



Levites in Charge of the Ark of Culture: The Morant Bay Rebellion and Racial Justice among Eminent Victorians

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ABSTRACT

On October 11, 1865, black laborers in Jamaica rebelled and attacked the Court House, symbol of white oppression. The inspirational leader was George William Gordon, a Baptist minister, mulatto ex-Magistrate, and member of the House of Assembly who had a history of emotive exchanges with the colonial governor, Edward John Eyre. Their disagreements were over wages, taxation, poverty, food insecurity, and civil rights violation. Gordon was accused of instigating the Rebellion, court martialed, and then hanged. Victorians quickly took sides in the controversy, some, mostly from the literary community, siding with Eyre, and others, largely from the scientific community, wanting Eyre prosecuted. Eyre subsequently was recalled but not prosecuted. Racial justice, this essay argues, emerged central to the controversy, a discrete case that called into question the role of the humanities in culture, what one observer, championing its value, has referred to as “Levites in charge of the ark of culture”. Those from the non-humanities campaigned stridently for racial justice.

KEYWORDS: Racial justice; Carlyle; Gordon; Eyre; Morant Bay

Levitas encarregados da arca da cultura: a Rebelião de Morant Bay e a justiça racial entre vitorianos eminentes

RESUMO

Em 11 de outubro de 1865, trabalhadores negros na Jamaica se rebelaram e atacaram o tribunal, símbolo da opressão branca. O líder inspirador foi George William Gordon, um pastor batista, mestiço, ex-magistrado e membro da Assembleia Legislativa, que tinha um histórico de trocas acaloradas com o governador colonial Edward John Eyre. Seus desentendimentos envolviam salários, tributação, pobreza, insegurança alimentar e violações de direitos civis. Gordon foi acusado de instigar a rebelião, julgado por uma corte marcial e depois enforcado. Os vitorianos rapidamente tomaram partido na controvérsia: alguns, principalmente da comunidade literária, apoiaram Eyre, enquanto outros, em grande parte da comunidade científica, queriam que Eyre fosse processado. Eyre acabou sendo destituído do cargo, mas não processado. Este ensaio argumenta que a justiça racial emergiu como elemento central da controvérsia, um caso específico que colocou em questão o papel das humanidades na cultura — o que um observador, defendendo seu valor, chamou de “levitas encarregados da arca da cultura”. Aqueles fora do campo das humanidades fizeram campanha vigorosa pela justiça racial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Justiça racial; Carlyle; Gordon; Eyre; Morant Bay



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The Caribbean Island of Jamaica was a valuable colony for its sugar production on which Great Britain relied for domestic consumption and to execute its military adventurism. Along with India, Jamaica was where the English turned to diagnose the condition of the colonial question and served as the proving ground for the young, English planter class. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the island became the fictional home of Fairfax Rochester and Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's gothic romance and governess novel, *Jane Eyre*. But Jamaica had long been a flashpoint for Rebellion, including Maroons insurgencies. A report drawing from original documents to justify the actions of Eyre observed the long history of Rebellion on the island: "There have been no less than *four* serious and *ten* minor insurrections in Jamaica in about a hundred years: one in 1760, another in 1795, the third in 1832, and the most memorable in October 1865" (Eyre Defence..., 1866, p. 8).

After years of neglect, the depressed sugar market, social unrest over the loss of jobs because of cheap, imported labor from India, exorbitant taxes, fears of being re-enslaved, and increased food insecurities ("steal or starve"), exacerbated by the economic fallout from the American Civil War (1861-1865), Jamaica had become "a colony in decline" (Heuman, 1991, p. 109).¹ Economic conditions and repeated but neglected ameliorations primed the island for Rebellion. "Conditions in Jamaica during the summer of 1865 did not improve" (Heuman, 1991, p. 118), leading to the Morant Bay Rebellion, when black laborers, spurred on by Paul Bogle, attacked the Court House, symbol of white oppression. Over a month-long conflict, eighteen government officials were killed, including the chief magistrate, approximately five hundred protestors were killed, an equal number tortured and beaten, and many of their homes torched. George William Gordon, a mulatto ex-Magistrate and member of the House of Assembly, was accused of inciting the riot. Gordon had always agitated for reform and if not rebellion. He and Edward John Eyre, appointed Colonial Governor in 1862, had a history of emotive exchanges in which Gordon, invoking the dreaded specter of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804),² warned Eyre repeatedly that resistance to black suffrage and unmitigated support of the plantocracy would eventually spark Rebellion. Though Gordon had led several protest meetings and was surrounded by a cadre of active participants in the Rebellion (Paul Bogle, James McLaren, and Samuel Clarke), he took no active role in the Morant Bay uprising and was not even physically present. Eyre, however, on October 20, 1865, had him forcibly removed from Kingston to Morant Bay, an area

¹ For more on events leading up the Rebellion and its causative factors, see Heuman (1991).

² "In England", James Anthony Froude later recalled, "the massacre in Hayti is a half-forgotten story. Not one person in a thousand of those who clamoured for the prosecution of Governor Eyre had probably ever heard of it. In Jamaica it is ever present in the minds of the Europeans as a frightful evidence of what the negroes are capable when roused to frenzy... It was inevitable that when the volcano in Jamaica began to show symptoms of similar activity the whites residing there should be unable to look on with the calmness which we, from thousands of miles away, unreasonably expected of them. They imagined their houses in flames, and themselves and their families at the mercy of a furious mob" (Froude, 1888, p. 258).



under martial law, arrested, charged with insurrection, court-martialed during a sham, six-hour trial (with one witness for the accuser and 5 for the prosecution), and subsequently hanged. The outnumbered white minority in Jamaica considered Eyre a hero, and initially the Home Office supported him. But almost immediately, public outcry accused Eyre of acting recklessly and transgressing his authority. Eyre boasted an enviable record of humanitarian acts, especially towards oppressed people, but he had recently drawn criticism for financial mismanagement and for running roughshod over the British House of Assembly in Jamaica.

