The comprehensive code did not require it, nor did slavery legislation elsewhere in the English Atlantic. Nevertheless, it was standard practice for slaveholders in the English Atlantic world to brand their slaves.⁹⁹

Slaveholders easily circumvented scripture when it fit their needs.¹⁰⁰ They tried their best, however, to remain as true to Protestant tradition and scriptural intent as their economic interests allowed. The Bible's book of Exodus required slaveholders to put a hole through one of their slaves' ears to mark lifetime slavery, but slaveholders found a more convenient way to mark their slaves. Apparently, as long as slaveholders kept true to faith's perceived intention, how the intention was achieved was less important. Branding might have been preferred to boring a hole in slaves' ears because a brand could be customized more easily; a slave with a plantation's unique brand, for example, could easily be distinguished from another plantation's. Slaveholders, therefore, found a compromise between Biblical instruction and economic efficiency. A perfect example of this spiritual and economic compromise in action existed on Barbados' Codrington plantations, where after their acquisition by the Society for the Promotion of Christian

⁹⁷ Beckles, *White Servitude, Black Slavery*, 5; "An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes," (1661), "... and if any Christian Servant so possessed of any such Negroe or Negroes not acquainting his Master thereof so faile or neglect to bring within the time before as is before enjoined, the said Servant shall immediately upon conviction thereof receive Thirty Nyne lashes upon his Naked back ... and after the expiration of his time of Service shall serve the Owner of the said Negro or Negroes the full terme and space of Seven yeares..."

⁹⁸ Exodus 21:6.

⁹⁹ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 472.

¹⁰⁰ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 25.

Knowledge, slaves' bodies were branded with the short form of their new owners:

“SOCIETY.”¹⁰¹ The Society knew perfectly well what Exodus required them to do if they wanted slaves, but their economic interests were equally important. Branding, like drilling a hole in one's ear, was still violent and, in the end, slaves were still permanently marked. Planters' adherence to scripture, therefore, upheld them as true followers of the true religion and maintained slavery according to Christian tradition.

The Book of Exodus also gives prescriptive orders for dealing with people, both free and unfree, who disobey authority. Like marking lifetime slaves and distinguishing between slaves and servants, Exodus seems to have also informed other clauses in the comprehensive code. The code legitimized various forms of violence against slaves, many of which were left to the slaveholder's discretion. For example, one of the Bible's most famous verses, “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, and stripe for stripe,” enabled all sorts of violence against slaves.¹⁰² This verse seems to have provided biblical inspiration among Barbadian planters; slaves who disobeyed or acted against them were severely punished, and in incredibly violent ways. The comprehensive slave code allowed masters to “severely” whip their slaves and “slitt” their noses, for example. Another legalized punishment was for slaves to “be burned in some part of his face.”¹⁰³ If these legally sanctioned disciplines were ineffective, “such greater Corporall punishments as [slaveholders] shall think meet to inflict” were perfectly allowed, and were all too frequent.¹⁰⁴ The most extreme punishment for particularly heinous

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 25. This was an especially common phenomenon in the eighteenth century. The Codrington plantations were also habitually bankrupt for their strict, work-stopping religious instruction on Saturdays.

¹⁰² Exodus 21:17, 21:23-25.

¹⁰³ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

crimes such as murder, burglary, arson of homes, buildings, or cane fields, and “Robbing in the Highway” was death without delay.¹⁰⁵

According to Ligon, punishments against slaves in Barbados were so severe that they developed such a “fearful disposition” that it made them “consequently bloody.”¹⁰⁶ Ligon discovered that slaves were so terrified of punishment that they would often commit suicide to avoid it. His assumption was based on an incident that occurred on Colonel Walrond’s plantation; when Colonel Walrond’s slaves were disobedient, he would threaten them more often than he would punish them, and because Walrond had punished many slaves in visibly horrific ways, his slaves knew that his threats were meaningful. Walrond’s slaves, then, would often “go and hang himself to avoid punishment.”¹⁰⁷ By Ligon’s count, Walrond had “lost three or four of his best Negroes this way.”¹⁰⁸ Infuriated, Walrond asked one of his most loyal slaves why so many had resorted to suicide and learned that many of them believed in “Resurrection, and that they shall go into their own Countrey again, and have their youth renewed.” What he did next was especially violent, and almost a perfect reflection of the head-mounting that Sir Humphrey Gilbert had done in late-sixteenth-century Ireland.¹⁰⁹ Walrond decapitated the slave that had most recently killed himself and mounted it on top of a spike “a dozen feet high.” He then ordered every slave on the plantation “to come forth and march round about this head, and bid them look on it.” Once everyone had seen what Walrond had done, he told them that he would do exactly the same to them as he had done to the one before them. He then asked the assembled slaves whether the head belonged to the man that hanged himself.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 50. Ligon explained that violence against slaves contributed to slave violence against masters, which is what he meant by “consequently bloody.”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ S.J Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

Which they acknowledging, he then told them, That they were in a main error, in thinking that they went into their own Countreys, after they were dead; for, this man's head was here, as they all were witness of, and how was it possible, the body could go without a head. Being convinc'd by this sad, yet lively spectacle, they changed their opinions; and after that, no more hang'd themselves.¹¹⁰

The book of Exodus is also clear about punishments that are too severe; if slaves die as a result of their punishments, the master “shall be severely punished.”¹¹¹ Like in Exodus, the comprehensive code enforced restraint on slaveholders by threat of punishments, too. Granted, punishments against masters paled in comparison to those permitted on slaves; punishments against those who killed slaves without just cause, however, were financially stiff. If a slave died because of a master's “wantoness,” “bloody mindedness or cruell intention,” the 1661 slave code fined masters three thousand pounds of sugar, and if someone killed someone else's slave, they were levied a five-thousand-pound fine payable to the public treasury on top of having to pay deceased's owner twice the slave's value.¹¹²

Protecting slaves against the “Arbitrary, Cruell, and ouragious will of every evil disposed person” was one of the key principles behind the comprehensive slave code.¹¹³ To modern sensibilities, where the horrors of slavery have become common knowledge, it is difficult to reconcile how a society rife with such legalized violence could claim that slaves' wellbeing was a top priority. Without a better legal framework to guide them, early modern Europeans and Barbadian colonists relied on Christian tradition to reinforce morality and economic self-interest as much as they relied on it to build law.¹¹⁴ The best examples are found in Ligon's *True and Exact History* and the comprehensive slave code. In Barbados, violence from infidel Africans

¹¹⁰ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 51.

¹¹¹ Exodus 21:20.

¹¹² “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 19-53.

against Christians, for example, was an egregious crime with particularly heavy consequences. What appeared in scripture seems paraphrased in the 1661 slave code, which read, “if any Negro either Man or Woman shall offer any violence to any Christian as by striking or the like” they would be progressively punished more harshly.¹¹⁵ A first offence would warrant a severe whipping, a second offence would warrant a slit to the nose, and the third would invite corporal punishment up to and including the death penalty.¹¹⁶ This clause paralleled the Bible’s Exodus 21:17 which demanded “he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”¹¹⁷ In this sense, masters (male or female) would have filled the role of father or mother and their caring over them, despite their violence, would have filled a metaphorical role of power resembling parental responsibility, although without the paternalism that emerged in eighteenth-century British America. Societal conditions allowed for paternalism to develop in British America in ways that it could not in Barbados because, according to most historians, Barbados and the broader British Caribbean “were hardly societies at all.”¹¹⁸ While mainland British colonies like Virginia fostered an “affectionate family environment ... romanticism, and humanitarianism,” Caribbean colonies and their relentless pursuit of profit from the sugar industrial complex—especially in Barbados—created a “monstrous distortion of human society” which espoused a “callous disregard for human life and dignity.”¹¹⁹

Planters in British America gradually applied fewer physical punishments and preferred appealing to slaves rather than violently threatening or making physical examples of them, and

¹¹⁵“An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Exodus 21:17.

¹¹⁸ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144.

¹¹⁹ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 284; Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 9; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144. A great range of citations here

hoped to persuade slaves to cooperate through dialogue.¹²⁰ Landon Carter, for example, a Virginian planter, forced one of his slaves to build his own coffin rather than physically punishing him, hoping that this would persuade him to perform better in the future.¹²¹ The reason for this dark, yet physically nonviolent, punishment was that the slave, a carpenter, had lately produced poor-quality work. Meanwhile in Barbados, Ligon noted that slaves were regularly beaten senseless for trivial offences, and this behaviour was legally legitimized according to the Barbadian Assembly's comprehensive slave code.¹²²

An example of a severe set of slave punishments in Barbados is found in Ligon's writing, in which he described being with a master when a slave revolt was discovered. A few slaves who worked in the boiling houses had planned to set fire to them in the hopes that it would spread and set "fire the rest, and so burn all" the plantation to the ground. "These villains" would have succeeded if not for the apparent loyalty of "some of the others who hated mischief as much as [the villains] loved it." The loyal slaves, as soon as they learned what was happening, went straight to their master. The several conspirators were put to death after witnesses came forward to confirm the plot, and the master granted all those who ended the plot "a dayes liberty to give themselves and their wives, to do what they would." The master also granted double rations for three days for everyone on the plantation as a reward and celebration. The slaves, however, turned down the master's offer. According to Ligon, "they would not accept any thing as recompence for doing that which became them in their duties to do, nor would they have him think, it was hope of reward, that made them to accuse their fellow servants, but an act of Justice, which they thought themselves bound in duty to do."¹²³

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 284.

¹²¹ Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter's Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹²² "An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes."

¹²³ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 53-54.

There was an incontrovertible dark side to all of this, however. Barbados wholly depended on unfree indentured servitude (including convict labour) and slavery for everything it accomplished. From its initial construction to its economy to its everyday life, indentured servitude was a fact of everyday Barbadian life. Servitude was typical of the early modern period and should not be understood as uniquely Barbadian or colonial.¹²⁴ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least 40% of England's population lived in some form of servitude.¹²⁵ Servitude was pervasive to the extent that it was a privilege to hold such a status, for those who were neither master nor servant were legally vagabonds and subject to tough punishments such as forced labour, whippings, or imprisonment.¹²⁶ To avoid being labelled a vagrant, many people therefore actively sought out servitude.¹²⁷ Even though the concept of servitude was the same, there were some key differences between servitude in England and what emerged in Barbados.

Servants in Barbados were mostly disliked Irish Catholics, and during the 1640s and 1650s, a significant number of them were especially loathed prisoners taken during the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland.¹²⁸ Although most indentured servants were in Barbados voluntarily, some were common prisoners brought to serve a sentence, and others were kidnapped.¹²⁹ Before the sugar revolution of the 1640s, servants worked for small farmers on small tracts of land and cultivated modest livings with tobacco and cotton. Compared to sugar, however, raising tobacco and cotton was easy; farmers could do it themselves without the need to hire anyone, but those who wanted to expand their enterprise or make work easier for

¹²⁴ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 172-173; Guasco argues that although servitude was standard in the early modern world, the form it took in the Americas was unprecedented in its violence and condition, describing it as an "innovation" in "bound white labor for labor's sake" that gave the appearance of slavery.

