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Slavery and Antislavery in the Founding of Georgia and New South Wales

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SLAVERY AND ANTISLAVERY IN THE FOUNDING OF GEORGIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES

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This thesis examines the development of antislavery ideologies in both colonial Georgia, and New South Wales. It unveils the reasoning behind the creation of Georgia, as a colony that would serve as a receptacle for debtors and the English poor, and traces the rise and fall of a new colonial paradigm that would have excluded slavery in the New World. Though the Georgia project ultimately failed, a similar ideology was developed in the founding of the penal colony, New South Wales. Slavery was again excluded from a colony in the British Empire, as an endless supply of convict laborers became the equivalent of slaves. Convict transportation to Australia was eventually stopped in the nineteenth century, and as a result Queensland planters turned to the race-based slavery of South Sea Islanders.
INTRODUCTION

At eight o’clock in the morning on April 18, 1732, the bodies of Richard Smith and his wife Bridget were both found hanging by the neck in the King’s-Bench debtor’s prison in London. In the next room lay a cradle where their two-year-old daughter was found dead, having been “shot thro’ the Head.” Neighbors who knew the family were clearly shocked by the discovery as they described them as “honest, industrious, frugal, and a loving Couple,” who had fallen on hard times. Richard Smith had been a skilled bookbinder by trade, and through a series of poor financial decisions wound up in one of London’s many debtors’ prisons. He was even well educated for the time, evidenced by several letters he left at the crime scene.

Smith asked the person who found the letters to “find a Chap for my Dog and ancient Cat,” and to pass another letter on his cousin, Mr. Brindley. Smith confessed to his cousin that the reason for their actions was “an inveterate Hatred we conceived against Poverty and Rags,” which he explained was the consequence of a “Train of unlucky Accidents.” Knowing how harshly he would be judged for killing their child, he defended: “it is less Cruelty to take the Child with us, even supposing a State of Annihilation… than to leave her friendless in the World, exposed to Ignorance and Misery.” He also lamented that he would never be able to pay his creditor, though he had now “perform’d in the best manner I was able.”

The story of the Smiths’ tragic end reached newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic, and made readers question the utility of a prison that kept its inmates in perpetual debt. It also found its way into a small pamphlet that challenged that system and proposed that debtors could be more useful abroad than at home. That pamphlet, entitled An Appeal for the Georgia Colony (1732), recognized that Smith was not alone

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1 “Foreign Affairs,” The Rhode-Island Gazette, October 18, 1732.
and many others had “Self-murder’d.” The anonymous author of the pamphlet also speculated that perhaps as many as 4,000 debtors died of starvation in prison every year, and 2,000 more died on the street. In an empire where colonies relied on African slaves to fill the demand for laborers, was it not time to reevaluate the purpose of colonization when so many idle poor were on the streets of London? Who should be sent to the colonies?²

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This question has not escaped the scholarship of historians who have revealed a great deal about trends in trans-Atlantic migration during the colonial period and beyond. White servitude in the form of indentured labor provided Virginia with workers to sustain the profitable tobacco trade in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Even in supposedly more egalitarian New England, servants constituted perhaps as much as a third of the initial workforce. The cost of bringing over these servants posed a serious problem to those who invested in the colonies, so much so that the Virginia Company provided risky loans to transport workers across the Atlantic on the condition of their later repayment, which could often take several years.³

A draconian form of discipline ruled in the Virginia colony causing those under indenture to flee from harsh working conditions. Simultaneously punishments for flight and disobedience became increasingly severe to deter escape attempts, a sad precedent that served as the foundation for the treatment of African slaves later in the century. David Galenson, a historian who has led much of the research on white servitude, has argued that the transition from indentured servants to African slaves can be explained by the changing costs of slaves and servants.⁴

⁴ David Galenson has rightly noted that the study of indentured servitude “has been curiously neglected. Inextricably intertwined with the origins and progress of slavery in the American colonies, indentured servitude initiated the colonies’ use of bound labor.” See David W. Galenson, “British Servants and the Colonial Indenture System in the
By the mid-seventeenth century, the price of indentured servants had risen dramatically, by almost 60 percent in Galenson’s estimate. The increasing price of these migrants seems to have been due to a decrease in supply, meaning those that would have migrated earlier in the century found reason to remain where they were in England. An improving economy at home was a critical factor in slowing the migration of indentured servants across the Atlantic. Consequently, the price of African slaves decreased with greater supply to the point where they became more cost effective than the white servants being sent from England. As a result, planters increasingly turned to importing African slaves instead of European servants. While the flow of indentured servants never stopped completely, the roles they were imported for changed gradually from unskilled to skilled, creating a race-based division between those types of labor.\(^5\)

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the prevailing economic theory of mercantilism advocated caution in sending any more free laborers to the colonies. It was believed that any further depopulation of the English labor pool would put the nation in a position where it would be unable to compete with the manufacturing centers of its European neighbors. Reformers advocated that debtors, criminals, and the idle poor were the perfect candidates for colonization in an era when it was believed that the number of laborers a nation had directly correlated with its power abroad. The first convicts transported to Virginia were sent in 1615 to supplement the great demand for labor in that colony. During periods of slow migration, transportation became a regular way to bridge the gap when the servant supply was low. Unimpressed with the character of the convicts, both Maryland and Virginia passed laws to restrict their entry into those colonies even though convict laborers may have cost as little as one third of the price of

African slaves. In the West Indies, on the Leeward Islands, convicts and poor debtors were in demand simply to preserve the white population there.\(^6\)

Compared to indentured servants in the first half of the seventeenth century, and African slaves in the second half, transported convicts made up only a small portion of those who migrated to the New World. It was not until Parliament passed the Transportation Act of 1718, that convicts began to be used for a more imperial design. According to A. Roger Ekirch, a historian who has written much about convict transportation, from the time the Act was passed to 1775, more than two out of every three convicts at London’s main criminal court, the Old Bailey, were banished to the colonies. It has also been estimated that perhaps as many as a quarter of those who immigrated to the colonies during the eighteenth century were in fact transported convicts. In Ireland, a criminal offence was not even a prerequisite for transportation. The courts indiscriminately exiled criminals and impoverished drifters alike, ridding their cities of those they considered a drain on their economy. This was similarly proposed for the English judicial system by the Reverend, George Ollyffe, whose pamphlet, *An Essay Humbly offer’d, for An Act of Parliament to Prevent Capital Crimes...* (1731), argued that the poor offered “a Nursery of the vilest Hands.” He suggested that there was “a very feasible way to clear the Nation of them; that is by ordering that such as are not decrepit and decayed, who are able to work, should be Transported to our Plantations, and sold for Slaves to pay their freight.”\(^7\)

The author of *An Appeal for the Georgia Colony* had an extremely ambitious agenda, to challenge the paradigm of colonization by suggesting that there were viable

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alternatives to the African slave trade that would not depopulate England of precious laborers. That anonymous author was none other than James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia. His plan was to create a colony, which would be supplied from England using debtors. Like those who were executed by the state, or fled to find work in other countries, debtors served no purpose in the English economy. Imprisoned away from society, they could not work even though capable, and once released many found their way back into debt, and returned to prison. Instead of shutting away these debtors, Oglethorpe proposed that they be used to create a new colony.

The history of early colonial Georgia has been often overlooked by textbooks partly because it was a miserable failure, but successful or not, Georgia had the first colonial antislavery policy in British America and perhaps in the entire empire. This project seeks to illuminate that policy by examining the founding of Georgia in the context of an empire dependant on the forced migration of African slaves. The first chapter argues that an understanding of how the poverty crisis was perceived in England was essential to the creation of a new colony in which debtors, and poor vagrants could be reformed through hard labor, thus the formation of the philanthropic organization the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia. A trans-Atlantic perspective broadens the scope of this study to include not only the intellectual background for the new colony, but also how that colony functioned logistically once established in America. Using pamphlets, and letters from both the Trustees, and the inhabitants of Georgia, a dialogue on the issue of the utility of free labor vs. slave labor becomes apparent.

Though Georgia ended in economic ruin, the legacy of this form of labor colony lived on through the eighteenth century. During that time, the transportation of convict laborers to the colonies continued uninterrupted, ridding England of its most problematic citizens until 1775. By then, the chaos of the American Revolution stopped the flow of convicts causing a buildup of untapped laborers floating on prison ships on the river Thames and elsewhere throughout England. Presumably these convicts would have continued to be sent to the American colonies once the situation had been resolved, but the independence of the United States put a crimp in the transportation policy of England. With such a large supply of convicts to reform, and the loss of the American colonies still on the minds of politicians and English intellectuals, a plan was devised to send these
convicts to a remote corner of the world first explored by Captain James Cook, a place
known simply as Botany Bay.

Like the creation of Georgia, the first Australian colony, New South Wales, was
founded by reformers seeking to reform social outcasts. Once again, white laborers, and
not African slaves would form the underclass of an English colony. The second chapter
of this project seeks to examine that phenomenon in detail. It will argue that a de facto
antislavery policy existed there, the purpose of which served to establish that colonization
need not depend on African slavery, and could instead rely upon a never ending supply of
British criminals. Integral to this point is the establishment that though convicts were still
considered subjects of the crown, they were nevertheless used the same way African
slaves were. In this regard, convicts became a form of substitute slave laborers ready to
be injected into the Australian colonies as the English justice system saw fit. Using
sources from both English intellectuals and the transported convicts, this study shows
how convicts replaced slaves in a time when the morality of the African slave trade was
beginning to come under fire from early abolitionists.