Called “one of the most acrimonious controversies in modern history” (Ford, 1948, p. 219), the Eyre controversy attracted extremist positions around whether in quelling the insurrection Eyre was an exemplary, manly British hero (like a General Gordon, of whom *Punch* would later do a large cut of him rescued in the Khartoum) Victorians have historically venerated in their cult of hero worship, or whether he was a heartless butcher of blacks. Victorians from Great Britain’s leading minds were divided politically. As George H. Ford (1948, p. 222, 229) has observed, “England was split into two camps, over an issue which engaged the passions of many men”, and “the interesting feature of the Eyre case in England was that it served as infallible reagent. It brought out a writer’s true color”. Most leading figures from the humanities, like Ruskin, whose color was “fundamentally old-fashioned blue” (Ford, 1948, p. 229), supported Eyre, along with John Tyndall, the sole scientific exception, whose close friendship with Carlyle trumped everything. On the contrary, Eyre detractors were men of science, and mostly evolutionists. The positions of both groups were informed by racist and colonialist politics. Also under contestation was what Catherine Hall (1989, p. 184) characterizes as “different notions as to what constituted a proper English manhood”. The conflict offered the English middle-class “two different identities, two different subjectivities”, both of which “depended for their articulation on a sense of difference, both from black men and from black and white women”. But it was the “particular vision of manhood” that “was to contribute to the construction of popular imperialism in the late nineteenth century”. The Eyre controversy, this essay argues, became an indictment of the humanities in its claim for the moral high ground. But there was more at stake in the Jamaica insurrection — racial justice. As far as John Stuart Mill was concerned, and as this essay will argue, the controversy circumscribed the very character of justice and a just society.

The Morant Bay Rebellion, in the words of Leonard Huxley, became “the touchstone of ultimate political convictions” (Semmel, 1962, p. 14), leading to what Hall (1989, p. 168) sees as the “discursive construction of the category ‘black’ but also to the available ethnic and gendered identities of the English middle class”. Those who sided with Carlyle and Eyre were mostly writers, whose appreciation of justice and understanding of an imagined community, one might have thought, would have prompted serious questions about social justice. But this was not the case. Eyre, for example, had become “indoctrinated with some of the theories of Thomas Carlyle”, and “had come to believe, after Carlyle, that the best way to handle the grievances of negroes was by the use of strong measures” (Ford, 1948, p. 220). The Eyre case is fascinating to “anyone interested in the Victorian world of letters” (Ford, 1948, p. 219). Eyre’s detractors, in contrast, emerged from the scientific community. Matthew Arnold, around the same time, was arguing for the centrality of the humanities to the morality of culture, insisting that literary,

and not scientific, studies were best suited to nurture a critical sense of values, what Thomas Huxley (1888, p. 24) describes as the humanities in “possession of the monopoly of culture”. Arnold’s humanists, “Levites in charge of the ark of culture” (Huxley, 1888, p. 9), clearly called into question the moral imperative behind the humanities in the Eyre case. As Mill (1989, p. 217) recalled in his *Autobiography*, the altercation was catalyzed by “injustice”. Frequent associations between the Jamaican uprising and the rebels in Haiti, the “niggers” of the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858), and of turning Jamaica into an independent republic brought the point acutely home. John Tenniel’s cartoon, “The British Lion’s Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger” (Tenniel, 1857, p. 76-77), depicting the British Lion attacking a Bengal Tiger, served as a semiological threat to colonies contemplating rebellion.

Although never chiming univocally, *Punch, or the London Charivari* (1841-1992; 1996-2002), the preeminent English magazine on satire, irony, sarcasm, burlesque, cartoons, caricatures, and ridicule, with its ability to capture and channel the national sentiment, engaged the controversy completely, subscribing essays and cartoons about it, all of them favorable to Eyre. Within months of the insurrection, the December 2, 1865, issue of the magazine featured an article, “Last Case of Colour-Blindness”, which recalls the Morant Bay Rebellion, the “fearful business in Jamaica”, and grossly exaggerated events meant to incite English hysteria:

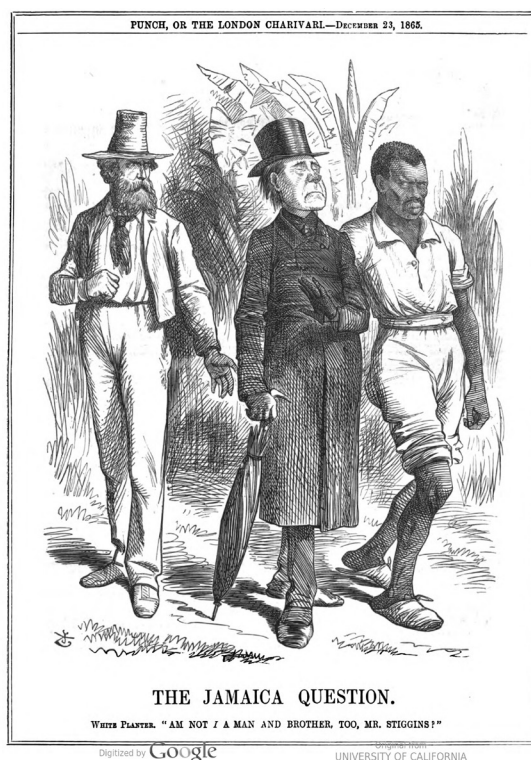
Blacks rioted, were fired upon, and the riot became madness. The blacks slew many whites, and the massacre was attended by incidents too revolting to be described in pages usually devoted to pleasantness. It must, however, be stated that a young clergyman was hewn in pieces, and that the blacks enacted hideous orgies, devouring the brains of their victims. A terrible vengeance descended upon the savages, and shot, steel, and cord came into stern use. A great slaughter was made (Last Case..., 1865, p. 216).

Linking the Morant Bay Rebellion the Indian Munity, the December 2, 1865, anonymous essay was directed to members of the Jamaica Committee demanding Eyre’s recall and prosecution, observing that “a small white population, eight times outnumbered by the negroes, and suddenly confronted by the foulest horrors of savage warfare” determined to terrorize “wives and little children”. Yet, “All we hear is a howl about the severity exercised upon the poor dear blacks”. The essay cites a letter from Dr. Burns, “a shining light among the advocates of the blacks”, who “has not a word of regret for his brother Christian minister... chopped to pieces by the blacks”. It points to the impending Parliamentary inquiry on the Rebellion, and that “if injustice has been done, it will appear, and no Englishman will defend it”. Whereas the British has always “advocated Justice to men of all colours”, even when “universal philanthropy was not the fashion, and was not exactly rewarded with ovations”, we cannot turn a blind eye to the outrage against “all decent Englishmen” (Last Case..., 1865, p. 216).

On December 23, 1865, in the wake of the Rebellion and the attempt by Eyre to quell it, *Punch* followed up with John Tenniel’s “The Jamaica Question”, in which a White Planter invokes the famous abolitionists motto, “Am Not I A Man and a Brother Too, Mr. Stiggins!” The cartoon features the sanctimonious evangelical, Baptist minister, Mr. Stiggins, perhaps in the profile of John Stuart Mill, locked arm in arm with a negro laborer, who is led away from the plantation.

A white planter, with an extended hand, pleads for recognition.³ The tropically set cartoon with sugarcane in the background reflects concerns of the laborer over the neglect of the planter and highlights the controversy over Exeter Hall philanthropists, missionary activities, especially from the Baptist, colonial governance, and race (Figure 1). Referencing a scare-mongering letter, “The Jamaica Insurrection”, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* from a white shop owner who provided rum to conciliate black protestors, Percival Leigh’s “Poor Innocent Blacks!” which appeared in the magazine on January 13, 1866, addresses Exeter Hall and the Baptists in Jamaica about their “judgment against Governor Eyre!” Employing the trope of a pantomime, Leigh, one of the co-founders of the magazine and “the Professor” at the *Punch* Table (Leary, 2010, p. 22), considers blacks animals and children who lisps and babble in “broken English”, asking only to excuse Eyre, “Shall the little excesses of their innocents be called outrages, and atrocities?” The answer: “Oh no, no!” Rather than put down the insurgency, the preferred genocidal option, given black addiction to alcohol, is “give them rum, then; do not hang them nor shoot them. Rum and hot water, with certain lumps of sugar in it, and a squeeze of lemon” (Leigh, 1866, p. 15).

FIGURE 1. “The Jamaica Question” by John Tenniel



Source: The University of California. Courtesy of HathiTrust.

³ The allusion to Stiggins might be to Reverend Mr. Stiggins from Dickens’s *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), a member of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association. Stiggins is the hypocritical, alcoholic, and “red-nosed” preacher who serves as a fraudulent “shepherd” to a religious group. Dubbed “the shepherd” by Mrs. Weller, he exploits her piety, is addicted to money, and is a satirical caricature of evangelical, narrow-minded, puritanical preachers of the Victorian era. The connection to Jamaica comes from the famous coffeeshop turned London pub in the heart of London’s financial district, the Jamaica Wine House, or the Jamaica Tavern, known familiarly as “Jampot”, because of Jamaica’s pivotal role in British sugar and coffee production. The pub was a frequent haunt of Dickens during his work on *The Pickwick Papers*, and is believed to be the model for Ebenezer Scrooge’s counting house in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*.

“Brooks, Lemon, Leigh, and Mayhew formed a bare majority in favour of a Large Cut defending Eyre, while Silver, Taylor and the Agnews disagreed, with Taylor declaring, ‘I will have no hand in the Cut’” (Leary, 2010, p. 51). Shirley Brooks’s “Exeter Hall Spite”, for January 27, 1866, informs *Punch*’s readers that Exeter Hall and the Baptists with their “nigger sermons” have hired an attorney “who goes to Jamaica to do his best or worst against Governor Eyre” and to do “all the mischief possible”. Brooks was confident that “much of this holy spite will be defeated” because of the “amateur commission”. The “real commission”, however, will reveal that “a house was on fire, and that the firemen who put it out worked with a will and successfully”. Slighting the damage done to property and the loss of lives in the insurrection, Brooks kept up his analogy of a house on fire: “Englishmen do not, on such occasions, make a riot because some of the water may have broken a few windows, even though they were the windows of a Baptist chapel” (Brooks, 1866, p. 42). Brooks’s analogy resonates with Carlyle’s, which he perhaps heard during a meeting of the Eyre Defence and Aid Committee.