¹²⁵ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5.

¹²⁶ Davies, *The North Atlantic World*, 180.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 35.

¹²⁹ Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery*, 1-2. See also Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 50-57, for a detailed account of the conditions and makeup of seventeenth-century Barbadian servitude.

themselves usually contracted fewer than five indentured servants.¹³⁰ But one farmer and a handful of servants simply could not manage a sugar plantation, much less a profitable one. The demand was far too much both physically and in terms of resources; it required a whole team of people in multiple roles, often skilled, in addition to constant, round-the-clock, unyielding labour that planters complained Europeans were not well-equipped to do.¹³¹ The tropics were unforgiving for early modern Europeans—the combination of heat, malaria, and yellow fever was especially lethal such that when plagues broke out, deaths tolls were significant.¹³²

When Ligon first arrived in Barbados, he was faced with a plague that had just run rampant through the island, killing so many so quickly that “the living could hardly bury the dead.”¹³³ The plague was deadly enough that Ligon wanted to leave Barbados for Antigua, where he presumed he would escape infection. He wound up staying in Barbados—whether by choice or an official’s order is unknown—due the presumption that the ships too had become “infected with disease.” Ligon rationalized this by resolving that, even if he did go to Antigua, there were too few surviving men to go with him to start a plantation there.¹³⁴ Africans, by comparison, were perceived to be much better suited to hard labour in the Caribbean than Europeans due to their higher resistance to the types of diseases it harboured.¹³⁵

It was easy for planters to rationalize African slavery by virtue of their self-proclaimed “God-given supremacy,” giving them religious and moral authority, and which was further

¹³⁰ Gmelch, *The Parish Behind God’s Back*, 20.

¹³¹ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 242.

¹³² Richard B. Sheridan, “The Domestic Economy,” chap. 3 in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, Jack P. Greene and J.R. Poole, eds. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 53.

¹³³ Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes* (London, 1657), 21.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*; Compared to other historians, Robin Blackburn downplays the extent to which disease affected servants. African slaves only had a “slightly longer life expectancy than English servants” and were only “generally lower” in maintenance costs, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 242.

¹³⁵ Sheridan, “The Domestic Economy,” 53.

upheld by law.¹³⁶ The Curse of Ham from the Bible's book of Genesis was vital in forming early modern categorizations of people based on skin colour, and is perhaps seen most clearly in the development of Barbados' plantation complex.¹³⁷ Many slavery historians argue that economic self-interest was the primary driving force behind the creation of racialized slavery, but Barbadian officials rationalized the economic exploitation of European indentured servants and enslaved Africans with religion.¹³⁸ Whether religion was just a veil for economic self-interest cannot be known; the argument, however, is not about how much those who developed the institution of Barbadian slavery believed in the faith, but how well they were able to use it to their advantage.

The Barbadian Assembly adopted the comprehensive code at a pivotal moment in Barbadian history; once sugar found its way into the soil, its roots firmly took hold and changed Barbados forever. Previous staple industries like tobacco and cotton practically disappeared within just a few years as the sugar industry ruthlessly took hold, forcing smaller competitors out of the market and off the island. As sugar grew, so did the number of African slaves; big planters preferred them over indentured European servants because they believed they were better able to survive in the Barbadian tropical climate. Africans were also preferred to carry out unfree labour as early as the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a generation before England colonized Barbados. The Privy Council's opinion reflected that of seventeenth-century Protestant Christian tradition that Africans were eligible for enslavement because of their perceived status

¹³⁶ Gmelch, *The Parish Behind God's Back*, 24; *An Act for the Good Governing of Servants and Ordering of the Rights Between Masters and Servants* (1661); Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 9.

¹³⁷ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 66-67; Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 39-41.

¹³⁸ Beckles, *White Servitude, Black Slavery*, 1-2; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144; Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 242. See also Hilary McD Beckles' article focusing exclusively on how unparalleled economic self-interest was responsible for slavery and the racism that emerged from it; "The Economic Origins of Black Slavery in the British West Indies, 1640-1680: A Tentative Analysis of the Barbados Model." *The Journal of Caribbean History*; May 1, 1982; 16; 36-56.

as infidels.¹³⁹ Barbadian big planters' religious and economic preference for African slaves led to fewer servants working on plantations as labourers, despite petitions and laws calling for more Christians to serve on the island. Roman Catholics and other denominations became Christian-like so that Christian became synonymous with whiteness. The Protestant English had established difference between themselves and the Irish going back well into the medieval ages, and the English preferred them as indentured servants until the sugar revolution of the 1640s. Confronted with starkly different-looking people without Christian belief of any kind, however, Protestant Barbadian planters suspended or, to some extent, tamed their differences with Catholics and recognized them at least Christians in order to provide themselves with a sense of security against perceived godless Africans (even if they were not true Christians). Barbadians used Protestant Christian tradition to legitimize African otherness and enslavement far more than they used skin colour alone. The "true constitution" of the Barbadian Assembly's comprehensive slave code seems to have relied on Christian tradition to advance their religious beliefs in conjunction with their economic self-interest. Slavery derived from a divine a curse, not a racialized belief in inherent and immutable racial inferiority, against "brutish heathens," allowing seventeenth-century Barbadian planters to create and maintain supremacy over infidels and heretical Christians to their own economic advantage.

¹³⁹ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 118.

CHAPTER 4 THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR AND TRUE RELIGION IN BARBADOS

During the English Civil War, Barbados was caught in its own political and religious upheaval. The civil war made religion a serious point of contention and division between peoples in both Britain and Barbados. The colony's governor from 1630 to 1640, Henry Hawley, was a corrupt official who collected revenues for himself that should have gone into public coffers or to the Barbadian proprietor, the Earl of Carlisle, who resided in England.¹ For example, in 1634, Governor Hawley ordered that a £1 anchorage fee be charged to all foreign vessels in addition to a seven percent customs charge on what goods they sold, but he refused to give customs revenues to those they were owed. Further, properties owned by those convicted of crimes were not surrendered to the island's proprietor as they should have been, rather Hawley confiscated them for himself and his government's benefit.² These and Hawley's many other financial misdeeds prompted the colony's receiver general, Peter Hay, to label the governor as the island's "President of mischeefe." He demanded that Hawley and his government release all funds they withheld from those to whom they rightfully belonged, and ordered him to fully reveal the government's accounting and debts to the proprietor.³ Hay's demands went ignored, and it was not until 1638 that the Earl of Carlisle realized the full extent of Hawley's corruption and replaced him with a new governor, Henry Huncks.

Hawley, however, refused to leave and lied to Huncks that the island's proprietor was no longer the Earl of Carlisle, but that it was somebody else who preferred to keep him as governor.

¹ Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38-39.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ *Ibid.*

Fearing for their lives, both Huncks and Hay fled Barbados and successfully convinced the Earl of Carlisle of Hawley's duplicity, leading to Charles I's reconfirmation that Huncks was the rightful governor of Barbados. The king forced Hawley from office by sending a party of royal commissioners to the colony, including Hay, to place Hawley under arrest. Huncks, however, created more problems as governor than Hawley.⁴ Huncks misappropriated revenues, too, but when questioned about it, instead of ignoring his accusers, he threatened them with violence and imprisonment. In addition to financial mismanagement, corruption, and shows of force, the new governor committed another egregious offence, which was his disrespect of the true Protestant religion. Reynold Alleyne complained in a letter to Peter Hay that Hunck was personally responsible for the colony's religious neglect, and that it was because of him that organized religion in Barbados was suffering. By actively suppressing the government's funding of Barbadian churches and ministers, Alleyne contended that Hunck believed "The Church ... should sink and the parson swim."⁵

Hunck's corruption led to Charles I replacing him with a new governor, Philip Bell, in 1641. Barbadians were relieved to have an honest, law-abiding governor who promoted more autonomy for the colony and preferred minimal regulation, letting planters tend to their affairs without imposing government on them.⁶ As much as planters enjoyed having Bell as their governor, however, his hands-off style of governing also pertained to matters of religion. This infuriated those who wanted stricter religious laws enforcing true Protestant religion in Barbados, and, in particular, those who wanted heretics pursued and punished in the colony.⁷ The English Civil War made these tensions especially awkward because in Barbados, the civil war

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Reynold Alleyne to Peter Hay, Mar 8, 1641, Hay Papers, quoted in Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 41.

⁶ Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 42.

⁷ Ibid., 77.

was primarily fought on religious grounds between planters, while the government tried its best to remain uninvolved and nonpartisan.⁸ In an attempt to convince his opponents that he was indeed on their side in religious matters, Bell petitioned the Earl of Warwick for help, writing, “We humbly desire your Lordship, that rest of the committee may be certified of these truths.”⁹ He convened with the Barbadian Committee of Lords and Commons for Foreign Plantations to write that under his governorship, the only people in the colony to have “suffered ... deprivation, banishment, or imprisonment” had been those “preaching blasphemies or heresies,” and who promulgated “known errors in the fundamentals of faith.”¹⁰ Despite Bell’s insistence of intolerance toward Catholics, he did little to suppress them, and there were many reports of openly practicing Catholics throughout the 1640s. The Royal Navy captured Barbados in 1651 to put an end to its lingering civil war conflicts, and installed a new governor to maintain Cromwellian order.¹¹ Once all of Britain’s Caribbean colonies were decidedly loyal to the new government and slavery was becoming more widespread, colonists began to reevaluate the distinction between themselves, and between themselves and slaves. Christian heretics and blasphemers (those who were Christians, but not Protestants) found common ground with English Protestants in that they were Christian-like, but not infidels as were African slaves. Following the English Civil War, Christianity became synonymous with whiteness in Barbados and the broader English Caribbean.

⁸ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 37.

⁹ Committee of Lords and Commons for Foreign Plantations, “Governor Philip Bell and Committee to the Earl of Warwick,” Oct 1646, *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments respecting North America*, vol. 1 (1542-1688), Leo Stock, ed. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1924), 191.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 76-77.

The English Civil War began in 1642 and lasted until 1651, and was fought predominantly between those loyal to the English monarch, Charles I, and those who believed that power should be concentrated in parliament. Royalists and Parliamentarians plunged the nation into a bloody civil war lasting nearly a decade, which saw, for the first time in European memory, a major European power's monarchy defeated by its own people, with its king arrested, tried, and executed. Parliamentarians then dismantled the monarchy (although reinstated it in 1660), and appointed Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. Concentration of political power was a major reason for the outbreak of civil war, but religion quickly became an equally powerful force in the conflict, too.¹² As discussed in the first chapter, Henry VIII's 1530s Protestant Reformation rejected papal supremacy in Rome and created the Protestant Church of England, led by none other than Henry himself under the self-appointed title of Supreme Head of the Church. This sudden change of spiritual authority, however, was difficult for many to immediately reconcile—the head of their faith, after all, had changed from a pope with an apparently direct line to God to a mortal king virtually overnight. For much of the sixteenth century, Protestant conversion in Great Britain was therefore slow and difficult to enforce. In Ireland, conversion barely happened at all.¹³ A century later, by the 1640s, Great Britain had largely become an island of Protestants, but, according to Christian radicals known as Puritans, the Church of England still had too many Catholic traditions that needed eradication. The problem was that Puritans wanted religious experience to be more personal, and more closely based on individual biblical study than on adhering to ecclesiastical interpretations and traditions

¹² Charles W. A. Prior, "Religion, Political Thought and the English Civil War," *History Compass*, 24-25.