Convicts poured into the Australian colonies until the mid-nineteenth century, but
as transportation became a politically untenable issue, the supply was eventually shut off
one colony at a time. The dearth of cheap laborers that followed caused Australian
planters to look for an alternative pool of workers within the Pacific region. The final
chapter is an examination of the “labor trade” in South Sea Islanders to Queensland. Of
particular interest is how that colony justified the use of the islanders, reverting back to
an ideology of racism to keep those laborers in bondage. By examining accounts from
those personally involved in the labor trade, and those who fought against it, this study
concludes by arguing that even after the African slave trade was abolished in the British
Empire, race-based slavery continued in the Australian colonies nearly until the twentieth
century.
By the close of the seventeenth century, it was widely acknowledged that poverty had become a national crisis in England. The enclosure movement forced peasants to look for work in the cities, of which there was very little to be found. Philanthropists, such as Thomas Firman, proposed new, innovative ways to employ the impoverished to ensure that they did not become a financial drain on the state. In his pamphlet, Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor... (1687), Firman argued that the government needed to take a more active role in finding work for those who needed it. He theorized that workhouses, government subsidized manufacturing centers, could serve as a temporary bridge for those who wanted employment but could not find it. Keeping the lower classes employed would reform them into a more useful citizenry, decrease crimes such as robbery, and add wealth to the nation by making goods that were imported at great cost from overseas. Workhouses became prevalent in Bristol around the turn of the century, and by 1722, Parliament passed the Workhouse Act, which created more than one hundred in and around the London area.\(^8\)

The theory that labor could reform the poor into a virtuous underclass persisted well into the eighteenth century and as the need for laborers grew, government leaders and aristocrats began to question institutions that kept Englishmen from employment. In 1729, a young politician named James Oglethorpe led a crusade against debtors prisons in London. The death of his friend, Robert Castell, drove Oglethorpe to launch an inquiry into the condition of the prison system and his committee revealed the gross negligence of the prison staff who had little concern for the health and well being of their prisoners. By the end of that year, Oglethorpe was championed as a hero for instigating the release of as many as 10,000 debtors from the suffering they endured while incarcerated.⁹

The release of so many debtors soon became a political problem for Oglethorpe, once it was apparent that they could not find jobs, and creditors refused to extend them loans. Those worst off returned to a lifestyle of corruption, fled to find work in Prussia, or starved on the street. To relieve the former convicts, and perhaps to save his own reputation, Oglethorpe acted quickly to find a solution. He approached John Percival, a member of the committee who investigated the prisons, and an influential politician in the House of Lords. Percival was a member of the Associates of Dr. Thomas Bray, a charitable organization composed of wealthy philanthropists and politicians who also ran the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SPCK). Percival recalled that Oglethorpe had presented him with a plan for “sending a colony of poor and honest industrious debtors to the West Indies,” where they could find as much work as they wanted. Indeed, there was precedent for this as convicts had been sentenced to hard labor in the New World since the seventeenth century. Working side by side with American slaves, theorists believed that hard work would reform these felons into more useful citizens.¹⁰

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Bray approved Oglethorpe’s scheme and allowed him to use the Associates to run a charity for sending these debtors to the New World. Once they had found a potential source of funding large enough to sponsor the venture, the Associates chose a location on the continent of North America and changed their name to the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia, in honor of the monarch. By 1732, the Trustees secured a charter from Parliament which stipulated that they could proceed with their plan but were limited to administering the colony for a period of twenty years, at the end of which control would revert to the crown.11

As a private charity, the Trustees planned to finance the colony by collecting donations, but even in the first years they had significant difficulties procuring funds. One historian, Richard S. Dunn, has suggested that funding was a problem throughout the twenty years the Trustees administered Georgia. Of the £155,000 spent on Georgia, £136,000 came from parliament. These figures indicate that private contributions averaged less than £1,000 per year. Indeed, not even the assistance from Parliament could be guaranteed. When the Trustees asked Parliament to make a permanent grant of £7,000 per year, Robert Walpole denied their request citing budgetary concerns. Instead, they had to reapply for assistance every year, which put tremendous pressure on the Trustees to make their enterprise appear worthwhile.12

Because the Trustees could not rely on government support, it became necessary to cast a wide net in their search for donations. Oglethorpe, himself, wrote several

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11 Though most accounts portray Oglethorpe as the one who originated the idea for colonizing Georgia, some historians have pointed out that Dr. Bray himself may have designed the plan. Trevor Reese has suggested that Thomas Coram, another Trustee of the Bray Associates, attributed the design to Bray. Lord John Percival, however, maintained that it was Oglethorpe who approached Bray. Baine, ed., Creating Georgia, xiv-xxvi; Reese, Colonial Georgia: A Study in British Imperial Policy, 9; Harold E. Davis, The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1773–1776 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 8; “The Avalon Project: Charter of Georgia: 1732.” Yale Law School. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/ga01.asp (accessed April 10, 2010).

pamphlets appealing to the public for financial assistance. In his first, *An Appeal for the Georgia Colony* (1732), he framed the Georgia project as a saving grace that would correct the systemic problem of English poverty. He defined the purpose of the project: “The Trustees intend to employ the Money collected to relieve the prisoner,” because so many Englishmen have seen “…a Father, a Brother, a Child, or (which is much dearer) a Friend, torne away to Prison, and buried forever within a Jayl.” The reason for this is simple: “He who has no Money, nor Means of getting a livlihood, is now in England an Outcast of the Society.”

In another pamphlet, *A New and Accurate Account of the Provinces of South-Carolina and Georgia* (1732), Oglethorpe argued that keeping debtors in prison was not only immoral but contrary to the economic prosperity of England. He asked whether, “Hundreds of Prisons filled with Thousands of English Debtors, are they a Glory, or a Reproach, a Benefit, or a Burthen, to the Nation?” Those who wondered about the wisdom of sending former prisoners to Georgia need not worry for these debtors were “but Novices of Iniquity,” and after all, “Prevention is better than the Punishment of Crimes.” The creation of a debtor colony would heal English society by placing labor back into the hands of those who had no prospects for employment, thereby preventing these individuals from more violent crimes such as theft and robbery.

The secretary for the Trustees, Benjamin Martyn, who had spent time in the Fleet prison for his debts in 1725, wrote a piece that emphasized the mutual benefit of the scheme to both poor debtors and England as a whole. In *Some Account of the Designs of the Trustees for Establishing Colonys in America* (1732), Martyn reminded readers that the idle poor were essentially, “enemies of the public tranquility,” for they “are of no use to themselves and of little to the public.” English society need not endure this problem, however, because “there are other parts of the world where men are as much wanting as lands are here, places in which fertile tracts of land are of no value because there is none to cultivate them.” The Trustees designed the new colony of Georgia to change the

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English lower classes into more valuable citizens by providing a potentially unlimited supply of labor, and turning them into productive workers.\textsuperscript{15}

Martyn reiterated many of these points in a subsequent pamphlet, \textit{Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia}... (1733). He emphasized that the idle poor were simply “a dead Weight on the Publick,” and also criticized the perception that throwing them in prison was the answer to the problem. He hypothesized that “above one third Part of the Debts is never recover’d hereby,” because once released “they come naked into the World again; as they have no Money, and little Credit, they find it almost impossible to get into business, especially when our Trades are overstock’d.” Martyn astutely pointed out that this system nearly guaranteed a cycle of poverty, as these debtors would be “contracting new Debts, must return again into Prison, or… be forced into bad Courses, such as Begging, Cheating, or Robbing.” The Georgia project would break this cycle by providing labor to those that had none. These poor English would instead live a virtuous lifestyle as small farmers, and as a result, all of English society would benefit in a reduction of crime.\textsuperscript{16}

As the Trustees made their stance clear, they had to tread lightly because of the public’s fear that a reduction of population from the English mainland would take away laborers who could be used at home. Therefore the Trustees were always careful to explain that the project would not deny the nation of any valuable workers. Indeed, they even turned down a great number of applicants because they could potentially be used in England. It should also be noted that there is no evidence to suggest that any debtors who were serving time in prison were forced to immigrate to the colony. Those impoverished Englishmen who did have debts and applied to go over had to be interviewed by the Trustees, and could not be sent without the consent of their creditors. They even


\textsuperscript{16} Benjamin Martyn, \textit{Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia}... (London: W. Meadows, 1733), 5, 20.
published the names of the potential colonists they intended to send in a public
newspaper two weeks before they were scheduled to leave England.\(^{17}\)

In a sermon before the Trustees in 1735, the Reverend George Watts, reminded
his congregation that Georgia, “takes none off from any other laudable and useful
business; but sets the \textit{hungry} only to do it, and possess and enjoy it when it is done.” In
creating this labor colony, the benefits were to transcend class lines in English society.
Watts explained that it was in the interest of “persons of most moderate Condition,” to
donate because, “the small portion they are casting into this treasury, they are purchasing,
perhaps, a safe retreat for themselves, or descendants, should misfortunes overtake
them.” Indeed, there was no less motivation for the rich because a donation for them
would be “securing the quiet undisturbed enjoyment of their remaining abundance; and
All, that they are discharging their Duty to God, their fellow-creatures, and the publick.”
Therefore, contributions were in everyone’s best interests.\(^{18}\)

Not only was Georgia to alleviate social problems, it was supposed to make the
entire nation wealthy as the materials produced within the colony would replace those
that were imported at great expense. In his pamphlets, Martyn explained that Georgia
could save England as much as £500,000 per annum simply by growing these materials
internally instead of importing them from its European competitors. Because Georgia was
a “tract of land [that] lies in the same latitude with Persia and Jerusalem in Palestine,”
commodities such as silk, hemp, and flax, could be produced along with “Indigo,
Cochineal, Olives, Dying Woods, and Drugs of various Kinds.” A workforce of English

\(^{17}\) Baine, “New Perspectives on Debtors in Colonial Georgia,” 10-13; C. Robert
Haywood, “Mercantilism and Colonial Slave Labor, 1700–1763” \textit{The Journal of
Southern History} 23 no. 4 (Nov., 1957): 454-460. For further interpretations on the
immigration of debtors to Georgia see Albert B. Saye, “The Genesis of Georgia:
Merchants as well as Ministers” \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly} 24 no. 3 (1940): 191-
201; Saye, “Was Georgia a Debtor Colony?” \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly} 24 no. 4
(1940): 323-341; Kenneth Coleman, “The Founding of Georgia,” in \textit{Forty Years of
Diversity}, eds. Jackson and Spalding, 10; Davis, \textit{The Fledgling Province}, 10; E. Merton
Coulter, “Was Georgia settled by Debtors?” \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly} 53 no. 4

\(^{18}\) George Watts, \textit{A Sermon Preached Before the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of
Georgia}... (London: M. Downing, 1736), 8-9, 26
poor would grow these items, raise their own standard of living, and strengthen the mainland English economy.  