Whereas *Punch*, like the conservative *Times*, deplored Eyre’s prosecution, “Brooks’s involvement was direct and personal” (Leary, 2010, p. 122). For the February 10, 1866, issue of *Punch*, he produced a poem attacking Exeter Hall. “The Bold Governor Eyre and the Bulls of Exeter Hall”, subtitled, “A Song for the Streets”, opens with the location of Exeter Hall⁴ on the posh Strand in London where attendees congregate “to hear spouters abuse”, and “fanatics howl nonsense” from “the big bulls of Bashan in Exeter Hall”. The poem further indicts Exeter Hall for its sympathetic, philanthropic stance towards disenfranchised people, its “pets”, accuses it of “spasmodic bewailings”, “philanthropist squall”, and antipathy to Eyre, attributes the human atrocities by way of projection (“chops up white people and scoops out their brains”, and “horrible murders performed by the Pet”), employs a variation of the Carlylean pejorative “Quashee-Bungo” for indolent West Indian blacks, and praises Eyre, “a brave English Gentleman”, who, for “saving Jamaica with powder and ball, / Has roused all the malice of Exeter Hall”. It also threatens repercussion in the face of black intransigence: “Eyre gave him a lesson he’ll never forget” (Brooks, 1866, p. 62). These attacks by the arch-conservative Brooks were not surprising, given his recognized imperialist and Toryean bent, very much in line with what the once liberal *Punch*, champion of justice and defender of the oppressed, had become. Brooks “thought the dark races were unremediably inferior” (Leary, 2010, p. 121). He had attended a meeting of the Eyre Committee in which Tyndall delivered “a long speech avowing ‘his belief in the dangerous nature of the negro,’ a scientific racism”, as Leary noted, “that was becoming more and more common among organs of the English opinion... Brooks’s aggressive intervention at the Table carried the day for a pro-Eyre Large Cut”. His “political influence on the magazine was pervasive and usually decisive” (Leary, 2010, p. 122, 124).

⁴ Exeter Hall is the familiar assembly for advocates of emancipationist, suffrage, and other philanthropic causes, which to Carlyle became synonymous with Philanthropy, Black Emancipation, Nigger Philanthropy, and the Dismal Science. “Exeter Hall” became a catch phrase for the empty rhetoric of abolitionist, emancipationist, and philanthropic causes.



At the outset, Carlyle's friend, W. E. Forster, celebrated for the Education Act (1870), was involved in the Eyre case. Appointed Under-Secretary for the Colonies only one month after the Morant Bay debacle, he was charged with setting up a Royal Commission of Inquiry, formed on December 12, 1865, to investigate the insurrection. Forster found himself preoccupied with daily Jamaica dispatches. He noted on November 29, 1865, only two days after assuming office, "very bad news from Jamaica of slaughter by the troops and under martial law". Writing to an American friend on January 17, 1866, Forster, who had historically supported subjugated peoples, found it ironic that his "first official experience would be this sad Jamaica business". He blamed the fracas squarely on unfair labor practice: "the efforts of the employers, after emancipation, to obtain labour by law cheaper and on more stringent conditions than the market price and conditions, after they had lost the power of getting it by the task". He felt that employers' attempts to circumvent the law of supply and demand led to "mutual class injuries and class feuds or drive the labourers away" (Reid, 1888, p. 384). Forster wanted to focus attention on the economic conditions that nurtured such disturbance rather than on the employment of coercive labor practice.

Harriet Martineau, whom Carlyle (1972, p. 118) once accused of being "full of Nigger fanaticisms", called the Jamaica situation a "hateful subject... till justice is done". She was convinced that with W. E. Forster in office, "we may hope he will do something" (Martineau, 1983, p. 257). She considered his appointment "an indispensable passage to power, and to more freedom, though not entire, and to the thought of what he may be able to do for Jamaica and the North American colonies". Forster, she felt, would model for England "what a man's work *may* be under the stimulus of such a conscience and such a heart as his" (Reid, 1888, p. 386). But Forster would disappoint his philanthropist friends. He supported Eyre's recall but not his prosecution. His friends could not understand how someone "whose sympathies with the subject and native population were so real and intense, could refuse to listen to their demand for vengeance upon Governor Eyre". Forster was especially conflicted because he felt that he was "more sensitive on the negro question" than anyone else. He assumed, then, a middle position on Eyre—not the hero-worship of Carlyle, nor the demonized image of Eyre created by the Jamaica Committee.⁵ Martineau expressed disappointment and attributed Forster's failure to act to an inability to separate his "Quakerism" from his "official trammels" (1983, p. 274).