¹³ "Resolutions on Religion Presented by Committee of The House of Commons (1629)," *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, retrieved from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/ENGref/er92.html>; Henry Gee and William John Hardy (eds.), *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 523; "Ireland is now almost wholly overspread with popery, swarming with friars, priests, and Jesuits, and other superstitious persons of all sorts, whose practice is daily to seduce his majesty's subjects from their allegiance, and to cause them to adhere to his enemies."

resembling Catholicism. To Puritans, the Church of England's ecclesiastical structure of bishops and archbishops, headed by a monarch as Supreme Head of the Church (a self-appointed pope in all but name), was far too Catholic, too hierarchical, and so Puritans aimed to remove it.¹⁴ The civil war, then, was one part political and one part religious.

Unlike his predecessors who reluctantly accommodated Puritanism (James I and Elizabeth I), Charles I resisted Puritan reforms.¹⁵ He took firm action against them by ordering conformity in religion and respect for the church hierarchy. The ferocity with which he enforced religious conformity was met with fierce resistance, sparking a war with the Church of Scotland in 1639, an Irish rebellion in 1641, and infuriated whole scores of people all across Britain.¹⁶ By the outbreak of civil war in the early 1640s, most of Charles' subjects had turned against him. Charles lost power, and Parliament, with Puritans on its side, managed to reform the Church of England throughout the 1640s to achieve many of the changes that Puritans had long been seeking.¹⁷ English Civil War did not just affect Great Britain and Ireland—its renewed emphasis on anti-Catholicism and stricter Protestantism had a significant effect throughout the British Atlantic, particularly in Barbados—a world where, before the war, some historians have argued religion was “comparatively uncontentious.”¹⁸

During the English Civil War, the Church of England was forced to become less Catholic and closer to “true religion,” which really meant true Protestantism. Barbados was not immune to this effect, and its officials became emboldened in their desires to both please the new English

¹⁴ Arthur Charles Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492-1962* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1999), 58.

¹⁵ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

government and suppress heretics and blasphemers in the colony. Neither Parliament nor the Barbadian Assembly, whose representatives comprised of wealthy sugar planters, nor any other political or legal entity, ever explicitly defined what “true religion” actually meant, but it appears to have meant strict adherence to Protestantism. England and its colonial authorities used “true religion” to discriminate between peoples and also used it to influence legal codes such as the Barbadian 1661 comprehensive slave code. Ultimately, “true religion” decided who was property and who was not; seventeenth-century Barbadian categorizations of people derived from religion.¹⁹

Before the English Civil War, and before African slaves matched and then outnumbered Catholic indentured servants, the primary distinction between people in Barbados, like in Britain, was religion. Roman Catholics and Protestants were not just spiritually different, they were like separate races of people, though races defined by religion, culture, and nationhood.²⁰ By the mid-seventeenth century, however, Barbadian slave owners were calling for more Christian servants and more Christian immigration to increase the number of Europeans on the island, suggesting that Christianity—regardless of denomination—became synonymous with whiteness. Barbadians were strictly demanding enforcement of the true religion in the colony, and on the other, they were concerned with equalizing the balance with Africans. To do this, becoming especially apparent in the 1640s and 1650s, there was marked tolerance of Barbadian Catholicism. Catholic suppression was so lax that when Father Antoine Biet, a Frenchman, arrived in 1654, he observed that the Catholic population could generally practice their religion in peace and with “great freedom,” so long as they were inconspicuous and did not practice in public.²¹ I argue that

¹⁹ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 53.

²⁰ Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

²¹ As quoted in Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 77;

this temporary toleration is best explained by a swift evolution in how people viewed each other in Barbados. As Africans began to dramatically outnumber Europeans, Barbadians of European descent began to understand whiteness and Christianity as being synonymous. The Barbadian comprehensive slave code and other religious government acts were the result of Parliamentary attempts to enforce England's "true" Protestant religion, simultaneously reinforcing religious divisions between peoples, and maintaining traditional English Protestant supremacy over infidel Africans and heretical Catholics.

Barbadians could neither socially nor economically afford to take a side on church reform in the English Civil War.²² The Assembly decided that neutrality was the best option, and so did the island's Lord Proprietor, James Hay, the Earl of Carlisle, although Governor Bell did little to prevent conflict on the island.²³ While England was gripped with conflict, Barbados, despite its own concurrent Civil War-related administrative problems, managed to overcome its consistent economic hardships of the previous decades. Sugar had taken over nearly all of the island's industries, profits were dramatically increasing, and people were flocking to the island with dreams of success—Barbados was an attractive haven from the civil war, and was popularly "the richest colony in English America."²⁴ Barbadians knew well what they had accomplished, too, and most agreed that taking sides in the conflict would threaten the economic stability they had worked for so long to achieve. With the Barbadian government's fear of slave revolt already a preoccupation, it also knew that taking sides risked unnecessarily transplanting the civil war to the colony.

²² A.B., *A brief relation of the beginning and ending of the troubles of the Barbados, with the true causes thereof: Set forth by A.B. a diligent Observer of the Times* (London, 1653), Early English Books Online, 1.

²³ Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church*, 72; Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 37.

²⁴ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 79.

The prospect of Royalist and Parliamentary immigrants fighting amongst themselves or, perhaps more threateningly, against whichever side the government might have taken was something the government wanted to avoid.²⁵ Richard Ligon commented on this in his *True and Exact History*, describing that despite the island being “of severall Perswasions,” Barbadians were “So frank, so loving, and so good natur’d ... to expresse their affections yet higher, they had particular names to another, as, Neighbour, Friend, Sister, Brother.”²⁶ Because they were “Loving, friendly and hospitable to one another,” Barbadians carefully avoided conflict over political beliefs, and even crafted it into law, such that “whosever nam’d the word *Roundhead* or *Cavalier* should give to all those who that heard him, a Shot and a Turkey, to be eaten at his house that made forfeiture.”²⁷ Ligon’s example reflected the government’s official position delivered in 1645, declaring that it was “not to receive any alteration of government until God shall be so merciful unto us as to unite the king and Parliament.”²⁸ For most of the 1640s, the people and government of Barbados did not want to risk the island’s already fragile stability by concerning themselves with the war in England, choosing instead to par the course by maintaining official neutrality. The exception to this was when Lord Francis Willoughby sided against Parliament during his brief stint as governor in 1651, which resulted the Royal Navy blockading the colony and laying siege to it from October 1651 to January 1652.²⁹ As long as they could cultivate sugar and conduct unimpeded trade with both sides—and with the winner when the war was over—

²⁵ Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 38. Although the Barbadian government preferred neutrality, there were skirmishes between Parliamentary and Royalist residents and planters.

²⁶ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; *Roundhead* and *Cavalier* were respective colloquialisms for Parliamentarians and Royalists during the English Civil War.

²⁸ As quoted in Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 38.

²⁹ Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 50-52.

Barbadians preferred to establish themselves as neither friend nor foe, but as an essential and reliable trading partner.³⁰

One reason why Barbadians could readily distance themselves from the civil war was because Barbados was a “monstrous distortion of human society,” governed by the “all-powerful sugar magnate.”³¹ From the 1640s, Barbados had become a “wilderness of mere materialism, without a sense of community responsibility or loyalty to place,” and juxtaposed “material success and social failure.”³² Economic interest was so critical that protecting the sugar industry was the government’s exclusive priority; it superseded everything, including deposing or protecting the crown and all the social implications that went along with it. What did reach Barbados from the civil war, however, was stricter adherence to Protestantism within the Church of England. English Puritans with new sympathy in the crown and government expressed the need for the state to expunge all Catholic remnants from the Church of England, but, more importantly, they also emphasized the importance of determining and preaching the “true religion.”³³ To get around this problem of specifically defining what the “true religion” was supposed to be, Barbadians followed Parliament’s will to conform strictly to Protestantism by adhering to anti-Catholicism in the strictest of terms, while at the same time recognizing Catholics as Christian-like in response to increasing numbers of African slaves.³⁴

In 1643, Parliament passed an “Ordinance for the Government of the Plantations in the West Indies,” which recognized the difficulties Caribbean planters faced there. In an apparent effort to help, Parliament decreed, “To their great Grief and miserable Hardship,” planters often

³⁰ Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church*, 59.

³¹ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144-145.

³² Ibid.; Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 377.

³³ Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution*, 123.

³⁴ Ibid., 124.

spent a lot of money to move themselves across the Atlantic with their families, only to arrive in an unknown, “remote and desolate” part of the world. Once there, they would have to clear their own land, build their own house, and live or die solely on their own “extreme Labour and Difficulty.”³⁵ But, even more troubling to Parliament was that these pioneers were forced to live “fearing the Outrageous Malice of Papists,” who would only take advantage of their “poor and low ... Condition.”³⁶ If planters hoped to live in colonies that were well-governed, secure, and prosperous, Parliament believed that “true religion” had to be enforced. The ordinance was therefore “chiefly to the Preservation and Advancement of the true Protestant Religion amongst the said Planters and Inhabitants, and the further Enlargement and Spreading of the Gospel of Christ.”³⁷

Not adhering to the true Protestant religion was a serious, and sometimes traitorous offence.³⁸ After a high-profile trial in 1645, Parliament ordered the beheading of William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud had played a lead role in Charles I’s attempts to assert control over the Church of England by emphasizing ecclesiastical authority, something Puritans viewed as heretically Catholic. In its seventh article against him, the court ruled that the Archbishop Laud had “traitorously endeavoured to alter and subvert God’s true religion by law established in this realm, and instead thereof to set up Popish Superstition and Idolatry.”³⁹ The tenth article against him was also concerned with Laud’s “true” religious affiliation by claiming

³⁵ "November 1643: Ordinance for the Government of the Plantations in the West Indies," *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 331-333. *British History Online*, 2016, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp331-333>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ D. Alan Orr, *Treason and State: Law, Politics, and Ideology in the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101-140.