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The pamphlets released by the Trustees outline a new paradigm of colonization, a utopian plan that would add great wealth to the empire, but the Georgia project’s success or failure hinged heavily upon one important factor—the exclusion of slavery. It was acknowledged, even by the Trustees, that slavery had been the primary source of labor in the New World, and wealth creation in the Old. As early as 1731, the Reverend, and future member of the Trustees, Samuel Smith lamented that, “Our great Metropolis is the common Receptacle of the Wealth of the Plantations, and enrich’d by the Drudgery of our Negroe Slaves.” The wealth created by slave labor in the New World widened the divide between the rich and the poor in England, as less work was available to occupy the lower classes.

If Georgia were to succeed in alleviating class tensions by employing the lower classes, slavery had to be excluded from the colony. Only in doing so, could the Trustees insure the colony’s capacity to absorb England’s surplus labor. Penal reform and colonization thus came together as an early movement against slavery, an indication that opposition to slavery was often a reflection less of any direct moral rejection of the institution than of its capacity to impinge on a broader imperial project. In their 1733 promotional tract, *Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia*, the Trustees emphasized that “Civil Liberty is to be establish’d there in its full Extent,” meaning that there would be “no Appearance of Slavery,” and therefore “the People being oblig’d to labor themselves for their Support, will be, like the old Romans, more active and useful for the Defense of their Government.” Not everyone agreed with the idealism of the Trustees. One of the earliest critics of this policy was Samuel Eveleigh, a South Carolinian who knew the harsh realities of colonialism and slavery. In April 1733, he

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21 Martyn, *Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia…*, 33.
wrote to the Trustees to warn them that such a radical departure from the colonial model of plantation slavery “will be a great prejudice if not a means to overset your noble design.” Eveleigh explained that “it will be very difficult for white people to hoe and tend their corn in the hot weather, for I do assure you I think ‘tis equally as hot as ever I felt it in Jamaica in the summer months.”

In 1733, the first Georgian colonists arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, led by James Oglethorpe himself. He felt constant pressure from the slave trading lobby to admit slaves from the outset and in a letter to the Trustees, he reported that he had “brought all our people to desire the prohibition of Negroes and rum, which goes much against the grain of the traders in these commodities in this town.” Though this move may have been unpopular in Charleston, he argued that “if either of them are allowed our whole design will be ruined.” Nevertheless, he realized that additional laborers would be required to clear the grounds at Savannah, and reluctantly accepted an offer to rent twenty African slaves from plantation owners in Charleston. By August of that year, he wrote back to the Trustees regretting this decision as, “Idleness and drunkenness were succeeded by sickness.” To counteract the former, he “sent away the Negroes who sawed for us, for so long as they continued here our men were encouraged in idleness by their working for them.” The colonists would not be reformed into virtuous citizens without laboring for themselves.

Instead of relying on slave labor, the colony depended on indentured servants to form the lowest class of Georgian society. The need for servants was evident very early on in the colony. According to historian Kenneth Coleman, Oglethorpe was so desperate for laborers that he “bought the indentures of some forty Irish convicts who were on a ship forced into Savannah by bad weather and lack of food.” By 1736, the need was still

so great that Oglethorpe wrote to the Trustees asking for an additional 400 servants. The conditions of servitude may have been a disincentive. Historian Trevor Reese has pointed out that in other colonies servants usually received 50 acres upon completion of the indenture. In Georgia, many servants were allotted as few as 20 acres. Incentives for servants were gradually increased to entice immigration to the new colony. By 1737, the Trust allowed servants to acquire 50 acres, and by 1741 that number increased to 70 acres, perhaps indicating how few desired to come.25

Acquiring indentured servants to come to Georgia was difficult enough, but once they signed their indentures and arrived in the colony many fled shortly thereafter. The South Carolina border was a short distance away from Savannah, and many servants quickly disappeared across colony lines. There, an ideology of racism propelled them up the social ladder instantly, and there were no restrictions on the amount of land one could hold. Surely, work as an overseer was more appealing than doing the same kind of work the slaves were. In his pamphlet, *A State of the Province of Georgia* (1742), the secretary for the Trustees in Georgia, William Stephens, chastised the servant class:

> When those who quitted their own Country… saw Labour stand before their Eyes in Georgia, they were easily persuaded to live in Carolina by Cunning, rather than work: This has been a great Misfortune also upon many Persons, who brought over Servants indented to serve them, for a certain Number of Years, who being picked up in the Streets of London, or some such Manner, their Masters found them unfit for Labour, and many of them took such Opportunities as they could get, to desert and fly into Carolina, where they could be protected.26

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Thus what was needed was “a Number of German Families, accustomed to Husbandry,” and “a Number of English and Welch Servants, such as are used to hard Labour in the Country.” By this stage, it was clear that the English indentures arriving in Georgia refused to do the type of work that was equated in the colonies with the lowest class of African slaves, subsequently strengthening the arguments of slavery advocates that only African slaves could be used for the most labor intensive tasks. Peter Gordon, the bailiff in Savannah, argued that, “it is morally impossible that the people of Georgia can ever get forward in their settlements or even be a degree above common slaves, without the help and assistance of negroes.”

Advocates of slavery argued that servants were an anachronism in the New World. Patrick Tailfer, a lowland Scot who arrived in Georgia in 1734, wrote to the Trustees the next year claiming that the introduction of slavery was necessary for the colony to survive. He reasoned that, “White servants not being used to so hot a climate can’t bear the scorching rays of the sun in summer.” They were also costly as “Negroes can endure this climate almost without any clothes, only a cap, jacket and pair of trousers made of some coarse woolen stuff in the winter and one pair of shoes,” while white servants “must be clothed as Europeans and proportionable to the season all the year throughout.” Feeding slaves was also more cost effective as all they had to be fed was “salt, Indian corn and potatoes which they raise themselves with no expense to the master but the seed and have nothing to drink but water.” Servants had to “be fed with flesh meat, bread and other victuals suitable to the European diet which they have been used to and bred up with from their infancy.” Finally, slaves were kept forever but “we have white servants only for a short time.”

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29 Tailfer lists a multitude of other reasons why slavery should be permitted in Georgia. See Patrick Tailfer and others to the Trustees, 27 August, 1735, in General Oglethorpe’s Georgia, vol. 1, ed. Lane, 225.
Tailfer, fed up with the antislavery policy of the Trustees, fled to South Carolina in 1740. Even though he crossed the border into a slave society, he continued his bitter resistance against the Trustees by co-writing a pamphlet entitled, *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia in America* (1741). In this document, he posed a list of twelve grievances against the Trustees among which was, “to prevent our procuring, or so much as seeing any Negroes, (the only human Creatures proper to improve our Soil) lest our Simplicity might mistake the poor Africans for greater Slaves than ourselves.” As opposition to the policy against slavery mounted, those that resisted were dubbed “malcontents” by the administrators of the colony. Betty Wood, a historian who has studied these disgruntled colonists, has reported that nearly ninety per cent of them were originally from England or Lowland Scotland. Meanwhile a great number of the foreign Protestants who migrated to the colony were in opposition to the introduction of slavery. This may indicate that English and Scottish colonists had a cultural aversion to the type of labor that was normally reserved for African slaves. The malcontents were led by a small group of adventurers who paid for their own transportation to the colony, as well as the cost of transporting indentured servants. Consequently, they were awarded the maximum land grant available by law, five hundred acres, and also had the most to gain from Georgia becoming a plantation style economy if slaves were admitted.30

In 1741, Benjamin Martyn composed a response to Tailfer, in the pamphlet *An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia*. The secretary for the Trustees reminded the malcontents that slavery was incompatible with the type of society they were trying to create, one in which the poor would be reformed through their own labor. Slavery would ruin the colony, and that is why they restricted land grants to 20 acres in first place: “this Quantity, if well cultivated, would yield not only a comfortable, but handsome Subsistence, but would not enable him to maintain a Number of Negroes.” In other words, by allotting settlers small plots, the Trustees were seeking to prevent the kind of accumulation of wealth that would allow the colonists to acquire

slaves. Small, yeoman farms were to be the ideal in Georgia.\textsuperscript{31} Martyn pointed out that the hardest working colonists had formed their own petitions against the introduction of slaves:

The most industrious People in the Colony, are so sensible of the Inconveniences, and Dangers, to which they should be exposed by the Introduction of Negroes, that they have petitioned against them, particularly the Salzburgers at Ebenezer, and the Highlanders at New Inverness in Darien. The Inhabitants likewise of Frederica (the chief Town in the Southern Part of the Province) upon an Application for Negroes from some in the Northern Part, (who were less exposed to the Spaniards,) prepared a Petition against them.\textsuperscript{32}

The author included these petitions in an addendum to his pamphlet, as evidence that his views were broadly held. Another pamphlet, An Account Shewing the Progress of the Colony of Georgia (1741), employed many of the same arguments that Martyn used and warned that if a planter class were to emerge, the wealthy elite would leave the colony and take their profits with them. The authors accused the malcontents of soliciting signatures for a proslavery petition “by the Power which the others had over them as their Creditors, and by Hopes being given them, that if they stuck together, the Trustees must grant them Negroes, or see the Colony abandoned, were thus drawn to sign the same.”\textsuperscript{33}

After Tailfer left the colony, William Stephens’ son Thomas, took it upon himself to continue the fight against the antislavery policy of the Trustees. Thomas Stephens had a personal rivalry with Oglethorpe, who accused him of stealing from the colony’s stores. His honor destroyed, he aligned himself with Oglethorpe’s and the Trustees’ greatest rivals, the malcontents, and became the most vociferous pro-slavery advocate in Georgia. In 1742, he wrote a pamphlet entitled, The Hard Case of the Distressed People of Georgia, in which he claimed “that the Colony is already ruined is certain and evident; and it can’t be said, that the Introduction of Negroes has brought this about.” Thomas

\textsuperscript{31} Benjamin Martyn, “An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia” in The Clamorous Malcontents, intro. Reese, 141.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 146; For an analysis of the Darien antislavery petition see Harvey H. Jackson, “The Darien Antislavery Petition of 1739 and the Georgia Plan,” The William and Mary Quarterly 34, no. 4 (October 1977): 618-631; Betty Wood, “A Note on the Georgia Malcontents,” 271.
\textsuperscript{33} “An Account Shewing the Progress of the Colony of Georgia in America from its First Establishment” in The Clamorous Malcontents, intro. Reese, 217.
also argued against the importation of indentured servants because “it has already been shewn, that white Men are unequal to the Task, yet it must be done.” He even brought his petition to introduce slavery to the Trustees personally, and made his case before the president, John Percival, who rejected his plan outright.