Carlyle's first comment on the Rebellion was on December 2, 1865, in a letter to Lady Lothian: "As Great Britn is growing more and more into one universal, sooty, most unlovely Blacksmith's Shop, this questn is evidtly the most importt of all. — What a shriekery is ris- is [sic], rising abt the "Jamaica Massacre", — from a few throats, I can remark, but of choicest

⁵ W. E. Forster concluded: "We can recall him [Eyre] as unfit; we can censure him as a fool; but we have no right to punish him as a criminal". Of his brief involvement in the Eyre case, Forster felt that "There are not many things for which I cannot reproach myself, but the not having a constant, anxious, painful desire to do my duty to the negro and Jamaica during my six months at the Colonial Office is not one of them" (Reid, 1888, p. 387, 389-390). Forster considered Carlyle's diction satanic ("Satan pokes his fingers into all human works"), and felt, somewhat ironically, that as "Clear-eyed" as Carlyle is, he seems also "somewhat one-eyed. His very love of truth leads him into" (Reid, 1888, p. 268).

folly —” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2015, p. 61). On April 10, 1866, his wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle, shared the exchanges she had with Abraham Hayward on the Rebellion:

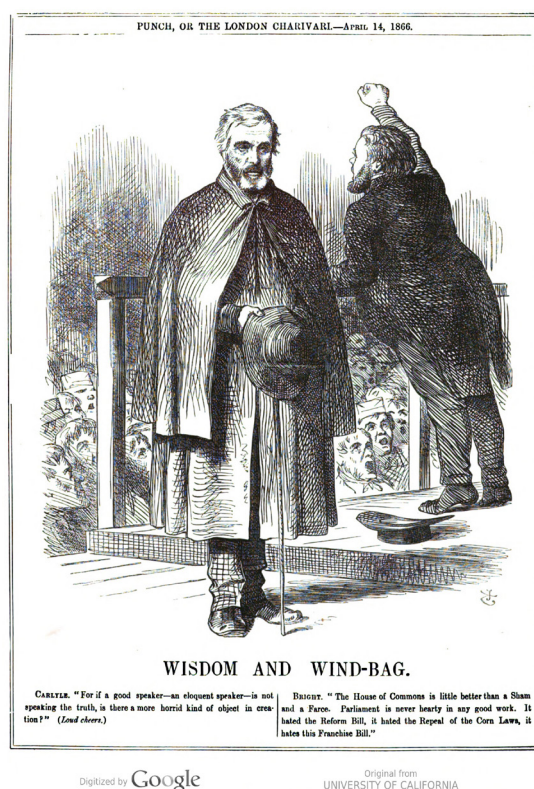
Hayward was raging against the Jamaica business—would have had Eyre cut into small pieces and eaten him raw— He told me *women* might patronize Eyre—that woman were naturally cruel, and rather *liked* to look on *while horrors* were perpetrated. But no man living could stand up for Eyre *now*! “I hope Mr Carlyle does, I said, I haven’t had an opportunity of asking him, but I should be surprised and grieved if I found him sentimentalizing over a pack of black brutes”! (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2015, p. 176-77)

Hayward concluded: “His great aim and philosophy of Life being “*the smallest happiness of the fewest number!*” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2015, p. 177). Perhaps for the first time that I can recall, Jane showed signs of her husband’s racist contamination. This was quite unlike the stance towards blacks she had historically held, once comparing herself to a swarthy washerwoman, and had numerous acrimonious exchanges with her husband over race. But there is much in Jane’s public recitation that seems staged. In her performative act, she was assuming the role of dutiful wife (she would die suddenly two weeks later on April 21, 1866). After all, “establishing his mastery was her job” (Rose, 1983, p. 247), which Carlyle had demanded in that famous prenuptial ordinance. Carlyle replied to Jane the very next day, April 11, 1866:

I fear his loudness indicates a bad humour in the public agt Eyre;—if they do condemn him to censure, for quenching a hideous fire of that kind, by the readiest means he had (*plenty* of water on it till it ceased), I shall never forgive them. Nay (*privately very!*) if Eyre had shot the whole Nigger populatn, & flung them into the sea, wd it probably have been much harm even to *them*, not to speak of *us*? (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2015, p. 178).⁶

The “them” versus “us” binary is the familiar antithetical signifier of black versus white, Other versus Anglo, barbaric versus civilized, animal versus human, apes versus angels, female versus male. Eyre’s action was considered manly by Victorians anxious about their virility in the Victorian spermatic economy but unacceptable to effeminate Exeter-Hall sentimentalists. Simply configured, Eyre was a man and his sentimentalist detractors women.

⁶ On April 14, 1866, John Tenniel’s cartoon, “Wisdom and Wind-bag”, Figure 2, shows the contrasting styles between Carlyle (truth) and John Bright (lies). With back turned to an infuriated mob, Carlyle, depicted as wisdom, asks, “For if a good speaker—an eloquent speaker—is not speaking the truth, is there a more horrid kind of object in creation?” In the 1840s, the radical orator, agitator and Quaker pacifist with arm raised, Bright (Wind-Bag) led to fight over repeal of the Corn Laws (*Punch* sees him birthing it). In the cartoon, Bright rouses the mob in his critique of the House of Commons: “The House of Commons is little better than a Sham and a Farce. Parliament is never hearty in any good work. It hated the Reform Bill, it hated the Repeal of the Corn Laws, it hates this Franchise Bill” (Tenniel, 1866, p. 155). Carlyle and Bright opposed each other on the Reform Bill of 1867. Bright was also a member of Mill’s Jamaica Committee. The cartoon might be capturing his address at a Manchester meeting demanding Eyre prosecution, where he pronounced, “the blood of Gordon and of many less known men cries to heaven for vengeance” (*apud* Ford, 1948, p. 222). See Dickens’s November 13, 1865, letter to Carlyle on his attendance at the Manchester meeting in which Bright accused Eyre of tyranny and wanted him prosecuted. The letter is rife with Carlylean language (Ford, 1948, p. 227).

FIGURE 2. “Wisdom and Wind-bag” by John Tenniel

Source: The University of California. Courtesy of HathiTrust.