³⁹ John Rushworth, “Historical Collections: The trial of William Laud,” *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 3, 1639-40* (London, 1721), 1365-1381. Retrieved from *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol3/pp1365-1381>.

that he provided and acted on “secret intelligence” from the Pope, with the ultimate goal of “traitorously and wickedly” endeavoring to “reconcile the Church of England with the Church of Rome.”⁴⁰

In 1650, as the civil war was coming to an end, the Barbadian Assembly passed legislation which ordered, among other things, “the unanimous Profession of the true Religion in this Island,” and imposed “condign Punishment upon the Opposers thereof.”⁴¹ Although no records show that Barbadians punished “Opposers” as severely as Archbishop William Laud, those who performed against the act still met harsh consequences. From London in 1653, an anonymous writer who went by the name A.B., and who was a “diligent observer of the times,” wrote that in Barbados many “innocent Delinquents” were forced “from their Estates and Families, and then tried.”⁴² There were physical punishments, too: A Captain Tienman and Lieutenant Brandon not only had their estates confiscated by the government, but they were fined, branded on the cheek, and had their tongues cut, before being permanently banished from Barbados.⁴³ The “Act for the Profession of the True Religion” legalized these punishments and paved the way for further action against others. The government also used the act to establish committees to carry out various acts of sequestration to weed out and punish those who would oppose what the Assembly considered the colony’s “true religion.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid.; see also, Adele Hast, “State Treason Trials during the Puritan Revolution, 1640-1660,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 37-53 for a more complete analysis of religion and treason during civil-war England.

⁴¹ “An Act, Intituled, An Acknowledgement of and Declaration of the Inhabitants of the Island of Barbadoes, of His Majesty’s Right to the Dominions of this Island, and the Right of the Right Honourable Earl of Carlisle, derived from the Said Majesty; and by the Earl of Carlisle, to the Right Honourable the Lord Willoughby of Parham; and also for the unanimous Profession of the true Religion in this Island, and imposing condign Punishment upon the Opposers thereof,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 48.

⁴² A.B., “A brief relation...,” 5.

⁴³ Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (London: Longman, Brown, and Green, 1847), 271.

⁴⁴ A.B., “A brief relation...,” 6-7.

In 1661, the same year the comprehensive slave servant codes were passed, the Barbadian Assembly passed two pieces of religious legislation in an attempt to end the confusion over what the colony's post-civil war religion was supposed to be after recognizing that "divers opinionated and self-conceited Persons have declared an absolute Dislike to the Government of the Church of the *England*."⁴⁵ The "Order for the Publication and Execution of the Acts concerning the Uniformity of Common Prayer" (1661) and "An Act Concerning Morning and Evening Prayer in Families" (1661) were rooted in strict Elizabethan-era Protestantism, resembled instructions from the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, and paid homage to sixteenth-century laws, such as the "Act of Uniformity" (1559). Barbadian neutrality during the civil war made it difficult for authorities to regulate religious matters concerning the Church of England, but once Parliament had established that Protestantism was to be enforced and Catholicism diligently suppressed, it was better positioned to pass such legislation.⁴⁶

Barbadian neutrality might have led to the island's generally quiet approach toward religious matters too, but after the Restoration the Assembly was better positioned to regulate religious practice.⁴⁷ The 1661 Barbadian act concerning religious uniformity made it expressly clear that in the civil war's aftermath, religious regulation was desperately needed. "Upon Pretence of an Alteration of Church Government in *England*" during the English Civil War, "scandalizing Ministers" and their followers tried "to seduce others to their erroneous Opinions." According to the Assembly, their "Misdemeanors" had "begotten many Distractions, a great Reproach and Disparagement to the Church and Ministry," and caused "Disturbance of the

⁴⁵ "An Act or Order for the Publication and Execution of the Acts concerning the Uniformity of Common Prayer," *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes*, 12.

⁴⁶ A.B., "A brief relation...", 1.

⁴⁷ "An Act or Order for the Publication and Execution of the Acts concerning the Uniformity of Common Prayer," *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes*, 12.

Government of this Island.”⁴⁸ “For Suppression of ... their disorderly Courses,” the Assembly declared that all people on the island, “inhabiting or resident, ... henceforth give due Obedience, and conform themselves unto the Government and Discipline of the Church of *England*.”⁴⁹ This act was not delivered in a vacuum; to the best of its knowledge, the Barbadian Assembly followed precedent set by the Church of England and Parliament in Britain, the spirit of whose laws were “the same,” and what was “expressed in the Fronts of *English Bibles*.”⁵⁰ Parliament passed its own Act of Uniformity less than a year later, in 1662.⁵¹ By the 1660s, there was a clear push to establish Protestantism as the “true religion” in the colony, and it was happening in concurrence with an ever-growing population Africans and increasing anti-Catholicism. Barbadians were trying to connect Christianity to their own identities and infidelity to Africans’ in an era when skin colour as a distinction between peoples was not as prevalent.

Barbadians’ attempt to determine and enforce “true religion” through legislation was an imported idea from post-war England, but—like the English—they never clearly defined exactly what it meant. Through several government acts already mentioned and more, however, they did provide plenty of examples of what true religion was not. In the Acts concerning the Uniformity of Common Prayer, the Assembly prefaced its order to enforce “true religion” through the Church of England as the only acceptable religion by explaining what actions constituted irreligiousness. “Aversion and utter Neglect or Refusal” of the Church of England’s “Prayers, Sermons, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Rites and Ordinances” were major

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Charles II, 1662: An Act for the Uniformity of Publique Prayers and Administrac[i]on of Sacraments & other Rites & Ceremonies and for establishing the Form of making ordaining and consecrating Bishops Preists and Deacons in the Church of England," *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80*, ed. John Raithby (s.l: Great Britain Record Commission, 1819), 364-370. *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp364-370>.

problems to the Assembly. Perhaps more troubling to the Assembly was that these offenses were often encouraged by “scandalizing Ministers” in their parish churches and at conventicles held “in private Houses and other Places.”⁵² Barbados was not alone in its attempts to crack down on conventicles, either; in 1670, Charles II decreed that conventicles were a significant threat to peace, and that “further and more speedy Remedies against the growing and dangerous practices of Seditious Secretaries and other disloyall Persons” were required to maintain the authority of the “true religion,” and to put an end to the many “Insurrections” they, “as late experience hath shewen,” had caused.⁵³

The Assembly’s “Act concerning Morning and Evening Prayer in Families” (1661) further mandated true religion by providing even more specific religious instruction, which emphasized the importance of ecclesiastical instruction. Those who lived within two miles of a church had to attend “Divine Service” every Sabbath in the morning and evening, while those who lived more than two miles only had to attend “once a Month at least.”⁵⁴ The act required that ministers had to begin prayers by nine o’clock in the morning and offer preaching “at least” once every Sunday. Church attendance and instruction for adults, however, was not the act’s only concern—religious instruction which followed the act’s “true intent” was absolutely necessary for children and servants. The Assembly declared that parents took very “little Care” of their children with respect to religious instruction, resulting in many of them being ignorant of the “Fundamentals of the Christian Religion, or the Knowledge of God,” making religion

⁵² “An Act or Order for the Publication and Execution of the Acts concerning the Uniformity of Common Prayer,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes*, 12.

⁵³ Charles II, 1670, “An Act to prevent and suppress Seditious Conventicles,” *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80*, ed. John Raithby, 648-651. Retrieved from *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp648-651>.

⁵⁴ “An Act concerning Morning and Evening Prayer in Families,” *Acts of Assembly*, 13.

“Scandalized, and the Worship of God contemned.”⁵⁵ If children grew up without a proper understanding of the “true religion,” the Assembly was deeply concerned that ignorance would lead to “all manner of Vices” on the island. On Sundays, church wardens had the authority to police some of these vices by conducting island-wide searches for “Lewd and Debauched Company” wherever they suspected it might be; taverns, victualling houses, alehouses, and private residences were potentially subject to thorough inspection. If church wardens caught people “Drinking, Swearing, Gaming, or otherwise Misdemeaning themselves,” they were presented with two choices: an immediately payable, on-the-spot fine of five shillings, “for the Use of the Poor,” or a four-hour penalty in the stocks.⁵⁶ Since lewdness and debauchery were supposedly avoidable if only churches gave true religious instruction, the Assembly decided that “concerning God and the true Religion,” ministers had a “Duty of Preaching” and “Catechizing and Questioning all the Youth, and others that shall come before them, in the Points of the Christian Faith.”⁵⁷ Notably absent from seventeenth-century Barbadian catechization were slaves.

When Richard Ligon tried to have the slave Sambo instructed in the Christian faith, his master explained that Barbadians “were governed by the Lawes of *England*,” and, as such, they “could not make a Christian a Slave.”⁵⁸ If Sambo had become a Christian, it would have undermined the whole fabric of Barbadian society. Slaves would have become free and the plantation complex dependent on African slavery would have fallen apart, not just in Barbados, but all across the British Caribbean. British Caribbean planters maintained that if they wanted social cohesion and a thriving economy, keeping slaves ignorant of the “true religion” was

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 50.

essential.⁵⁹ Willfully or not, Sambo's master, like most planters, relied on misinformation to keep slaves out of the faith. While no law prohibiting Christians from slavery existed on paper, planters depended on popular opinion—if everyone believed enslaving Christians was illegal, then, *de facto*, it was, regardless of whether a written law existed or not.

By the last quarter of the century, however, the British government and church officials were becoming increasingly skeptical of the claim that Christianity and slavery were mutually exclusive. French and Spanish colonies not only baptized their slaves, they required it by law, and strictly enforced religious instruction and the observance of holy days under threat of severe punishment.⁶⁰ French officials, for example, altogether dismissed Africans' spirituality as irreligion, which they claimed justified and necessitated slaves' Catholic indoctrination for salvation. French financier Jacques Savary explained in 1675 that the slave trade “may only appear inhuman to those who do not know that these poor people are idolatrous or Mahometans.”⁶¹ According to Savary, French slave merchants were actually doing Africans a service by purchasing them from captivity in Africa. By bringing them to the Americas, misguided, “Mahometan” Africans could obtain “knowledge of the real God and a path to salvation ... to make them into good Christians.”⁶²

British planters, who claimed baptism and freedom were inextricably linked, were well aware that French and Spanish slaves were Christian converts, yet they occasionally bought

⁵⁹ Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 355; see also, Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 95-96. One possible origin of this belief could have come from ancient tradition. In the Middle Ages, particularly spanning the Crusades, Christians and Muslims would often enslave each other, but would grant freedom to anyone who converted in captivity. This tradition seemed to have continued in the British Atlantic and among the Muslim Barbary pirates; according to some estimates “fully half” of all Barbary pirates were freed Europeans who had converted to Islam to gain their freedom.

⁶⁰ K.G. Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 107.