By 1750, the Trust had disintegrated into a collection of disenchanted politicians and philanthropists, few of whom were original members of the organization. Oglethorpe, who had been the staunchest supporter of antislavery within the colony, had fallen into disrepute because of his military blunders during the War of Jenkins’ Ear. In 1740, a preemptive strike on St. Augustine caught the city off guard long enough for Oglethorpe to lay siege. One historian described how Georgia’s founder “suddenly became irresolute,” and refused to make the final blow that would have crippled the Spanish threat permanently. A counterattack led to the retreat of Oglethorpe and his forces, who spent the next two years fearing reprisal from their southern neighbors. By mid-1742, the Spanish had managed to attack several British forts on the Georgia border, and Oglethorpe was left to defend his colony with almost no military aid from South Carolina, possibly retribution for the poor relations between the two colonies. The Trustees marginalized him sufficiently to guarantee that he retained little power in the colony he worked so hard to create.

John Percival, who had presided over the Trustees for a number of years and a firm supporter of the antislavery law, resigned because of illness in 1742. The Trustees were never able to secure enough donations to fund themselves privately, and had constant difficulties trying to obtain financial relief from Parliament. Not only were the


Trustees unable to fund the project, they also found that few of the English poor sent over were willing to perform the difficult labor necessary to begin a colony. As a result, from the earliest days of the project, they were forced to steer their recruiting efforts away from debtors, and the English poor toward foreign Protestants. The embattled Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia finally gave into the pressure from the malcontents. In 1750, the Trustees repealed the law that prohibited slavery in the colony abandoning their original plan and paving the way for Georgia to become a slave society.37

Historians of colonial America have rarely looked toward Georgia as a beacon of moral progress in the New World, yet Georgia’s founding represented an unparalleled paradigm shift in British colonization away from slavery. The growing ranks of English poor became a national crisis that made colonial promoters question the validity of sending African slaves to labor in the New World when their own countrymen were unemployed and on the streets. This systemic problem is what filled debtors prisons, increased crimes such as robbery, and fueled the gap between the rich and the poor. Georgia was intended to provide work for the lower classes, and thereby reform them into more virtuous subjects. Though the Trustees ultimately failed in their design, another opportunity to restructure colonialism came after the American Revolution.38

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37 Percival, Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont… vol. 3, 265; Dunn, “The Trustees of Georgia and the House of Commons,” 551; For information on the settlement of foreign Protestants see George Watts, A Sermon Preached Before the Trustees…, 9-10, 13.
The Georgia Project was designed to be a measure that would rid England of its idle poor, thereby cleansing the nation of unproductive drones by sending them to find work across the Atlantic. It also preemptively targeted the class most likely to commit future crimes, and therefore was intended to alleviate social conflict at home. Though the idealistic aims of the Trustees ultimately failed, they nevertheless proved that there were alternatives to colonizing with African slaves. Transportation of criminals was one way in which England could colonize without resorting to race-based slavery. Convicts continued to be transported to the colonies throughout the eighteenth century, and their forced migration only stopped when the mainland colonies began their war for independence in 1775.39

The independence of the American colonies became a serious obstacle to sentencing convicts to transportation. Once the door was shut to the forced emigration of convict laborers, those sentenced to transportation were indefinitely imprisoned in large ships known as hulks. Festering with disease, these floating gulags served as temporary prisons for offenders waiting to be banished from the British realm.40 Every year that the

40 For a detailed account of conditions aboard the hulks see Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787–1868* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 41-42. It should be noted that time spent imprisoned in a hulk did not reduce the duration of their sentence of transportation for convicts. One writer challenged this policy in the *Saunder’s News-Letter* dated May 1, 1795. He criticized the system for “inflicting a punishment that the law does not warrant, and far exceeds the sentence pronounced on them.” See F. M. Bladen, ed., *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 2, (Mona Vale, N.S.W.: Lansdown Slattery & Co., 1978), 818. Another convict imprisoned in the hulk Stanislaus wrote to Under Secretary Even Nepean asking to “be taken out of this floating hell, and sent in the next ship to Botany Bay.” Moseley’s
war raged on meant an ever-growing convict population on the banks of the Thames and elsewhere. Though the build up of these felons was a stagnant eyesore to most everyday Londoners, there were a few who saw it as an economic opportunity, even a boon possibly, that might create a new and better empire. Seeking fame and recognition, a number of Englishmen came up with their own plans as to where these convicts should be sent. By 1787, the plethora of convicts became a public controversy, and the government was finally forced to make a decision.41

How Botany Bay was chosen to become the repository of convict laborers has been at the center of intense historical debate. Some scholars have seen Botany Bay as essentially a dumping ground, a place that Britain reluctantly chose after all other options had been considered. Other historians have argued that there was nothing haphazard about the colonization of convicts in Australia at all. Alan Frost, the scholar who has been the leader of the strategic school, has suggested that the choice of Botany Bay was a geopolitical chess move intended to counter a growing French presence in the Pacific. With the loss of the American colonies, the British needed to assure the continued safety of commerce coming from the British East India Company. Indeed, a Franco-Dutch alliance in the Pacific in 1785 gave much impulse for the need to defend British trade in the region.42

In addition to protecting already established commercial interests in the East, there was another economic motive in the choice of Botany Bay. During his voyage with Captain James Cook, the botanist, Joseph Banks, noted that there was an abundant supply of flax growing on the coasts. Flax grew only in certain climates and was an integral component of shipbuilding used to create sails. Banks believed the area of Botany Bay had an ideal climate for its propagation. In addition to this key strategic resource, Alan Frost has also highlighted the increasing importance of the Pacific by examining the request came because he had the “gaol fever” three times. See Edward Moseley to Under Secretary Nepean in Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 2, 102.
41 On the convict crisis see David Mackay, A Place of Exile: The European Settlement of New South Wales (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1-7.
Nootka Sound Crisis. In the late eighteenth century, the American Pacific Northwest had become an important gateway to commercial interests in the fur trade with Russia, so important in fact, that the British were prepared to go to war with Spain over it. Indeed, the region of Canada around Nootka Sound was even a proposed site to create another penal colony that would solidify Britain’s claim to that area.43

Whether or not Botany Bay was meant to be a dumping ground is of immense significance in understanding Australian nationalism, and perhaps Australians’ own sense of exceptionalism from the founding moment. If there were a broader significance to shipping convicts to New South Wales, then the British government legitimately believed that transportation, and the forced labor that came with it would reform the convicts and turn the colony into a new Albion in the Pacific. Once reformed, the ex-convicts would be free as any other subject of the Crown and could return home and rejoin English society. Conversely, if Botany Bay was intended simply to be a place of exile for an unwanted segment of society, then New South Wales was meant to be a place of permanent segregation, where social outcasts would forever remain. The implication being that Australia truly would never be anything more than what Scottish cartographer, Alexander Dalrymple, dubbed, a “thief colony,” or at least such would be the implication for those Australians seeking to celebrate their nation’s distinctive ignominious origins.44

If historians like Alan Frost are correct, then the purpose of Australia’s founding was to protect Britain’s eastern interests perhaps more than it was to punish it’s own

43 David Mackay’s view that the convicts were dumped haphazardly at Botany Bay challenges what has become the traditional explanation of the founding of New South Wales, as told by historian Alan Frost. Frost has asserted that when the government of William Pitt made the decision to colonize that area it was far from the whim Mackay has made it out to be. Instead, it was a conscious and strategic effort to rebalance the empire in order to “use the convicts to build a new base that would increase the nation’s capacity to protect her Eastern establishment.” See Alan Frost, Convicts and Empire, xiv-xv, 140-141, 154-157; Alan Atkinson, “Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay,” Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society 61 no. 5 (1975): 288-310; Alan Frost, “The Choice of Botany Bay. The Scheme to Supply the East Indies with Naval Stores,” Australian Economic History Review 15 (1975): 1-20; For information on the proposed convict settlement in Canada see R. Cadman Etches, Pat Wilson and Richard H. Dillon, “A Plan for Convict Colonies in Canada,” The Americas 13 no. 2 (October 1956): 187-198.
44 For Dalrymple’s impressions of the colony see Alexander Dalrymple, A Serious Admonition to the Public on the Intended Thief Colony at Botany Bay (Dubbo, NSW: Review Publications, 1979), 29.
deviants. Therefore the case can be made that elites saw transportation as a method to reform citizens rather than to punish them. Thus, once reformed they would be able to provide critical strategic support to the empire’s commerce in the Pacific, a purpose for their exile. A founding based on redemption and restored honor is more glorious than one based on forcing unjustly treated felons and outcasts into slavery. Subsequently, Frost has argued that from the very start “the simple fact is that a surprising egalitarianism quickly came to prevail in the colony,” after the arrival of the First Fleet.45