For much of the spring of 1866, Carlyle was preoccupied with Jane's death and the funeral arrangements. All other events, leading up to the Rectorship of Edinburgh University, including the Eyre matter, dropped off his radar. It would be resumed on August 11, 1866, when he was invited to join The Eyre Testimonial and Defence Fund (later changed to The Eyre Defence and Aid Fund). The following day, he journeyed to Southampton to attend a banquet welcoming Eyre, where Kingsley was the featured speaker.⁷ Carlyle's August 8, 1866, letter to Lady Ashburton provides clear evidence of his position on the Condition of England Question. "The History of Engl^d", he lamented, "appears to me to get baser and baser every day". Carlyle was reacting to the August 4, 1866, caption from the *Illustrated London News*, "The Mob Pulling Down the Railings in Park-Lane", which so infuriated him that when the invitation came from the Eyre Committee, he was on board. Defending Eyre was of a piece with what he saw as the decline of Great Britain and introduction of mob-rule, what in a December 19, 1868, letter to Gavan Duffy he characterized as "Colonial & British Anarchy" (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2017, p. 211), and the need to preserve English colonial expansionism: "Colonies & Mother-Country sh^d be kept together by every rational & feasible method" (Letter to Sir George Grey, March 25, 1870; Carlyle; Carlyle, 2018, p. 179). Carlyle was also growing closer to the Prussian Nationalist strongman and advocate for German nationalism, Otto von Bismarck, "that most remarkable of

⁷ The mayor of Southampton, S. M. Emanuel, donated £10 to the Eyre Fund and quite likely attended this event. For an analysis of Kingsley's speech, see Ford, 1948, p. 231-232.

living Politicians” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2018, p. 136), the “rugged strength, promptitude, veracity, and generally manful character of the man” (Letter to K. R. H. Mackenzie, December 29, 1869, Carlyle; Carlyle, 2018, p. 126) with “a royal enough physiognomy” whom “I more and more believe him to be a highly considerable man; perhaps the nearest approach to a Cromwell that is well possible in these poor times” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 42). With Bismarck on his mind, Carlyle wrote to Hume on August 23, 1866:

The clamour raised against Governor Eyre appears to me to be disgraceful to the good sense of England... all the light that has yet reached me on Mr. Eyre and his history in the world goes steadily to establish the conclusion that he is a just, humane, and valiant man, faithful to his trusts everywhere, and with no ordinary faculty of executing them; that his late services in Jamaica were of great, perhaps of incalculable value, as certainly they were of perilous and appalling difficulty—something like the case of “fire”, suddenly reported, “in the ship’s powder room”, in mid-ocean (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 43-45).

The letter continued: “The English nation never loved anarchy, nor was wont to spend its sympathy on miserable mad seditions, especially of this inhuman and half-brutish type; but always loved order, and the prompt suppression of seditions” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 45). Carlyle hoped that “many other British men, of far more significance in such a matter, will at once or gradually do the like... what a vital detriment throughout the British Empire, in such an example set to all the colonies and governors the British Empire has”. He promised “the whole weight of my conviction and good wishes is with you, and if other service possible to me do present itself, I shall not want for willingness in case of need. Enclosed is my mite of contribution to your fund” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 46).

Carlyle immediately became involved in the Eyre Defence and Aid Fund Committee, organized by Hamilton Hume, chaired by Sir Roderick Murchison, and Carlyle serving as its titular head. Comprised of some fifty-three members, the committee was established on August 28, 1866, to provide support for Eyre. Its first meeting was on August 29, 1866. Employing what we today call crowdsourcing or Go Fund Me, the Committee decided to invite subscribers and to publish their names. The list grew to over 645. There were several subscriptions of £100, including Ruskin’s. Murchison donated £21, Carlyle and John Forster £10. Some contributors lent their names and others the ideological cause: “One who perceives the necessity of firmness and vigour in those in Authority”; “Indignation on the right side”; “A Lady who suffered by the insurrection and believes Governor Eyre has saved Jamaica to his ungrateful country”; “One who thanks Governor Eyre for saving the lives of Englishmen and Englishwomen”: “From an admirer of a brave and good man.” So seared was the Indian Rebellion (1857) into the British psyche that many subscribers casually connected the two events: “A lady who was in India during the mutiny”; “A Private Soldier who had not forgotten Cawnpore”; and “One whose sister was massacred at Cawnpore” (Eyre Defence..., 1866, p. 25-31).

A rough estimate of funds raised, using only the largest contribution from £10 upwards, amounted to approximately some £2391, around \$3 million in today’s evaluation. The goal had been to raise £10,000, which was quite likely reached, for many contributors went unrecognized,



perhaps wanting anonymity, such as Tennyson. Obsessed with Timbuctoo and with memories of the Indian Mutiny, he donated £10 “as a protest against the spirit in which a servant of the State, who has saved to us one of the Islands of the Empire, and many English lives, seems to be hunted down” (*apud* Ford, 1948, p. 230). John Morant made the largest donation, £500 (approximately £15,000 in today’s evaluation). Morant Bay took the name of his family, whose history in Jamaica dates to around 1660, beginning with John Morant (c1628-1683), son of the first Morant settler in Jamaica, who married a wealthy descendant of the Governor of Barbados. Their grandson, Edward Morant, married into a wealthy family that owned 25,000 acres in Jamaica. Nine generations of the family maintained estates on the island, producing sugar, tobacco, and indigo when slaves worked on the plantations under the tropical sun growing cane, crushing it, and making sugar for rum. The Morant estates retained 438 slaves in 1817 and 700 by 1834. The income from these estates was substantial, averaging about £20,000 per annum for much of the 18th century. Following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and later the abolition of slavery, the family income halved. John Morant’s great grandson, Edward Morant (1730-1791), moved to England and purchased Brockenhurst House. Edward’s son, John Morant (1755-1794), was the largest donor to the Eyre Fund (Morant; family; Brockenhurst Park). The Eyre subscription list is a fascinating study into the popular genre of Victorian begging letters.