⁶¹ Jacques Savary, as quoted in Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness*, 53.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Catholic slaves from French and Spanish merchants anyway. In a glaring contradiction, British planters' claim that Christianity would prevent African slavery never stopped them from purchasing baptized slaves, even when they had to deal with the inconvenience of tolerating or suppressing their Catholicism.⁶³ French and Spanish slaves, while Christian, were not Protestant, and therefore, in the eyes of Barbadians, not followers of the *true* religion. Many historians have also compared the condition of Catholic indentured servants to slavery, and since the vast majority of indentured servants were Catholics who refused to convert to the “true” Protestant religion, the conditions they met in servitude were justified. To British planters, a person was viable for subjection so long as they followed a religion that was not the “true religion.” Catholics were Christians, but, according to Protestants, they were not *true* Christians—whether African or Irish or something else—which allowed Protestants to subjugate them to varying forms of slavery and indentured servitude.⁶⁴

Despite knowledge of Christian slaves in the broader Atlantic world, and certainly from their personal interactions with them, British planters remained unyielding in their conviction that slavery and Christianity were incompatible.⁶⁵ This, however, did not stop some British colonial governments from trying to require slave owners to convert their slaves. As early as 1663 the Barbadian Assembly considered an act “for recommending the christening of negro children and instruction of all adult negroes.”⁶⁶ In 1675, a Jamaican act tried to force planters to “instruct [slaves] in the Christian religion,” but it went virtually ignored.⁶⁷ In 1681, Richard Dutton, then-governor of Barbados, told the Assembly to draft and pass a law for the baptism of

⁶³ Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 96.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ “Minutes of the Council of Barbadoes,” Nov 23, 1663, Item 587, Vol 5 (1661-1688), *Colonial State Papers*, 169.

⁶⁷ As quoted in Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 355.

the island's slaves. The Assembly, whose representatives comprised of wealthy sugar planters, rejected the governor's request for two reasons: because slaves' "savage brutishness renders them wholly incapable" of Christianity, and because it would "ruin" the mercantile and slave-trading Royal African Company with which they did business.⁶⁸ The Planters' Committee of Barbados went to the Lords of Trade and Plantations to insist that converting slaves to Christianity was impossible, because it "would not only destroy their property, but endanger the island." To support this claim, the committee argued that "converted negroes grow more perverse and intractable than others," making them "of less value for labour or sale."⁶⁹

In 1660, Charles II, a Catholic sympathizer himself, instructed the Council of Foreign Plantations "to consider how the natives and slaves might be invited and made capable of baptism in the Christian faith."⁷⁰ The king's request apparently fell on deaf ears because no English colony made any serious attempt to comply. By 1685, 25 years after he had originally asked the colonies to convert their slaves, Charles had had enough of colonial resistance to baptizing slaves. The diarist John Evelyn wrote that while discussing colonial slavery with the king, Charles did not understand why planters were so resistant to his demands. On baptizing and catechizing slaves into the "true religion," the king complained that masters were "of mistaken opinion that [they] would be *ipso facto* free."⁷¹ No law existed prohibiting slaves from becoming Christians, but British planters vehemently insisted there was and, on that basis, refused to bring them into the faith. The political philosopher John Locke declared in his 1669 *Fundamental*

⁶⁸ Ibid., 356.

⁶⁹ Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 481.

⁷⁰ "Commission to Edw. Hyde, Lord Chancellor, Thos. Earl of Southampton, Lord Treasurer, Edw. Earl of Manchester, Lord Chamberlain, Theop. Earl of Lincoln, John Earl of Clare, Jas. Earl of Marlborough, Jerome Earl of Portland, Will. Visct. Say and Sele, and others," Dec 1, 1660, Item 2698, vol. 1 (1574-1660), *Colonial State Papers*, 492.

⁷¹ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn, Vol. III (1677-1706)* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996 (1906)), 1685.

Constitutions of Carolina that slaves had every right to religion and to be “fully members as any freeman.”⁷² Perhaps foreshadowing opposition, he further clarified that in a slave’s becoming Christian, none could be “exempted from that civil dominion his master hath over him, but be in all other things in the same state and condition he was in before.”⁷³ Baptized, practicing Christian slave or not, Locke explained that every master “shall have absolute authority over his Negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever.”⁷⁴ The Providence Island Company agreed with Locke and Charles II’s view long before either had commented on the feasibility of Christianizing slaves. In the 1630s, the company was having problems with runaway slaves thanks to the Puritan Samuel Rishworth, who was allegedly spreading the “groundless opinion that Christians may not lawfully keep such persons in a state of servitude.”⁷⁵

After travelling to Barbados, Anglican bishop Morgan Godwyn published his scathing *Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, in which he laid out a comprehensive lawsuit “persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negro’s and Indians in our Plantations.”⁷⁶ Godwyn accused planters of “*Heathenish Licentiousness*,” “Irreligion, and “*Atheism*” for their “wretched false Gain” in “*the Starving of [slaves’] souls*.”⁷⁷ Godwyn’s 174-page lawsuit was divided into three chapters and could be reduced, in his own words, to “three general *Assertions*.” The first outlined that planters had no authority to prevent anyone, but especially slaves or servants, from joining the church. Godwyn declared that these individuals had “*naturally an equal Right with other Men to the Exercise and Privileges of Religion*,” and that to “*deprive*” them from baptism and

⁷² John Locke, *Locke: Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 230.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “The Company of Providence Island to Capt. Bell, Governor,” Item 975, vol. 1 (1574-1660), *Colonial State Papers*, 202-203.

⁷⁶ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission to the Church: Or Persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negro’s and Indians on our Plantations* (London, 1680), title page.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

religious instruction was wholly unjustified.⁷⁸ The second of Godwyn's assertions concerned spreading the faith; he argued that "*the profession of Christianity absolutely oblig[es] ... the promoting of it,*" no matter how great the "Difficulties nor *Inconveniences.*"⁷⁹ According to Godwyn, planters' "Neglect" in catechizing slaves was inexcusable, and doubly so because they did more than just neglect catechization—they hindered and opposed it, which was "*in effect no better than a renunciation*" of Christian doctrine.⁸⁰ His final generalization echoed what had been said by the likes of Locke and Charles II; Godwyn, exasperated, dismissed all opposition to baptizing slaves as totally unfounded "*Inconveniences ... pretended for this Neglect.*"⁸¹ Like others who fought planters' unwillingness to baptize their slaves, Godwyn's pleas went ignored, earned him enemies, and might have even strengthened Barbadian opposition to his goals.⁸²

Frustrated, he wrote that

These two words, Negro and Slave, being by Custom grown Homogenous and Convertible; even as Negro and Christian, Englishman and Heathen, are by the like corrupt Custom and Partiality made Opposites; thereby as it were implying, that the one could not be Christian, nor the other Infidels.⁸³

To planters, it did not matter that a bishop accused them of rejecting the faith or that they had become "*WORSE than an INFIDEL.*"⁸⁴ Slaves remained unbaptized and as far away from the true religion as planters could make possible.

Increasing pressure from the king and Parliament led Jamaica's colonial government to pass "an Act to encourage and Facilitate the Conversion of Slaves to the Christian Religion," but it, like other attempts to enforce slaves' conversion, was just a platitude. Renewed importance on

⁷⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church*, 118.

⁸³ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 36.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 105.

colonists' religious beliefs in Jamaica and elsewhere in the British Caribbean is important because it shows that this phenomenon was not exclusive to Barbados, and that the importance of defining true religion was widespread. Despite the king's and parliamentary pressure to convert colonial slaves, there is no concrete evidence that any serious conversion of slaves ever took place anywhere in the seventeenth-century English Caribbean.⁸⁵ In Barbados, planters' resistance became more entrenched as the seventeenth century dragged on. They refused to comply with either the king's or Parliament's requests to bring slaves into the church, and the Assembly enforced no such act to make them. In the 1690s, Governor Francis Russell fully supported planters' resistance to Christianizing slaves, arguing to the Lords of Trade and Plantations that, if planters were forced to baptize their slaves, it would be self-destructive and would cause a sharp decline in economic productivity. Russell told them that holy days and Sundays would require that work come to a full stop, which was something that "most of the planters" thought "too much to be spared from work."⁸⁶ Barbadians simply would not budge; they would not give their slaves Christianity if it also meant giving them a route to freedom.

The myth of liberty being tied to Christianity was so pervasive that even slaves and non-Christian Africans believed baptism was the only sure way to secure it. There are several examples from the last quarter of the seventeenth century of free blacks and former slaves engaging in the Christian rituals of baptism and marriage to prove their legitimacy as subjects of the crown.⁸⁷ By striving toward the "true religion" through its rituals, even those the plantation complex dehumanized most saw Protestantism as an avenue toward becoming a free person in the eyes of the law and common opinion. It is important to remember, however, that the

⁸⁵ As quoted in Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 356

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 112.

exceptions do not disprove the rule. At every available opportunity, Barbadian planters overwhelmingly prevented slaves from being baptized.⁸⁸ From the colony's founding to 1650, only three slaves are known to have taken the sacrament, and between 1650 and 1715, just 185 baptisms exist in known records.⁸⁹ If 185 seems high, consider the number of slaves on Barbados during that period was an estimated 40,000.⁹⁰ Historians, then, must be careful not to exaggerate the claim that some slaves in the English Caribbean were Christians, too, or that free Christian Africans were similarly equal to free Europeans, as a mere 0.014% of Barbadian slaves became free Christians during the whole seventeenth century.⁹¹ Some 41 free blacks were baptized during the same period, but these individuals seem to have taken the sacrament to legitimize themselves as persons, not because they particularly met divine intervention and wanted to follow the path of the true religion.⁹² More likely, these exceptional individuals wanted to become *true* people and the true religion was the best way to achieve that goal.

Adopting the dominant faith to elevate one's social status was common in the medieval and early modern periods.⁹³ According to some historians, for example, half of all Muslim Barbary pirates were actually converts who had abandoned Christianity in captivity to earn their freedom in Islam, and there are countless examples of otherwise oppressed peoples converting

⁸⁸ Christopher Hodgkins, *Reforming Empire: Protestant Colonialism and Conscience in British Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 132.

⁸⁹ Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 110.

⁹⁰ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 312.

⁹¹ According to known records. Jenny Shaw notes there are significant gaps in the historical records, some spanning several years. Figure is based on known baptism records presented by Shaw in *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 110; Richard Dunn's slave population chart in *Sugar and Slaves*, 312; and "Numbers of slaves from Africa disembarking in Barbados, 1627-1700," *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/1Y7amyFq>. Between 1641 and 1700, 181,591 African slaves arrived in Barbados. The Slave Voyages database does not consider the total number of slaves to have lived in Barbados during that time. I approximate the total number of slaves to have lived in Barbados between 1641 and 1700 to have been about 300,000. If only 41 baptisms occurred during that time, the approximate figure of baptised slaves is 0.014%.

⁹² Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean*, 110-113.

⁹³ Nicholas M. Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650-1780* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 54-55; Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 96.

for legitimacy, especially during the religious conflicts of the Middle Ages.⁹⁴ If disenfranchised individuals wanted equal, or closer to equal recognition from the dominant culture, one of the most efficient and easiest ways to achieve it was for them to legitimize themselves in the eyes of that culture by adopting its religion. In Barbados, baptism in the true religion was an essential marker of legitimate personhood, and those who converted to the true religion likely did so for exactly this reason.⁹⁵

Resistance to conversion persisted in Barbados in the second half of the seventeenth century, and a noticeable shift in planters' tone had occurred. Every effort continued to keep slaves out of the church, but opposition to conversion changed from falsely claiming that English law made it impossible, to apocalyptic, doomsday warnings of societal and economic collapse. Ligon's conversation with Sambo's master revealed that it was either masters' ignorance of the law or intentional disinformation that kept slaves from baptism, but a few decades later, Governor Russell's argument to the Lords of Trade and Plantations—though entirely against conversion—was chiefly concerned with economic output and domestic security, not spiritual permissibility. Unlike Sambo's master, who claimed to be worried about the asceticism of the true religion and obeying the laws of England, Russell and the planters he represented were afraid that Christianizing slaves would forcibly reduce the number of days a plantation could operate and, consequently, its profits. Economic decline was definitely a major preoccupation for planters, but so too was keeping the island secure from rebellion, and planters insisted that conversion posed a severe threat to an already delicate peace.