Whether a colony can be considered egalitarian when the vast majority of its citizens were in bondage can certainly be debated. Alan Frost has pointed to Arthur Phillip, the first governor of New South Wales, as a progressive leader who took a hard stance on the African slave trade. Indeed, even before the First Fleet left England, Phillip emphasized that there would be a new order in New South Wales that would exclude the institution of race-based slavery:

The laws of this country [England] will, of course, be introduced in New South Wales, and there is one that I would wish to take place form the moment his Majesty’s forces take possession of the country: That there can be no slavery in a free land, and consequently no slaves.46

The origins of Phillip’s antislavery sentiment may have stemmed from his contact with slave societies throughout his life. During the Seven Years War, Phillip’s naval service was spent on board ships in the West Indies, and he was involved in an attempt to capture the French island of Martinique, which was heavily populated by slaves. Later in his career he joined the Portuguese Navy, and while in Brazil may have witnessed African slaves at work in diamond mines north of Rio de Janeiro. In 1770, as a fourth lieutenant, Phillip also had personal experience putting his own countrymen in bondage, as he led press gangs to force impoverished vagrants to serve on board his ship, the Egmont. His exposure to the institution of African slavery may have influenced his decision to ban

race-based slavery later in New South Wales, a measure that was probably more feasible with an endless supply of convict laborers.47

Phillip may have also attended a scientific seminar given by Henry Smeathman, an entomologist and protégé of the great naturalist, Joseph Banks. Smeathman studied termite colonies while living in West Africa, and his essay, Some Account of the Termites, which are found in Africa and other hot climates (1781), contains antislavery undertones that suggest he had abolitionist sympathies. Phillip was so intrigued with Smeathman’s work that he wrote to him to relay information about the termite damage he saw while living in Brazil. Smeathman’s antislavery stance became more overt in 1786, after he published another pamphlet, Plan for a Settlement to be made near Sierra Leone, in which he proposed to send poor black Londoners to find work in that colony.48

Smeathman’s mentor, Joseph Banks was also an acquaintance of Arthur Phillip, and often received shipments of specimens from Phillip’s expeditions in New South Wales. Banks’ opinion on the African slave trade appears to be rather complicated, as he apparently recognized that it was “impolitic & inexpedient to imploy slaves when free men can be procured…” but did not necessarily disagree with the institution on moral grounds.49 In fact, Banks believed that if slavery were to be challenged at all, it should not be “on moral principles… but on Commercial ones which weigh equaly in moral & immoral minds…”50 Indeed, Banks personally understood the commercial interests quite well as he had seen an economic opportunity in the discovery of bread fruit in the Pacific, which he attempted to introduce as a food source for slaves in the West Indies, a potentially lucrative endeavor.51

A number of scholars who have studied the daily lives of the convicts conclude that they lived in a state of relative freedom in New South Wales. These historians have argued that the governors were benevolent, and the ability to be rewarded for good behavior equates to a society in which there was tranquility between those who had absolute freedom and those that did not. This seems to be where a conceptual barrier between slave and free is erected because white convicts do not fit well in the slave narrative so prevalent in the eighteenth century. Indeed, words like “convictism,” have been created to describe this in between state of free and slave. Scholars have even likened the state of convicts to indenture, in which a free individual willingly signs a contract to work for a number of years for an employer that they chose.\(^{52}\) Eris O’Brien has argued that the convicts were all “well treated.”\(^{53}\) When convicts perished on the voyage to New South Wales, or were beaten like slaves, scholars have been quick to make generalizations that exculpate the government. One author, Stephen Nicholas, has qualified their suffering by suggesting that, “physical violence in Australia was no greater than that in the British army or navy, and less than that of American slaves.”\(^{54}\)

When violence was inflicted on the convicts, some historians condone it because “convicts were reduced to bondage by due process of British law,” and because of this their punishments “were affirming no more than what British law had laid down as punishment for crime.”\(^{55}\) This essentially meant that no punishment given by the British government could be arbitrary. One historian, J. B. Hirst, sums this up nicely by arguing that this type of forced labor was not slavery because “generally they accepted the legitimacy of their conviction, even though of course they were still interested in


\(^{54}\) Nicholas and Shergold, “Unshackling the Past,” in *The Convict Workers*, ed. Nicholas, 11.

escaping the rigours of their punishment.”⁵⁶ Thus the founders of Australia can be forgiven for keeping their first citizens in bondage. Historian, David Neal has suggested an alternate approach to look at “the distinction between bond and free… [as] distinction of degree, not a distinction between those with some rights and those with none at all.”⁵⁷

In explaining how New South Wales evolved into a “free” society, one must examine the types of sources historians have traditionally relied upon. Alexander Harris, a convict who served a sixteen-year sentence in Australia knew even then that there were essentially two separate stories coming out of New South Wales. The first glorified the governors, and civil officials. It emphasized the progress of the colony, the relative good temperament of the convict laborers, and predicted that New South Wales would become an economic success of untold proportions. Harris, himself, explained the distinction:

> I cannot conceive how writers on New South Wales reconcile it with common honesty invariably to conceal this great fact. If their object were different from what it is, one might think it oversight; but when we know that their grand aim is the promotion of emigration, it appears a piece of cunning at once base and puerile. Surely no honourable man could make such an omission, revealing, as the act does, a consciousness that if emigrant labourers were aware of what awaits them, they would never make one step toward the country. If the practice cannot be given up, at all events let men be told what they are to expect.⁵⁸

These early accounts were propagated for a purpose, and some historians may have forgotten this. The success or failure of the colony was also a reflection on the officers’ leadership abilities and it was in their interest to project the best image of the colony they could.

The second type of evidence consists of sources from the convicts themselves, or official sources that have been largely overlooked by historians that chronicle the true

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⁵⁸ Alexander Harris, *Settlers and Convicts or, Recollections of Sixteen Years’ Labour in the Australian Backwoods* (London: C. Cox, 1847), 72.
state of nature in which the convicts lived their day-to-day lives. These documents are illustrative of anything but a free society. By looking at the offences that received a punishment of transportation, historians might better understand whether the convicts thought that their sentence was legitimate or not. Stephen Nicholas, a scholar who has studied the early convicts, has revealed that 81% of the men who were sentenced to transportation committed property violations, and of those offences, most were because of theft. This overwhelmingly indicates that the type of crimes committed by most of those who were sent to New South Wales were non-violent in nature. Nicholas also discovered that almost all of those who received a sentence of transportation were first time offenders, rather than hardened criminals and a few were even children as young as thirteen years old. Taking into account the widening gap between the rich and the poor in eighteenth century England, one can begin to question whether the convicts may have believed their sentences were appropriate.\footnote{Nicholas and Shergold, “Unshackling the Past,” in The Convict Workers, ed. Nicholas, 7; C. M. H. Clark, A History of Australia, vol. 1, From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 92; George Thompson, Slavery and Famine: Punishments for Sedition, or, An Account of the Miseries and Starvation at Botany Bay (London: J. Ridgway, 1794), 44.}

Like slaves, very few convicts left records for historians to interpret. Those who were able to write were not afraid of challenging the sentence of transportation on intellectual grounds. In 1794, Maurice Maragot who was convictEd in Scotland, wrote to the Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales, Francis Grose. He protested his sentence and asked to “claim the restoration of my freedom—freedom, the common birthright of Britons… as I conceive my sentence to be fulfilled on my arrival here, that sentence being transportation, not slavery.” The latter was “directly contrary to the British Constitution as it was established by the Revolution of 1688.” He argued not just for himself, “but to every Briton, for if the Executive power can make one slave, it may make all so.” Grose, who was unimpressed by Maragot’s argument countered that he “may rest assured I have not the smallest doubt, neither shall I have the least hesitation, of forcing as much good order from you as from any other prisoner in this place.”\footnote{F. M. Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 3, (Mona Vale, N.S.W.: Lansdown Slattery & Co., 1978), 228-229.}
For many who were banished to New South Wales, the sentence of transportation may have been the equivalent of the death penalty, or perhaps much worse. In theory, the sentence was supposed to be a limited term, meaning that they could potentially return to Britain after hard labor had morally reformed them. Once their sentence was complete, however, the government of New South Wales offered no assistance to any emancipated convict who wished to go back to Britain. Instead, many were forced to remain in the colony even after their term had expired because they could not raise the capital needed for the voyage home. Governor Arthur Phillip believed that the convict class could never be rehabilitated, and would even contaminate the population of virtuous free colonists:

As I would not wish convicts to lay the foundations of an Empire, I think they should ever remain separated from the garrison, and other settlers that may come from Europe, and not be allowed to mix with them, even after the seven or fourteen years for which they are transported may be expired.⁶¹

Perhaps worse than death for many of these convicts was being separated from their families and loved ones for so long a time, and many died in Australia, without ever being reunited. Indeed, there were rumors that those who were pardoned from death, and sentenced to transportation asked to die rather than to be sent to Botany Bay.⁶²

Though transportation was meant to be a reprieve from capital punishment, death was never far away for the convicts. Authors who have argued for the linear road to a free society have had difficulty explaining the mortality of the convicts, especially in the early years. Stephen Nicholas has suggested that the fatality rate for convicts being transported was very low in general, “landing an extraordinary proportion of convict passengers fit

⁶¹ Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 1 part 2, 53; Absolutely no aid was to be given from the government of New South Wales to help convicts return to Britain. See David Collins, ed., An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales… vol. 1, (T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), 169.  

⁶² In his criticism of founding a Penal Colony at Botany Bay, Alexander Dalrymple argues that it was unethical to remove them without returning them upon the expiration of their sentence. See Dalrymple A Serious Admonition, 29; In a letter to Arthur Phillip, Lord William Grenville stated “that it should be distinctly understood that no steps are to be taken by Government for facilitating their return.” See Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 1 part 2, 460; Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 2, 759.
This may have been true in the nineteenth century, but even on the later voyages there were still a significant number of convicts who did not survive the journey.