On August 30, 1866, Carlyle wrote to Caroline Davenport Bromley. “Yesterday, in spite of the rain, I got up to the Eyre Committee, and even let myself be voted into the chair, such being the post of danger on the occasion, and truly something of a forlorn hope, and place for *enfants perdue* [lost children]”. He saw the Eyre cause tied to the nation and pointed to Eyre’s dire economic condition: “Poor Eyre! I am heartily sorry for him, and for the English nation, which makes such a dismal fool of itself. Eyre, it seems, has fallen suddenly from 6,000*l.* a year into almost zero, and has a large family and needy kindred dependent on him. Such his reward for saving the West Indies, and hanging one incendiary mulatto, well worth the gallows” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 49-50).

Failing to attend to Carlyle’s long history of racist diatribes, imperialistic agenda, and gender politics, some observers, like Gillian Workman, contend that race was unrelated to the Rebellion. She accuses twentieth-century observers of race of histrionics and misreading of the racist map of the nineteenth century. Carlyle’s support for Eyre, she opines, was “undetermined by the colour of those killed and harmed” (Workman, 1994, p. 81), a position “too generous” to accept, according to Eileen Best (1978, p. 96), considering “the echoes of old racial bias in Carlyle’s own words describing the revolt”. Catherine Hall (1989, p. 189) arrives at a similar conclusion: “For the Jamaica Committee and their allies, the negroes belonged to the same human family as the whites, but for Carlyle and the Eyre Defence Committee, whites and negroes were not the same species”, a fact evident in the racist polygenetic theory and the pseudoscience of physiognomy that dominated the nineteenth century where blacks, like the Irish, were neither men nor brothers but apes.⁸ In fact, Percival Leigh’s short entry for December

⁸ L. Perry Curtis sees the “prevalent attitudes about anthropoid apes” connected to the Irish. “After the launching of *Punch*, Or the London Charivari in 1841, the equation between snub-nosed, big-mouthed, and prognathous faces Irish Celts became as complete as caricature could hope to achieve” (Curtis, 1997, p. 31). Cartoonists, such as Tenniel, “relied constantly on the physiognomical equation of prognathism and savagery, if not bestiality, when they sought to epitomize Irish rebels and republi-

13, 1868, “Colonial Rule”, makes just this case, observing that in New Zealand “one Maori’s life is computed to be worth the lives of ten Englishmen” (Leigh, 1868, p. 256). Workman resists the notion that the Eyre controversy reflected a very conscious construction of racial identity in the nineteenth century. She also does not recognize that twentieth-century racialist axioms are the legitimate offspring of nineteenth-century racialist construction. Thus, she mistakenly concludes that twentieth-century conception of race is “a quite separate activity from an attempt to understand the Victorians” (Workman, 1994, p. 81).

Many of Carlyle’s contemporaries, as equally as his modern detractors, were as aghast at his politics of white hegemony. Clearly, not everyone on the Eyre Committee was racist and not everyone who supported the Jamaica Committee was an emancipationist. Nor was support from whatever camp evidence enough of an individual’s racialist attitude. Nothing in all Victorian politics is more curious as the literary and scientific constitution of both committees: Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Dickens, and Tyndall on the Eyre side. Their detractors, Hughes, Mill, Darwin, and Lyell, on the Jamaica side, were supported by Exeter Hall and led by a large, vocal body of working men, and a growing number of English who demanded evidence substantiating Gordon’s guilt and questioning due process.⁹ Formed in December 1865, the Jamaica Committee of some eighty-eight members was led by John Stuart Mill. With unanimity, they “denounced Eyre and the barbarities committed by British troops in Jamaica, and commenced a campaign for retribution” (Semmel, 1962, p. 18).¹⁰

The Eyre Committee was founded along the lines of what Hall (1989, p. 185) calls “traditional values”, while the Jamaica Committee was committed to “dissent”; “the men who backed Eyre”, and the constitution of both committees were men, who, another critic observes, “mostly tended to uphold strong male authority within the family and to expect submissiveness from wives” (Rose, 1983, p. 265). The only discernible pattern is that the Eyre Committee was comprised mostly of heroes of letters and the Jamaica Committee men of science. But to dismiss race as irrelevant to the controversy, considering it a mere “cartoon, an outline of events and emotions”, and Carlyle’s racialist invectives “more a rhetorical device than an expression of racial disgust: a disastrous artistic miscalculation, rather than a revelation of his uncontrolled racism” (Workman, 1994, p. 81, 85), is to ignore the fact that overreaction to the Rebellion and the consequent miscarriage of justice by the colonial government were because a white defenseless minority (13,000) was perceived as under threat by a large black population (350,000), who, it was feared, especially invoking Haiti, might redress historic wrongs, which Eyre himself admitted. Almost