⁹⁴ Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 96.

⁹⁵ Beasley, *Christian Ritual*, 65.

When Russell said that slaves' "savage brutishness" made them ineligible for conversion, he articulated a widespread anxiety among planters that, in order to convert slaves, they would first need to learn English.⁹⁶ The representative of the Barbadian Planters Committee warned the Board of Trade in 1680 that if masters were forced to Christianize their slaves, any hope of maintaining security on the island would evaporate: "The disproportion of blacks to whites being great, the whites have no greater security than the diversity of the negroes' languages, which would be destroyed by conversion."⁹⁷ Barbadian planters agreed that as long as slaves were unable to communicate with each other, they could not orchestrate rebellion. They feared that slaves made into civilized Christians would also demand more material needs such as improved clothing, housing, nourishment, and rest, together stewing the perfect conditions for a well-organized rebellion.⁹⁸ The Planters Committee was convinced that teaching slaves English so they could join the church was far too risky to the island's safety, and indicative of the metropole's disconnection from the realities of colonial life in the English Caribbean. Teaching slaves English to make them good Christians would have meant giving them powerful weapons with which they could resist and fight against enslavement, endangering the island's social stability and economic future.

Planters and the Barbadian Assembly saw an additional threat to the island's stability with the sudden influx of Quakers following the Restoration in the 1660s. Like Catholic political prisoners who were shipped to the Caribbean for indentured servitude, Quakers also met exceptional harshness. Governor John Endecott from the Council for Foreign Plantations wrote

⁹⁶ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 418.

⁹⁷ "Journal of Lords of Trade and Plantations," Oct 8, 1680, Item 1535, Vol 10 (1677-1680), *Colonial State Papers*, 611-612.

⁹⁸ Larry Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 122.

in 1661 that it was necessary for Quakers to be banished from England to the colonies because they posed a “dangerous impetuous and desperate turbulence to religion and to the State.”⁹⁹ The Council for Foreign Plantations saw Quakers as “open capitall blasphemers, open seducers from the glorious Trinitie, the Lords Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed gospel, and from holy Scriptures as the rule of life.”¹⁰⁰ As such, they were deemed “open enemies to government itself” and “malignant and assiduous promoters of doctrines tending to subvert” and overturn the church and monarch through “their superadded presumptuous and incorrigible contempt of authortie.”¹⁰¹ Following the English Civil War, religious intolerance for those who did not follow the state’s “true religion” became more widespread, and Quakers were deported in droves to the English Caribbean—much to the annoyance of the crews who shipped and the planters who received them.¹⁰² Captains regularly complained that Quakers were a “troublesome cargo,” while planters admonished their pacifism as traitorous and disloyalty.¹⁰³

Quakers’ pacifism, however, was only a surface problem for Barbadian planters. In 1676, the Barbadian Assembly drafted “An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting” to prevent the continued spread of Quakerism among slaves.¹⁰⁴ Five years earlier, Quakerism’s founder, George Fox visited the island and began spreading his faith’s principles with special attention to slaves. Quakers, like Godwyn and others, asserted that it was their duty to themselves and God to instruct slaves in religion, regardless of what legislation was made by man. They attempted to teach “the light” through morality, which was broadly based on

⁹⁹ “Governor Endecott, in the name and by order of the General Court, to the King,” Feb 11, 1661, Item 26, Vol 5 (1661-1668), *Colonial State Papers*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 78.

¹⁰³ Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ “An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 106.

“*something within*” the soul that naturally inclined against stealing, drinking, swearing, adultery, fornication, lying, and “any other *Evils*.”¹⁰⁵ Above all, Quakers taught slaves to be diligent, true to themselves and others, and to fear God.¹⁰⁶ Whatever Quakers taught, as far as the Barbadian Assembly was concerned, they had trained “*the Negroes to Rebel*,” and created a situation in which “the Safety of the Island [was] much hazarded.”¹⁰⁷

The spreading of Quakerism undermined the “true religion’s” authority and threatened the risk of rebellion by giving otherwise fragmented slaves a common language and identity, pointing to why punishments for Quakers were as harsh as they were and why informers were rewarded so generously.¹⁰⁸ Anyone who reported a Quaker meeting where Africans were present, slave nor not, would be rewarded with ten pounds sterling per attending African.¹⁰⁹ If any “school” operated against the “true intent” of the Act, that is to say if any Quaker held a meeting where Africans were present, a mandatory minimum three-month sentence without bail was enforced, plus a fine of three thousand pounds of muscovado sugar to be divided equally between the informer and “public Use of this Island.”¹¹⁰ For a foreign Quaker to preach on the island at all brought a six-month prison sentence without bail or mainprize, and the fine increased to ten thousand pounds of muscovado sugar to be divided between the informer and the public use.¹¹¹ In an effort to make planters more diligent in preventing their slaves from

¹⁰⁵ George Fox, “For the Governour of Barbados, with his Council and Assembly, and all others in power, both Civil and Military, in this Island: from the People called Quakers,” in *George Fox and the Early Quakers*, ed. A. C. Bickley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1864), 401.

¹⁰⁶ Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 357.

¹⁰⁷ Fox, “For the Governour of Barbados...,” 401; “An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 106.

¹⁰⁸ Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3 (July, 2013), 450; Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 163-164, 72, 75-78.

¹⁰⁹ “An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting,” *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 106.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

attending Quaker meetings, the Assembly also thought it prudent to levy a ten-pound sterling fine per slave present against masters whose slaves were caught in attendance.¹¹²

George Fox's early 1670s letter to the Barbadian governor and larger government denied that he and his followers were "open capitall blasphemers" that brought "desperate turbulence" to the island's church and state.¹¹³ In fact, he insisted the opposite was true. Fox accused Barbadians of advancing "many scandalous *lies* and *slanders*" about Quakers, and tried to set the record straight by "sincerely" declaring "*That we Own and Believe* in the only Wise, Omnipotent and Everlasting God, the *Creator* of all things Heaven and Earth, and the *Preserver* of all that he hath made."¹¹⁴ He also lamented the "*Slander and Lye*" that Quakers inspired open rebellion, in the hope it would bring an end to slavery. Consistent with Quaker teachings, Fox explained that violence, and therefore the rebellion planters warned they were encouraging, was "a thing we utterly abhor and detest in our Hearts."¹¹⁵ Fox tried to dissuade planters by writing that he and his followers really wanted slaves "to be faithful and diligent in their *Master's Service* and *Business*." If Quakers could make slaves "love their *Masters* and *Mistresses*," Fox argued, masters would reciprocate that love, "and deal kindly and gently with them."¹¹⁶ But what Fox did not understand was that planters would not reciprocate that love as kindly or as gently as he had hoped because, in the seventeenth century, what separated slaves from masters' loving treatment was their irreligion.¹¹⁷ To true Protestant Barbadian Christians, Quakers, slaves, and Catholic

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1661-1668*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Fox, "For the Governour of Barbados..." 399.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 25. It was not until about 1713 that New World slavery could begin to be described as having a racialized basis.

servants each had varying degrees of similarities and differences, but all were punished and treated with exceptional cruelty because they were each similarly irreligious.

Whether it was Quakerism's founder George Fox or the Anglican bishop Morgan Godwyn, non-Protestant Christians in Barbados had significant difficulty comprehending why planters and the island's government would not baptize the island's slaves. Even Richard Ligon had an ethical dilemma when faced with the prospect of converting Sambo. The answer to this question boils down to how Barbadians and British West Indian colonists viewed race. Racialized explanations for slavery did not emerge until the eighteenth century, suggesting that the origins of New World slavery were far more nuanced than skin colour alone.¹¹⁸ Although seventeenth-century Barbadians and English officials used language that would certainly be considered racialized in the present, in the seventeenth-century British Atlantic world, "Negro" and "Negre" was synonymous with religious infidelity rather than an ethnic slur it is today. Until the seventeenth century, religion and culture predominantly defined what race took over in the eighteenth century onwards.¹¹⁹ Winthrop Jordan, historian of slavery and the origins of contemporary racism, argued that "despite their distinctive appearance," in contrast with Europeans, Africans' "religious condition distinguished them in a more familiar manner."¹²⁰ More than anything else, until the late seventeenth century, it was religion that was the primary marker of what set the boundary between likeness and otherness. English violence against others in its New World colonies persisted and evolved there, but violence towards others was not invented in the Americas.¹²¹ The early modern European world was a brutal one where physical

¹¹⁸ Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 11.

¹¹⁹ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 53.

¹²⁰ Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 11.

¹²¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 69.

abuse for punishments and demonstrations of authority were commonplace, a tradition which continued in European colonies around the world. When historical context is considered, claiming that violence against *others* by those with power is derived in contemporary understandings of race is challenging. Time and time again, religion proves itself to be a more complete explanation for what historically divided people, and rationalized their mistreatments. In the seventeenth century, religion was the most “familiar” way to distinguish people from one another—an age-old method by which Europeans had been dividing each other for centuries.¹²² The most accurate description of English Caribbean violence, therefore, was not that it was a product of racialized skin colour, but religion. Violence in the seventeenth-century English Caribbean was consistently Christian on non-Christian or—or more accurately, *true* Christian on heretics and infidels. Religion was a way of life for people in the seventeenth century, it was not just one element among many in people’s lives, it *was* people’s lives and was what fundamentally constructed their worldviews.

As we saw in the first chapter, since at least the early Middle Ages, the English used religion to justify its conquests in Ireland, and used it to subject the Irish to the slavery-like conditions that would carry over to the New World, where it would be industrially refined half a century later.¹²³ The parallels between the English treatment of the Irish and African slaves in the New World are plentiful. To rule by fear over the Irish, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, for example, would impale the heads of Irish serfs and erect them along the path to his command tent.¹²⁴ According to Ligon’s diary, he witnessed the Barbadian planter Colonel Humphrey Walrond use exactly the same method to instill fear and control his slaves in the late 1640s.¹²⁵ The English in

¹²² Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden*, 11; Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 53.

¹²³ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 155-169.

¹²⁴ Connolly, *Contested Island*, 265.

¹²⁵ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 51.

Ireland were there without “normal ethical restraints,” enabling them to unreservedly apply atrocious violence against the locals in order to achieve their colonial goals of applying civilized order and to spread Christianity.¹²⁶ Similarly, Barbadian planters had such a “callous disregard for human life and dignity” that maintaining order and control were inseparable from violence.¹²⁷ The British rationalized Irish and African inferiority from their irreligion first, not skin colour or racial differences.