Historians who have suggested that convict mortality was minimal during the voyage to New South Wales, perhaps have cast too wide a net. Emma Christopher has recently examined the plight of the Second Fleet that arrived in New South Wales in June 1790. Her research has uncovered that there was little difference between the horrors of this voyage compared to those experienced by Africans during the middle passage. Like African slave ships, disease was rampant and swept through the holds of the three ships carrying their human cargo. Many of the convicts were shackled together and made to sleep on the bare flooring. One man had been chained to a prisoner who died roughly halfway through the voyage, and instead of reporting his death, he pretended that the man was only sleeping to receive an additional ration, a tactic Christopher explains, that was common of African slaves on route to the New World. The captains and crew of the vessels were experienced slavers who had made the voyage from Africa to the Americas regularly. One estimate suggests that they may have transported at least 10,500 African slaves across the Atlantic. These slave traders also had experience transporting convicts from England to the slave trading forts in West Africa, where they were likely compelled to further facilitate the slave trade by providing logistical support to the outposts. Thus, white or black, Atlantic or Pacific, to the Second Fleet captains and crew, a slave was a slave. One observer, William Hill, thought the condition of the convicts so bad that he felt compelled to write to his friend, Samuel Wathen, a close acquaintance of William Wilberforce, about the horrors he saw aboard the ships. He explained that the captains of the ships showed little interest in whether the convicts lived or died, because it presented an opportunity to sell the extra food for a further profit once landed. This experience changed Hill, as he told Wathen, “the slave trade is merciful compared to what I have

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63 Nicholas and Shergold, “Convicts as Migrants,” in The Convict Workers, ed. Nicholas, 47.
seen in this fleet,” and noted that he felt scarred for life.⁶⁴ Those convicts on board the Second Fleet were treated as any other type of slave, regardless of their race.⁶⁵

When convicts did have the opportunity to resist their captors, they acted similarly to African slaves. Philip Gidley King, the second governor of the colony, recounted the story of an attempted insurrection aboard a convict ship transporting felons to New South Wales: “They would in all probability have succeeded, but for the activity and resolution shewn by the master Mr. George Bowen.” Several convicts positioned themselves to make a move on the officers on the deck when the captain on “hearing the alarm, had just time to arm himself with a loaded blunderbuss, which he discharged at one of the mutineers.” The remaining convicts “seeing what had befallen him, instantly ran down below; but the master, his officers, and some of the seamen of the ship, following them, soon secured the ringleaders.” The two leaders of the uprising were summarily executed, because “no other means seemed so likely to deter the convicts from any future attempt of the like nature.”⁶⁶

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⁶⁴ Emma Christopher, “‘The Slave Trade is Merciful Compared to [This]’: Slave Traders, Convict Transportation and the Abolitionists,” in Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World, eds. Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 110-111; Lt. Governor King also remarked that many of those ships that transported the convicts early on had no concern whether they lived or died. “A contract had been entered into by the government with Messrs. Calvert, Camden, and King, merchants of London, for the transporting of one thousand convicts, and government engaged to pay 17l. 7s. 6d. per head for every convict they embarked. This sum being as well for their provisions as for their transportation, no interest for their preservation was created in the owners, and the dead were more profitable (if profit alone was consulted by them, and the credit of their house was not at stake) than the living.” See Collins, ed., An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales… vol. 1, 123; Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 1, part 2, 368.

⁶⁵ Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 1, part 2, 366-371; For more on the horrors of the second fleet see an extract from the Reverend R. Johnson to Mr. Thornton in Ibid., 386-389.

⁶⁶ Collins, ed., An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales… vol. 1, 181; For an excellent overview on uprisings aboard slave ships see Eric Robert Taylor, If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); There was another attempted uprising on the ship Marquis on September 11, 1795. See Bladen, ed., Historical Records of New South Wales, vol. 3, 4-5, 102-110.
In his pamphlet, *Panopticon versus New South Wales*, Jeremy Bentham, father of the modern penitentiary system, used the mortality rate of the convicts being shipped to the colony as evidence of its iniquity. He included a table that outlined the appalling death rate of those transported to New South Wales. Of the 5,196 prisoners sent until 1795, only 4,674 survived the journey. He also estimated that as many as 936 died in the settlement by that date, bringing the total number of dead to 1,458 or 28% of the total number of convicts shipped within the first eight years of settlement. Bentham also admits that his data is incomplete because some of the ships that ferried the convicts did not provide an account for their number of dead, meaning that 28% is a conservative estimate and that many more probably died on the passage. Governor John Hunter, who wrote to the Duke of Portland on the 25th of June 1797, asked that the government create a position to monitor the condition aboard these ships because otherwise the convicts were “at the mercy of the master and his officers.” On one ship, the captain did “not appear to have had much lenity, as a number had died on the passage, of whom some had been severely punish’d.” It was not until 1801 that ships transporting convicts became required to keep daily records on the cleanliness of their vessels and the punishments inflicted upon their prisoners.67

Of those that made it to New South Wales, odds of survival in the first few years of colonization were not favorable. Many convicts arrived in the colony extremely ill and near death.68 Lt. Governor King noted that there were as many as “fifty male and four female convicts dying within the first thirty days.” This toll was bound to grow even further the following month as there were “five hundred sick persons.”69 One convict, George Barrington, noted that having four to five hundred convicts on the doctor’s list was not atypical and in these cases they were often, “entirely exhausted, and many of

69 Ibid., 189.
them were so fairly worn out, that they expired without a groan, and, to all appearance, did not experience the smallest degree of pain.”70 Even on a ship which had made “so good a passage,” of the 205 convicts being carried, twenty-four died during the voyage, and of those that survived the journey, they “were in so emaciated a state, that scarcely any labour could be expected of them for some months.”71 Governor John Hunter saw a number of convict transports arrive during his administration and lamented that those disembarking were “in general, greatly emaciated, and appeared starved, and worn out with confinement.”72 These convicts were so weak in fact that “they could not be put to any kind of labour, not even that of pulling grass for thatching the huts.”73

For those who survived the voyage, and were either fit on arrival, or recovered from sickness, the first few days in New South Wales were perhaps the deadliest. Lieutenant Ralph Clark, observed that in a brief time, “about forty of the Convicts have died,” and admitted, “I am not Surprised at there dying So fast the[y] have nothing to lay on but the cold grownd ther being no beds come out for them.”74 Convicts were even forced to work naked, as many, “were seen labouring in the fields, as free of clothing of any kind as the savages of the country.”75 Governor Hunter reported to the Duke of Portland that convicts were “literally naked,” and it was no wonder that their lack of clothing and blankets, “reduc’d the people to great distress and plac’d too many in the hospitals.”76 Many of those that survived the voyage from England only arrived to find

72 Hunter gives a good impression of the number of convicts who died on several ships, and lists illness as one of the consequences of so long a journey in captivity. See Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 554, 561, 566.
73 Ibid., 561.
75 Collins, ed., *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales…* vol. 1, 142.
76 Bladen, ed., *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 3, 691.
that starvation would be their end. Jeremy Bentham estimated that in 1792, out of “4000 convicts, 436 breathed their last, of whom more than 400 were carried off by famine.”

Even the officers governing the colony, who had every incentive to cast circumstances in the best possible light, could not help but write about the lack of rations. Lt. Governor King, said the convicts were receiving a “miserable allowance,” and wrote about seeing the effects of starvation first hand:

An elderly man dropped down at the store, whither he had repaired with others to receive his day's subsistence. Fainting with hunger, and unable through age to hold up any longer, he was carried to the hospital, where he died the next morning. On being opened, his stomach was found quite empty.

George Thompson, another eyewitness of the horrors at Botany Bay, recorded similar stories in his pamphlet, *Slavery and Famine: Punishments for Sedition, or, an Account of the Miseries and Starvation at Botany Bay...* (1794). He lamented that, “many a one has died standing at the door of the store-house, waiting for his allowance of provision, merely for want of sustenance and necessary food.” One person writing from Sydney commented that, “the poor fellows so exhausted with hunger and thirst that they could hardly stand.” Of 122 convicts transported from Ireland on the ship *Queen*, only fifty survived the first year. The deaths were caused by “an entire want of strength in their constitution to receive nourishment.” Of 450 that came on the *Pitt*, Thompson estimated only 29 survived, and “those that are now living chiefly owe their lives to those that are dead, the provision being so scarce, that had they not died all must have perished.” The ability to battle both the elements and hunger became essential to convict longevity in New South Wales.

Poisonous snakes, and the potential for drought or flood, were equally as deadly in the colony. More important were their relations with the Aborigines who were not afraid of defending their territory against anyone they saw as a threat. Those that did

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78 Collins, ed.. *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales...*, vol. 1, 110.
79 Thompson, *Slavery and Famine*, 36.
82 Thompson, *Slavery and Famine*, 36.
abscond, and successfully avoided conflict with the natives often starved to death from
being unable to identify what native plants they could subsist on. One man, near death
from starvation managed to find his way back to camp, but others were not so lucky. Any
venture beyond the guarded perimeter was a risky business.  

Conceptually it is hard to think how a penal colony like New South Wales existed
for so long. Without walls to keep prisoners within a given area, it would seem easy to
escape. The most important thing to remember is that there was nowhere to escape to. For
the hopeful, a myth persisted that if one could flee the clutches of their administrative
overseers, and proceed North, they would eventually reach “China by land,” or some
other free settlement “where labour would not be imposed on them.” These convicts
were planning on “subsisting themselves on oysters and other shell-fish,” until they
reached the mythical Chinese settlements on the North coast. Others attempted to
escape by sea, either planning to stow away aboard supply ships, or by building their own
boats. One female convict was “supposed to have effected her escape; but she was found
disguised in men’s apparel at the native’s hut on the east point of the cove.”
Reverend Samuel Marsden, who lived in early New South Wales, recalled that four convicts who
escaped in 1790 were found living with Aborigines five years later. The convicts knew
the consequences of attempting escape and the prospect of starvation, or being killed by
the natives was a calculated risk for those who sought to flee from slave labor.