It is important to remember that Richard Ligon was not Barbadian—he was an English tourist who stayed on the island for four years before returning to Britain. Not being a Barbadian meant that he brought his own biases to the colony with him, and viewed it through the lens of an Englishman, not a colonial Caribbean planter. Crucially, Ligon also was not a Barbadian Christian; perhaps if he were, he would not have had to ask why a slave could not be baptized. In 1640s Barbados, such ideas were unthinkable. Nevertheless, Ligon’s biases are helpful to understanding Barbados from the outside. When he expressed shock at the way Christian planters treated Christian servants, by not commenting on the way slaves were treated, he showed that violence against non-Christians was generally acceptable. Planters giving servants miserable enough lives for a tourist to call them “worsen” shows that violence was uniformly applied to those who were not *truly* Christian—to servants who refused to follow the Protestantism of the Church of England and to irreligious slaves—whether they were white or black did not matter, and this is where Ligon’s shock came from. Servants were not true Protestant Christians and, like Africans, not of the true religion, enabling planters to subject both to horrific violence.

¹²⁶ Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*, 127.

¹²⁷ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 144.

Seventeenth-century notions of “race” were not fixed social constructs like they are today. Race was something fluid and malleable; people could transcend the boundary of racial otherness by adopting the customs of the dominant group, most commonly by joining that group’s religion. Although planters vehemently resisted their slaves’ conversion when and wherever they could, the fact that slaves and free blacks in Barbados aspired to become Christians at all suggests that the planter class knew that otherness was far from permanent. Planters knew that slaves could become *like* them if they were taught the true religion, and they were afraid that if they did become like them, they would no longer be able to enslave them. There are no known seventeenth-century records of planters concerned with slaves’ skin colour, but there are plenty of records of planters and others worried about the ramifications of Africans becoming more like themselves through religion.

This is not to say at all that Europeans never commented on blackness, or that they never commented on traits they believed were inherent to those they perceived were culturally inferior. The Barbadian comprehensive slave code, for example, states that “Slaves” and “Negroes” were “Brutish and an uncertaine and dangerous kind of People.”¹²⁸ Europeans often took the view that foreign peoples with cultures dramatically different from their own were animalistic, and as such they generally needed to be treated in either one of two ways: They could be catechized into the Christian faith and become civilized like Europeans, or they could be treated like animals because, from the European perspective, they lived more like wild animals than domesticated humans.¹²⁹ Europeans’ earliest encounters with distant cultures more often than not involved comparisons to animals. While Europeans did comment on skin colour when they encountered

¹²⁸ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

¹²⁹ James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997): 143-166. Sweet provides an excellent discussion of early modern Christians viewing non-Christians as animalistic.

appearances different from their own, early modern writers seem to have used terms like “black” and “blackness” simply as adjectives rather than pejoratives.

European explorers who went to Africa in the early modern period described the people they found there as “brutish blacke people” who were “beastly,” “savage,” and who seemed to be “wilde men.”¹³⁰ A French explorer who travelled to Australia described its aborigines as “the most miserable people in the world,” and, as “human beings who approach closest to brute beasts.”¹³¹ British travelers to Ireland shared the same opinions as their contemporary Europeans in Africa, believing that Ireland was an uncontrollable, wild place inhabited by people who lived like animals.¹³² While observations on skin colour appeared in these explorers’ notes, they did not say that skin colour was responsible for their lack of apparent civility, but rather a lack of the Christian religion and knowledge of God. When Europeans made serious attempts to colonize lands where “brutish” peoples lived, they believed that these people—regardless of skin colour—could lose their wildness and become more like themselves by exposing them to Christianity and making them into Christians. By making colonized peoples into Christians, they also gave them European culture and sensibilities. If skin colour were the determining factor in what constituted otherness in the seventeenth century, it is hardly likely that Europeans would have spent so much time and effort on Christianizing them; if skin colour determined whether a person could be civilized or not, and if blackness was a permanent mark of uncivilized otherness, then Europeans would not have made attempts to civilize them with Christianity.

Seventeenth-century Barbadians kept Africans out of the church for exactly this reason. They saw Africans’ blackness like they saw Ireland’s heresy, but what allowed their shared

¹³⁰ As quoted in Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 52.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Lennon, *Sixteenth-Century Ireland*, 1-4.

subjugation was, respectively, their “heretical” spirituality and “false” Christianity. The French and Spanish saw Africans’ irreligion, too, and they took immediate steps to end it by forcibly baptizing them into Catholicism. British colonists, on the other hand, made no attempt to baptize their slaves because of the popular myth that Christians could not enslave each other, and that Christianity necessarily brought freedom. If slaves were made into Christians, then the plantation complex would have fallen apart, and with it, so would have planters’ immense wealth. These beliefs were so strongly held that they were direct influences on the laws British colonies made to govern slavery. The Barbadian comprehensive slave code, for example, treated slaves like animals and called on planters to treat them “as we doe mens other goods and Chattels.”¹³³ Dealing with slaves as planters would livestock called for a certain level of care and required that slaves were not to be left to the “Arbitrary, Cruell, and Outragious will of every evil disposed person,” but rather dutifully looked after and protected.¹³⁴

Slaves were nonetheless treated deplorably and subjected to incredible violence, but the larger point to be made is that those in positions of power thought of them not in terms of race in the modern sense, but as irreligious others who were capable of becoming legitimized persons through religious education. This meant that race in the seventeenth century was not something determined by birth or blood, but was something permeable and fluid depending on a person’s cultural practices. To Barbadian planters, the possibility of slaves becoming like themselves, of transcending the boundary of otherness, was one of the greatest threats imaginable and why they resisted it at every opportunity. By the end of the century, with increasing pressure from Parliament and the monarchy to baptize their slaves, planters could no longer cite a law that did

¹³³ “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

not exist as a reason to keep slaves out of the church, and racism as it is understood today began to emerge.

The eighteenth century began a long history of otherness defined as something intractable, redefining what rendered a person as capable or civilized in terms of their race. Irreligion was something that could be changed while skin colour was not, and so race itself was gradually redefined into something that would allow permanent subjugation based on visibly immutable traits. Distinction between peoples in the seventeenth-century British Atlantic had two parts: Before the English Civil War, the distinction was simply between Christian and non-Christian, but after the war, those who had previously been non-Christian were folded into a broader Christian identity, albeit a tiered one. As African slavery replaced indentured servitude as the most common form of unfree labour in Barbados, and then outnumbered Europeans by more than two to one by the end of the century, Barbadians began to recognize that although Catholics and other denominations were not followers of the true religion—Protestantism—they were more familiar to them than the African infidel, who lacked any knowledge of Christianity. These heretical blasphemers continued to be persecuted nonetheless, but an important development had occurred in the history of racism: Racialized discrimination between Europeans on the basis of religion began to fade as they were confronted with unprecedented numbers of strikingly different coloured people, and in their attempt to balance their numbers with Africans, perhaps without realizing it, Barbadians redefined Christianity to become synonymous with whiteness.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Edward B. Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3 (July, 2013), 429-458.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

English Protestant Christian tradition played an instrumental role in the development of African and Christian plantation slavery and servitude in seventeenth-century Barbados and English Caribbean. In the second and third chapters, this thesis showed that the world's two largest Abrahamic religions used scripture to rationalize the enslavement of others—Christians and Muslims enslaved those whom they believed their respective scriptures and traditions permitted. They also kept those out of slavery whom they believed their faith's traditions prevented them from enslaving, and they were predominantly those of the same religion.¹ Colonial English Protestants insisted it was impossible to convert slaves to Christianity because they believed scripture forbade the enslavement of Christians. African and Middle Eastern Muslims argued a similar line, claiming that they could not enslave other Muslims, which allowed them to enslave Christian Europeans and non-Muslim Africans instead.² Religious infidelity was how these two religions defined difference between people, and it was specifically upheld in English law in 1677 that Christian infidelity could lead to enslavement.³ English Caribbean planters feared that converting slaves would destroy their lucrative sugar industry because making them Christians would revoke the ability to enslave them. Baptism and catechization would have erased the line of difference between the English and their African slaves, which was infidelity, and planters feared that slaves would then become like themselves. Muslim Barbary pirates, too, believed that infidelity made the difference between likeness and

¹ David Brion Davis, "Constructing Race: A Reflection," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997):7-18, 9.

² James. H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997): 143-166, 153. Sweet notes that there were exceptions to this among Muslims, just as there were among Christians. French and Spanish slave owners, for example, had no qualms with enslaving baptized Africans, but English colonists did and fought all metropolitan attempts to have them baptize or proselytize to their slaves.

³ V.C.D Mtubani, "African Slaves and English Law," *PULA Botswana Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Nov. 1983, 72; see also *Butts v Penny* (1677) 2 Lev 201, 3 Keb 785.

otherness; those who converted to Islam were allowed to become part of the pirate crews that captured them, while those who did not were sold into Arab slavery.⁴ For both, their faith's tradition made infidelity a major dividing line between likeness and otherness, and, in the English context, had severe legal implications in the development of Caribbean slavery.

The 1670s saw several important developments in English legal history concerning the links between slavery, religion, and economics. The first occurred in 1672, when a royal charter established the Royal African Company to trade in “any redwood, elephants’ teeth, negroes, slaves, hides, wax, guinea grains, or other commodities.”⁵ The keyword in the quote is *other*: In addition to what the company was mandated to acquire, *negroes* and *slaves* were classified as material goods no different from *other* saleable commodities. The distinction between *negroe* and *slave* is also important because it implies that a slave was not necessarily a *negroe* and vice versa. Another important legal development came in 1677, which was similarly worded to what was found in the Royal African Company’s royal charter. England’s Solicitor General declared that “negroes ought to be esteemed goods and commodities within the Acts of Trade and Navigation,” similar to what the Barbadian Assembly had already established in its 1661 comprehensive slave code 16 years earlier—reinforcing the idea that the English considered Africans as trade goods, not people.⁶ This differentiation, however, was not based exclusively on the colour of Africans’ skin or their alleged *race*, but rather on a combination of Protestant tradition that informed sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English opinion that those who were

⁴ Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 96.

⁵ “Charter of Incorporation of the New Royal African Company,” Item 934, vol. 7 (1669-1674), *Colonial State Papers*, 409-412.

⁶ As quoted in Mtubani, “African Slaves and English Law,” 72.

black were divinely cursed infidels ignorant of Christian spirituality, which, per Genesis, made them eligible for enslavement.