83 Arthur Phillip, The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay... (Adelaide: Libraries
Board of South Australia, 1968), 118; Collins, ed. An Account of the English Colony in
New South Wales... . 23, 48; For more information about relations with the aborigines
see Wilbur R. Jacobs, “The Fatal Confrontation: Early Native-White Relations on the
Frontiers of Australia, New Guinea, and America: A Comparative Study,” The Pacific
Historical Review 40 no. 3 (1971): 283-309.
84 Collins, ed. An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales..., vol. 1, 195; this
story is confirmed by Governor Hunter. See Hunter, An Historical Journal, 564.
85 Barrington, A Voyage to Botany Bay, 82.
87 Ibid., 140; Escape of unskilled convicts posed few problems for the colony. In one
instance however, a ship headed to New South Wales had to “stop a leak which she
spring in her aft port,” and “eight of her ten male convicts found means to make their
escape.” This proved to be detrimental to the colony because “they had been particularly
selected as men who might be useful to the colony.” See Ibid., 245. This also poses an
interesting question. Did the English judicial system select individuals for transportation
based on their skills? Could their skills have influenced a verdict against them?; David
When the First Fleet arrived early in 1788, Governor Phillip was essentially a military dictator, and had the power to use the convicts as he saw fit. His first priority was to clear ground, build roads and buildings, and grow a public garden. An ideology of survival outweighed any drive for economic development in the early years. In a letter to the first Viscount Sydney, Thomas Townshend, Phillip lamented that for the near term a public monopoly of labor was necessary, but if New South Wales ever wanted to become anything more than a self-sustaining colony, then it was a “necessity [that] the convicts [be] employed by those who have an interest in their labour.”

Officers had been assigned convicts, but as they had seen their stay as being only temporary, they had little interest in the development of the colony. It was therefore, necessary to introduce free permanent settlers who would benefit directly from convict labor. Phillip explained to Lord Sydney that this plan was “most likely to render this Settlement independent for the necessaries of life in the shortest time possible.” Scholars have defended Phillip’s move to outsource convict labor to private settlers by reminding readers that the masters did not own the convicts, the government did. Thus, they argue, “the convicts were not like slaves, and their masters not corrupted by power.” Yet who owned the convicts mattered little, because it was their labor that was the source of their true value for the masters.

The public use of convict labor was controversial, and unprecedented. Jeremy Bentham pointed this out in his argument against “this new transportation system.”

Because they were being used for the public benefit, “therefore, without interest, as well as without any other than a very loose inspection — the effect of it was in this respect such as from the nature of man might be expected.” Under the old system, Bentham argued, the master had a more watchful eye on his work and “by the tie of personal interest, to extract from him as much labour as could be extracted.” And though he admitted he “never could bring myself to see any real advantage derived by the mother country, from anything that ever bore the name Colony,” at least the old system had its merits.  

George Thompson observed the convicts laboring and noted that the government received their pound of flesh, because “it was not uncommon for seven or eight to die in one day, and very often while at work, they being kept in the field till the last moment, and frequently while being carried to the hospital.”

Phillip agreed with Bentham’s critique that if the convicts were only to be used by the government, the colony could never become more than self-sufficient. He urged that free settlers be brought into New South Wales to rectify this deficiency. As the convict, Alexander Harris, pointed out, this necessitated an alternative image of New South Wales as a flourishing benevolent colony waiting for its riches to be exploited. Historian, J. B. Hirst, has argued that convicts benefited greatly from the government assigning their labor to private individuals. Hirst has also criticized scholars for paying too much attention to the temperament of the master as the determining factor in the lives of the convicts. This stance essentially exculpates the master class and denies agency to the few convicts who were able to express their discontent with their treatment. Thomas

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93 Thompson, *Slavery and Famine*, 36.
Watling, a convict transported to New South Wales for the crime of forgery, suggested that there was perhaps nothing more important than having a good master:

He must abide upon the colony and become the property of some haughty despot; or be lent about as an household utensil to his neighbours — there to exert these abilities, without any other emoluments than illiberal reflection; for the least apparent murmuring would instantly be construed as insolence, and could not fail, though he had faithfully served years, to damn him for ever in this life — for it would be burthened by cruelty, hunger, and the most laborious of employment.\(^95\)

Watling knew that convict servants had to be careful if they wanted to avoid the wrath of their masters.\(^96\)

In New South Wales the government used both rewards and punishments to impose social control. Because there were few free settlers in the early years, cooperative convicts often had to serve as intermediaries between the administration and slave laborers. They served as overseers, and even in the New South Wales Corps, the paramilitary body responsible for policing the colony. Other convicts participated in night watches and patrolled for suspicious activity after sundown. For those felons who showed good behavior, the government created ways to reward them with more freedom. These convicts were given a “ticket-of-leave,” which essentially amounted to a form of parole on the condition of good behavior. Freedom was also a commodity given to those who would share information about plots to escape or rebel.\(^97\)

The government was just as apt to use capital punishment to correct rebellious behavior in the colony. One young man, James Bennet, was caught stealing, and after a trial “he was executed immediately on receiving his sentence, in the hope of making a


\(^{96}\) Michael Dunn has also suggested that the privatizing of convict labor was tantamount to a form of slavery. See M. Dunn, “Early Australia; Wage Labour or Slave Society?” in *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. 1, eds. E. L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (Sydney: A.N.Z. Book Co., 1975), 33; Flannery, ed., *The Birth of Sydney*, 346.

greater impression on the convicts than if it had been delayed for a day or two.”98 The government used corporal punishment as an illustration of its control over its convict laborers on many occasions. Lt. Governor King remembered that there was a man by the name of Mr. Dodd, “who had for some time been authorized by the governor to inflict corporal punishment on the convicts for idleness, rioting, or other misdemeanors.” Dodd was so feared and, “had obtained such an influence over them, that military coercion was not so necessary as when the settlement was first established.”99

Historians who have argued that colonial Australia was far from a slave society have been quick to note that masters were forbidden to personally inflict corporal punishment. This no doubt is meant to mark another distinction between the penal colony and the slave society, yet just because they were not punished directly by their masters, does not mean they were not punished brutally. One could even argue that their plight was worse than that of slaves. Unlike with African slaves, masters did not have to pay for convicts and their obligations were only to feed, clothe, and house them. Therefore they had little interest in their wellbeing, and when a convict would not cooperate with a master, he would simply threaten to bring the problem before a magistrate. It was the government itself that dispensed the most gruesome punishments to the convicts. Since the expansion of the colony relied so heavily upon the continued immigration of free settlers, it was in the magistrates’ interest to side with masters in any dispute with their assigned convict slaves.100

Alexander Harris saw these punishments first-hand during his sixteen-year sentence in Australia and remembered that “flogging in this country is such a common thing that nobody thinks anything of it.”101 Harris noted that there was a convict that received 2,600 lashes over 5 years, whose worst crime was “insolence” to his overseer.

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100 Clark, _A History of Australia_, vol. 1, 242.
101 Harris, _Settlers and Convicts_, 14.
a journal entry by Lt. Ralph Clark, the officer noted that convict, John Howard, received 500 lashes “for Selling his Slops which were Issued out to him by the Public and for telling a Liy.” Another convict was to receive 200 lashes for “Selling his Slops,” while a third convict was ordered to receive 100 lashes for being late to work. One prisoner was convicted of stealing eight pence worth of soap from a fellow convict. He received 500 lashes. Harris argued that the “disgusting brutality,” of the convict system “exceeds anything I ever yet heard of as practised under the sanction of British law.”

George Thompson remembered that there was such a thing as a “Botany Bay dozen,” which he explained was “twenty-five lashes.” That paled in comparison to the harsher punishments because “if the crime is such as would be punished by a dozen on board a ship, or on shore in England, it is here punished with two or three hundred.”

Harris was being genuine when he said that “the free settlers governed their men with capriciousness and by terror,” but it was the wrath of the government that the convicts truly feared. Henry George Grey, the third Earl Grey, who served as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, recognized that “the assigned servants were in fact slaves, and there is only too painful proof that in many instances the evils inseparable from slavery were experienced.” Besides corporal punishment, the colonial government had another tool in their arsenal to enforce social control. Convicts could be banished from New South Wales and sent to Norfolk Island, a sentence equivalent of a master in the American colonies selling a slave down river. Lt. Governor King remarked that Norfolk Island was, “an useful appendage to the principal settlement,” as “a place of

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104 Harris, *Settlers and Convicts* 14; Another convict was sentenced to 300 lashes for robbing his master. See Collins, ed., *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales...* vol. 1, 208.

105 Thompson, *Slavery and Famine*, 37.

confinement for some of her worst members.” At Norfolk Island, convicts were punished for any dispute with a soldier, “even if the soldier has been in fault.” On August 17, 1793, Benjamin Rogers “was punished with twenty-five lashes, ordered to wear an iron collar, and be kept in the jail-gang for two months,” even though it was widely acknowledged that the quarrel he was in was not his own fault. Anyone who was ordered to do work, and neglected their responsibilities were “deemed and held to be of the most dangerous and pernicious… and therefore be adjudged to suffer death.”

British convicts were a source of slave labor even during times when there were few being sent to New South Wales. Historians of New South Wales have noted that during the Napoleonic Wars, there was a precipitous decline in the number of convicts being sent to the colony. During the war, instead of sending convicts to the remote settlement on the other side of the world, they were impressed into the military. It is significant that the government had no qualms about trading one type of slavery for another.

Even the language used to describe a convict after his or her sentence had expired connotes an association with slavery. These ex-convicts have been termed “emancipists,” by both contemporaries and the historians who write about them. One cannot be emancipated unless they were in bondage, and though J. B. Hirst has argued that New South Wales did not transform into a free society because “at no stage had the society erected any barriers to freedom,” there is an abundance of evidence to suggest otherwise. Other historians have made educated guesses about when this transformation may have occurred, but perhaps more importantly Philip McMichael has

reminded scholars that this transition to a free society was anything but inevitable. Convict transportation was stopped to New South Wales in the 1840s but continued to Van Diemen’s Land until the mid 1850s and in Western Australia to the late 1860s, and while this meant unconditional freedom for white convicts, the end of transportation to New South Wales may have influenced the creation of an unofficial race-based slavery system to replace it.¹¹¹

Arthur Phillip aspired to achieve a peaceful co-existence with the aboriginal inhabitants of New South Wales. Though relations between the European colonizers and the native inhabitants were tenuous, nothing resembling race-based slavery would take hold as long as the government possessed a never-ending supply of convict laborers. The decline of transportation caused class tensions as the sentences of the last convicts expired. As convict slavery was phased out, those who had built their wealth on that institution feared a system where they had to provide more than just food, clothing, and shelter to their workers. In order to compensate for the transition to wage labor, a new class structure was created that included South Sea Islanders and Aborigines who became enslaved in a system of bondage already well established in the Australian colonies.\textsuperscript{112}

Recently, historian Gerald Horne has written an account about the illegal acquisition and kidnapping of islanders in the Pacific, a practice known as “blackbirding.” He argues that there was a dramatic increase in American immigration to the Australian colonies during the 1850s and 1860s. The timing of this is not coincidental for Horne, as he points to a small but not insignificant number of former Confederate soldiers who immigrated presumably at the end of the war. Consequently, these Americans brought with them the seeds of racism and a desire to continue their “American” slaving practices. While there is an interesting correlation in the timing of the transition to race based slavery in Australia, the suggestion that Americans single-handedly influenced the class structure of the Australian colonies may require more

\textsuperscript{112} Gerald Horne, \textit{The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 17. Originally laborers were to be imported from India, but the Indian government was reluctant to legalize the trade, therefore Australian plantation owners were forced to look elsewhere. See Kay Saunders, \textit{Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland 1824-1916} (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 14, 16.
evidence to be accepted. It should also be noted that while the labor trade did not pick up until the late 1860s, the first instance of recruiting South Sea Islanders in fact began with Benjamin Boyd’s attempt to acquire laborers in 1847, many years before the Confederacy existed. Robert Towns, an entrepreneur who started a cotton plantation in Queensland during the American Civil War, desperately sought to acquire workers from India, and followed Boyd in trying to recruit from the surrounding Pacific islands in 1863.113

Horne has perhaps given too much credit to the Americans as the movers of this race-based system of slavery in Australia. During this transition period between 1840-1860, there was already a well-established system of convict slavery that only needed a new influx of laborers, and an excuse to hold them in bondage to keep it going. Queensland has been the focus of several historians’ efforts to uncover this still enigmatic process of labor acquisition. In that colony, cash crops like those raised on slave plantations in the New World dominated the local economy. Cotton and sugar became the staples, alongside the already prevalent practice of keeping sheep and cattle. Horne reminds readers that much like in the United States, Queenslanders believed that the darker the skin, the more suited the worker would be to the tropical climate. William T. Wawn, a captain of a ship involved in the trade from 1875 to 1891, argued that this type of recruitment was necessary “to develop the resources of this region… to find a class of labourers better able to endure the climate than Europeans, as well as to work at a cheaper rate.”114

Estimates of South Sea Islanders brought to Queensland in the late nineteenth century range from 48,000 to more than 60,000.115 Ships that “recruited” these laborers

used a variety of tactics to lure them aboard. Some blatantly kidnapped the islanders out of their boats, or straight off the island. Others used a tactic known as “the eye drop,” in which a sailor tossed large iron weights into canoes close to the ship to force them in a position where the natives had to climb aboard or drown in a sinking canoe. One notorious ship captain, Ross Lewin, intimidated islanders by burning down their homes and crops. As these practices became more prevalent and the islanders grew more suspicious, deception became the favored method. At least one crew disguised themselves as missionaries in order to deceive the natives into believing that they were not there for labor recruitment, but to spread the gospel. When the ship’s crew sensed the time was right, the order was given to force the islanders on board. Other shipmasters deceived the islanders into signing indentures, the contract being a European invention they had no conception of. Still more were lured aboard with promises of valuable gifts like tobacco. Once on board these ships, many were locked away, much like the African slaves during the middle passage, and the convict slaves who were transported to New South Wales.

Proponents of the so-called “labor trade” used the same arguments as the defenders of the African slave trade, that by means of bringing the islanders into white society and forcing them to labor they were essentially “civilizing” them. Captain Wawn argued that the hard labor experienced by the islanders, much like that imposed upon the convicts, reformed them into civilized individuals: “I noticed a great difference between these Fiji “returns” and the majority of labourers from Queensland. The latter were vastly superior in manners, personal appearance, and intelligence.” Though he freely admitted that, “the Fijian boys, after their experience of hard work under a just and reasonable employer, no doubt presented signs of improvement on the original savage,” he nevertheless argued that “these were noticeable, however, to a far greater extent in the Queensland “returns,” who had mingled with white labourers on comparatively familiar

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terms.” Wawn even suggested that if he looked around the New Hebrides at just “a hundred of the inhabitants,” he could “pick out forty-five of the fifty solely by their personal appearance. They would present a healthier aspect, possess more muscular frames, and be devoid of the furtive, “wild dog” expression which the genuine savage usually wears.”

Once in Queensland, islanders had a mortality rate that was five to six times higher than those of European descent. The reputation of the trade became so notorious, that the Queensland government was forced to pass the Polynesian Labourer’s Act in 1868. This act aimed to regulate the trade punitively by requiring recruiters to sign a £500 bond guarantee that none of the islanders being transported aboard were kidnapped. Great Britain followed up shortly thereafter by sending the H.M.S. Rosario, under the command of Albert Hastings Markham, to police the labor trade in the New Hebrides and Santa Cruz.

For some, regulating the trade was not enough. Reverend D. MacDonald, a missionary who lived in the New Hebrides, wrote a pamphlet imploring that action be taken to end the trade. His work, The Labour Traffic versus Christianity in the South Sea Islands (1878), argued that the labor trade was a form of slavery, and anti-Christian as it competed with the spread of the gospel throughout the region. Indeed, the trade “has prevented multitudes of the possibility of learning the way of salvation,” and “…is not only responsible for the ruin of men as far as this world is concerned, but also for the ruin of men’s souls, their eternal ruin.” He suggested that the reason traders blocked the work

of the missionaries was simple: “the more ignorant the natives are, the more money the traffic makes out of them.”  

As much as Reverend MacDonald argued against the trade, he did not necessarily do it for humanitarian reasons or even because he thought slavery was wrong. In fact, he thought that slavery for life would improve the situation of the South Sea Islanders:

It would be better for the Papuans if they were bought for life than it is at present; it would be better for them as a race, and better for them as individuals having an eternal destiny. For it would then be the interest of the planter to preserve them and secure their increase, and in the course of time they would become christianised as the African slaves were in America; whereas at present they are being exterminated, and the work of christianisation is being immensely retarded, if not frustrated.  

As for the Islanders themselves, it is clear that MacDonald believed they were subhuman. That was why Christianity was needed in the region because, the “missionaries were a kind of guardians for these savages.” They needed protection because “they are like children or idiots,” and cannot defend themselves from the labor trade. Indeed, without Christianity they are, “as helpless or as easily imposed upon as a child, or an idiot, or one of the lower animals.” He also explained that he had no hard feelings against his fellow countrymen involved in the trade and that, “underlying it all there is a personal friendliness; do not both parties speak the same mother-tongue, and inherit the memories of the same grand national history?”  

By the 1880s, Pacific Islander labor was being supplemented with native aboriginals, who like the convicts preceding them, were not given a wage but paid in food, clothing, and blankets. Native Mounted Police gave potential Aboriginal workers to employers, and by one estimate over half of the employees of Northern cattle stations were natives. In Queensland, killing cattle was one of the few forms of resistance strategies Aboriginals could use against the encroachment of white settlement. South Sea Islanders and Aboriginals replaced convict slaves as the lowest class of workers in the

121 Ibid., 8, 14, 20.
Australian colonies and their status signaled a return to a race-based system of slave labor in the British Empire.\textsuperscript{122}

CONCLUSION

In the eighteenth century, slavery was not just an Atlantic phenomenon limited to the trade of Africans in the American colonies. It was a global issue, and was acknowledged as such even by contemporaries as it economically depleted the work available to the lowest class of laborers in England. The Georgia plan, created by the Trustees, was designed to solve this problem by exporting the poor to America in the hope that they could be morally reformed through the hard labor needed to create a colony. There, race-based slavery was illegal, and they could readily find employment. Georgia was the first step to ending the slave trade for good. If successful, the new colony would have been an exemplar that colonialism need not depend on the African slave trade, but could be sustained by the work of their own citizens.

The fact that Georgia failed did not eliminate the recognition that a new colonial paradigm was needed. By the 1780s, the desperate need to transport droves of convicts led to a plan to create the “penal” colony in New South Wales. The sentence of transportation, supposedly a reprieve from death, provided the colonial government under Arthur Phillip with a limitless supply of slave laborers. Instead of reforming the poor before they committed crimes like the Georgia colony was designed to, transportation was used to reform them after they committed the crime, essentially guaranteeing a steady source of slave laborers needed to create a colony. The Australian colonies had become totally dependent on that labor model, and once transportation ceased, planters turned to race-based slavery by kidnapping South Sea Islanders. This became an embarrassment for an empire that had outlawed the slave trade in 1807, and slavery as a whole in 1833. Indentured servitude also made a comeback after slavery was abolished, but instead of coming from Europe, these laborers came from the Pacific as Asian and Indian laborers found work in colonies like Trinidad, Jamaica, and Cuba.
Convict slaves were not just relegated to the American colonies before the Revolution, and the Australian colonies after. Bermuda, perhaps one of the most valuable West Indian colonies also received a steady supply of convict laborers in the eighteenth century. This new paradigm of colonization was mimicked by the French in the Pacific, and there were even proposals in the United States to use convicts as slave laborers to create a colony in Alaska. It is perhaps no wonder that the British were able to end their participation in the African slave trade as early as they did. A never-ending supply of English convicts could replace the more expensive trade in African slaves.\textsuperscript{123}

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