Later that same year, in 1677, in the high-profile common-law case *Butts v Penny*, England's Solicitor General found that slaves could be bought and sold because they were simultaneously "merchandise" and "infidels."⁷ According to Justice Powell who commented on the case, skin colour was not a factor in the legal condonation of seventeenth-century English slavery. He claimed that "common law takes no notice of negroes in being different from other men."⁸ In determining who could be subjected to slavery in either England or the colonies, infidelity helped provide the rationale over whether people could be enslaved, or whether they could be further reduced to "merchandise."⁹ Two years later, Parliament passed the "Habeas Corpus Act," which "gave everyone in England, whether subject, inhabitant or resident, protection against illegal arrest, imprisonment, or removal to a foreign country," further complicating the nature of English slavery because slaves, too, were encompassed in the legislation.¹⁰

Some of the earliest abolitionists noticed this apparent loophole and jumped on the opportunity to use habeas corpus and earlier 1670s rulings to try to free slaves and end slavery. Crucially, they did so on the basis of religion and not skin colour. They claimed that religion determined the difference between a slave and non-slave, and therefore all baptized slaves should have been emancipated under the law. They made no case on whether unbaptized slaves should be freed because, legally, no case could be had.¹¹ Neither the officials ruling in these cases nor

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ As quoted in Tom Bingham, *Lives of the Law: Selected Essays and Speeches: 2000-2010* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 225

⁹ Ibid.; Andrew Lyall, *Granville Sharp's Cases on Slavery* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2017), 179.

¹⁰ Mtubani, "African Slaves and English Law," 72.

¹¹ Ibid.

these early abolitionists referenced skin colour as a factor in either enslaving or emancipating Africans. It was Africans' Christian infidelity that determined whether they could be or could not be subjected to English slavery, and it was their Christianity, or lack thereof, that determined whether English abolitionists advocated for their freedom.

Another important legal development in British slavery arose in 1706 with *Smith v Brown and Cooper*. Lord Chief Justice Sir John Holt ruled that “as soon as a Negro comes into England, he becomes free.”¹² Holt clarified his decision, saying that “By common law no man can have a property in another” and that “there is no such thing as a slave in England.”¹³ This terrified colonial planters, who were already under immense pressure from Parliament and the king to convert their slaves—which planters consistently resisted and ignored. Holt added that although “[a slave] becomes free, one may be a villein in England, but not a slave.”¹⁴ So, while Holt agreed that Africans could not be enslaved, *something* still made them villains. If not skin colour, then what? It is important to note that although Holt's ruling sounded firm and unconfusing, it went largely unenforced for about another century. In 1772, some 66 years later, there remained at least 14,000 African slaves in England, and in the English Caribbean there were at least 140,000 slaves in Jamaica alone.¹⁵

Caribbean planters were still concerned, however, with England's apparent attempts to make slavery illegal. They repeatedly demanded clarification from legal officials, wanting to know what English legal decisions would mean for their livelihoods and security. English officials tried to reassure colonists that English laws would not affect them, and the *Smith v*

¹² Michael Tugendhat, *Liberty Intact : Human Rights in English Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 112.

¹³ As quoted in James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1986), 34.

¹⁴ As quoted in Mtubani, “African Slaves and English Law,” 72.

¹⁵ Tugendhat, *Liberty Intact*, 112.

Brown case should have stemmed planters' concerns. Holt found, for example, that a slave could be bought and sold in London, provided that the slave was not in England at the time of sale. The plaintiff was seeking £20 from the defendant for the purchase of a slave he had sold him, but the slave he had sold was in Virginia. The defendant claimed that he owed nothing because it was illegal to buy or sell slaves in England. Holt ruled in the plaintiff's favour, finding that even though slavery was against the law in England, it was not illegal in Virginia, therefore, "the said negro at the time of sale was in Virginia, and that negroes, by the laws and statutes of Virginia, are saleable as chattels."¹⁶ Had the slave been in England, the defendant would have had a case, demonstrating that English legality was separate from laws made in the colonies, and that planters had little to fear from English case law with respect to slavery.

Still, colonial planters were preoccupied with English legal developments against slavery, but they were especially worried about English officials trying to get them to bring their slaves into the church. Planters saw baptism as a backhanded way of eliminating slavery without the courts. In an attempt to alleviate planters' and merchants' "earnest solicitation" about "whether a slave was freed by being made a Christian," in 1729 (23 years after Holt ruled that a slave setting foot in England would be freed), England's Solicitor General Charles Talbot and Attorney General Phillip Yorke decided that no such result could come from merely arriving in England or baptism.¹⁷

We are of the Opinion, that a Slave by coming from the West-Indies to Great Britain, doth not become free, and that his Master's Property or Right in him is not thereby determined or varied: And that Baptism doth not bestow freedom on him, nor make any alteration in his Temporal Condition in these Kingdoms.¹⁸

¹⁶ Lyall, *Graville Sharp's Cases on Slavery*, 25.

¹⁷ T.B. Howell (editor), *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783, with Notes and other Illustrations*, Vol. XX (London: T.C. Hansard, Peterborough-Court, Fleet-Street, 1816), 70.

¹⁸ E. Fiddes, *Lord Mansfield and the Sommersett Case* (1934), 50 LQR, 501-502.

In response to whether Christianity necessitated emancipation, at the same meeting, Lord Mansfield unequivocally “resolved not,” and added that “the Court must consider the great detriment to proprietors, there being so great a number in the ports of this kingdom, that many thousands of pounds would be lost to the owners by setting them free.” Mansfield hoped that finally “these are proofs the law has interfered for the maintenance of the trade in slaves and the transferring of slavery.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, Mansfield ruled to emancipate all slaves in England in 1772. In one of the most important cases leading toward abolition, Mansfield commented that slavery was “an odious thing,” and that he “should only speak of it to testify ... contempt and abhorrence.”²⁰

Despite English officials’ repeated assurances that baptism would not require slaves’ emancipation, colonial planters and merchants remained skeptical, and overwhelmingly ignored both government and monarchical encouragement to baptize slaves.²¹ Planters in the English Caribbean and American colonies had decided Protestant tradition informed by scripture prohibited them from enslaving other Christians, and that learning Christian tradition would grant slaves knowledge that might enable them to bring about planters’ economic and physical destruction.²² It did not help that in the 1750s, Bishop George Berkley was attempting to establish his so-called “Bermuda scheme” in conjunction with English lawyers. The goal of this scheme was to bring about the total conversion of all slaves in the English Caribbean, and Berkley hoped to do this by luring slaves to missionary schools set up in the colonies. Planters of

¹⁹ Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, 70.

²⁰ *Somerset against Stewart* (1772) EngR 57; (1772) Lofft 1; 98 ER 499.

²¹ Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 355; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 481; Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church*, 118.

²² Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 49-50; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 418.

course vehemently opposed him, and he blamed them for obstructing him wherever they could. Even when Berkley insisted that conversion would not free slaves, but make them into better, more obedient slaves, planters resisted him, and Berkley ultimately faulted them for the project's failure.²³

Planters and slave merchants did not have an irrational, unfounded, paranoid fear that slavery could be lost from baptizing slaves. Their distrust of officials' motives for Christianizing slaves was legitimate. Certainly, there were attempts to free slaves if not through law, then through the church. The abolitionist William Wilberforce claimed in a lengthy appeal in 1823 that since the very beginning of slavery, the church was how abolitionists envisioned ending it, "long before the subject of the Slave Trade had engaged public attention."²⁴ Although Wilberforce confessed this in the early nineteenth century, his assertion was something that planters had sensed and were paranoid of in the seventeenth-century. Edmund Burke, one of Wilberforce's contemporaries, "had even devised a plan for ameliorating, and by degrees putting an end both to the Slave Trade and to the state of slavery itself in the West Indies."²⁵ Burke planned to do this by providing "education [for slaves], and above all, by religious instruction."²⁶ This, too, was something that English planters in the seventeenth century were afraid might happen, and was one of the most-cited reasons Barbadians resisted all attempts to educate slaves beyond what was necessary for them to carry out their tasks.²⁷ Burke argued that religious instruction would "prepare the poor degraded slaves for the enjoyment of civil rights."²⁸ As if to

²³ Lyall, *Granville Sharp's Cases on Slavery*, 27.

²⁴ William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1823), 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Journal of Lords of Trade and Plantations," Oct 8, 1680, Item 1535, Vol 10 (1677-1680), *Colonial State Papers*, 611-612.

²⁸ Wilberforce, *An Appeal*, 6.

confirm that planters were justified in fearing slaves' baptism and subsequent religious instruction, Wilberforce wrote that "it scarcely needs to be remarked, in how great a degree Mr. Burke was an enemy to all speculative theories."²⁹ Indeed, in 1676, the Barbadian Assembly passed "An Act to prevent People called Quakers from bringing Negroes to their Meeting" with the express purpose of creating mindful, thinking Christians (of any denomination) out of African slaves.³⁰ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionists were plotting exactly of what Colonel Walrond had warned Richard Ligon in late-1640s Barbados: If slaves became Christians, then the institution of English slavery would quickly fall apart, and that Protestant tradition played an enormous role in preserving it.³¹ Seventeenth-century English Caribbean planters sensed increasing opposition to their livelihood and security, and they did everything they could to maintain it. Planters fought to keep the line of difference where Protestant tradition had firmly positioned it: between Christians and infidels.

English differentiation between themselves as Christians and those who were not was a longstanding tradition. As early as the twelfth century, where this thesis began, religion was what separated the Irish from the English. Pope Adrian IV gave King Henry II the right to conquer Ireland with the purpose of bringing its allegedly barbarous inhabitants into the church. All claims of Ireland's lack of civility were blamed on its lack of Christian influence, exemplified best in the writings of Gerald of Wales, and which remained influential well into the eighteenth century. The Irish were not disliked because of their skin colour or some other racial trait, they were barbarous because they lacked proper Christian instruction. When Henry VIII left the Catholic church in the sixteenth century, Ireland remained loyal to the Pope, giving England the

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ "An Act to prevent People called *Quakers* from Bringing Negroes to their Meeting," *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 106.

³¹ Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes*, 49.

opportunity to continue its disparagement of Ireland. The Irish were now inferior because they were Catholics. Although their *race* remained constant, their beliefs were no longer consistent with the English monarchy's, allowing the English to continue differentiating themselves along religious lines rather than racial ones. This is why it is so important not to allow present conceptions of race, focused as they are on skin colour and assumed to be permanently ingrained in biology, to be transposed onto the past.

Protestant tradition played a crucial role in the development of plantation slavery and servitude in seventeenth-century Barbados. The colony's planters and authorities relied on Protestant tradition to prevent Africans from being baptized and used perceived African infidelity as an excuse to enslave them, in contrast to indentured servitude granted to Christians. If Africans were baptized, then, according to planters' religious beliefs, they would not have been able to own and enslave them, which would have changed the foundation of English plantation agriculture. It was therefore in planters' best interest to craft religious laws designed to maintain African slavery, and they rigorously, and successfully, fought all attempts to bring Africans into the church. After the English Civil War, there was renewed emphasis in Barbados to enforce the so-called "true Protestant religion," which saw increased intolerance toward non-Protestants who attempted to educate slaves in Christianity, as well as heightened insecurity in the face of declining numbers of Europeans while the number of Africans was steadily increasing. Difference in seventeenth-century Barbados was therefore best defined along religious lines rather than racial ones, as this was the familiar way of Europeans dividing each other until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, giving Protestantism a pivotal role in the development of Barbadian plantation slavery and servitude.

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