cans” (Curtis, 1997, p. 26). The Black body, it was purported, “degenerated from the ideal physique of the white race”, posing potential “dangers and crises” in this “long and complex process of political definition and redefinition in European culture and society” (Pick, 1989, p. 6, 21, 222). Curtis (1997, p. 149) sees “the deployment of science, especially physical anthropology and anatomical theory”, deployed “to help extend imperial sway over people with darker skins and flatter noses”. *Punch’s* satirical poem for October 18, 1862, “The Gorilla’s Dilemma”, dedicated “To Professor Owen and Huxley”, poking fun at the contentious debate on evolution between Richard Owen and Thomas Henry Huxley, opens with the line, “Say am I a man and a brother” (Gorilla’s..., 1862, p. 164). This was followed up in the same issue with “The Missing Link,” in which the Irish was considered as the link between the Gorilla and the Negro” (Missing..., 1862, p. 165).

⁹ See Semmel for the most comprehensive survey of the role of these participants (Semmel, 1969, p. 107-33).

¹⁰ Semmel’s *Jamaican blood and Victorian conscience* is the most comprehensive treatment of the controversy surrounding the Morant Bay uprising.

every English observer in Jamaica, military as well as civilian, who reported on the incident acknowledged race; and, indeed, much of the racialist clamor came not from twentieth-century observers but from Victorians themselves. Mill saw the response to the insurrection from Eyre and his English supporters not unlike “the same kind of people who had so long upheld negro slavery”. For the Jamaica Committee, says Mill (1873, p. 217, 218), “There was much more at stake than justice to the Negro”. Equally important was the rule of law.

As much as he resented chaos of all kinds, Carlyle was more incensed when recognized subalterns, which to him were often diseased racial Others, were perpetrators of societal disorder. Disorder to him smacks of degeneracy. The insurrection was clearly an affront to a patriarchal society headed by manly British leaders. Calling the clamor against Eyre “disgraceful to the good sense of England”, Carlyle reminded Hamilton Hume that “The English nation never loved anarchy; nor was wont to spend its sympathy on miserable mad seditions, especially of this inhuman and half-brutish type; but always loved order, and the prompt suppression of seditions” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 43-45). As Victor Kiernan (1982, p. 134) points out, “Empire meant in ideal terms the bringing of order and peaceful progress to lands beyond the pale”. Carlyle had consistently advocated decisive action towards all forms of disorder. Expectedly, then, he attacked the Jamaica Committee and criticized them for condemning martial law, the one necessary law of human society, vital in ending the mob-insurrection and returning the country to social order.

An implacable man in the image of a General Gordon, Eyre was a contemporary version of Carlyle’s hero, and the very antithesis to Exeter Hall palavers, pariahs in a nation. Not a Wellington, who “inspired me with no terror or reverence” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 1974, p. 111), Eyre was a Cromwell and a Frederick the Great, even an Abbot Samson. Kiernan’s estimation of Tennyson’s obsession with heroes and hero worship might easily be applied to Carlyle: “He could admire men of action the more because he was very little capable of it, and by putting himself into his heroes’ shoes he could rise above his customary inertness” (Kiernan, 1982, p. 130). For Victorians, Hall (1989, p. 191-92) observes, “Real manhood meant a capacity to act with authority and power”, which delimits “a particular variety of English masculinity and the denunciation of alternative forms as effeminate”, the two of them tied to “a specific set of ideas about sexual difference as well as with the fundamental nature of racial inequality”. Unmanliness is counterhegemonic. Eyre’s action was “an example set to all the colonies and governors the British Empire has”. Carlyle considered Eyre cut from the same cloth as Froude’s Anglo-Trinidadian, Charles Warner. Carlyle wrote to Charles Kingsley on September 3, 1866, calling Eyre “a faithful, valiant, wise and manful representative of the English Government” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 51). Carlyle had similarly lauded the Paraguayan Dr. Rodriguez Francia as a picture of European order and civility among South American voracious pumpkin eaters and incendiary agitators. Eyre was “a Hero who had, with such promptitude, sagacity and intrepidity, trampled out *fire in the powder-room*, and saved the whole West Indies *ship* from flying aloft amid the deep seas” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 51).

Rather than be rewarded, Eyre, Carlyle felt, was thrown to the dogs, that “small loud group” of “rabid Nigger-Philanthropists, barking furiously in the gutter” (Carlyle, 1896-1899, p. 12). What

Eyre had singlehandedly done, Britain as a nation had failed, ensuring proper management and enforcing civil order. England had left its colonies “all ungoverned, and nine-tenths of them full of jungles, boa-constrictors, rattlesnakes, Parliamentary Eloquences, and Emancipated Niggers ripening towards nothing but destruction”. Eyre, however, cleansed the diseased land and created an “exploitative colonialism... justified as the natural domination of the former or white” male “over the unformed or primitive male... thereby cleansing the unclean mire of essential maleness” (Sussman, 2008, p. 23). Carlyle offered a picture not of Jamaican insurrection and miasma, but a poetic portrait of order and health when black Dominicans were compelled to labor, managed stringently and kept subordinated:

Niggers held steadily to their work: ground then gradually rises, umbrageously rich throughout, becomes fit for coffee; still rises, now bears oak woods, cereals, Indian corn, English wheat, and in this upper portion is salubrious and delightful for the European, -- who might there spread and grow, according to the wisdom given him... well fit to defend their Island against all comers, and beneficently keep steady to their work a million of Niggers on the lower ranges (Carlyle, 1896-1899, p. 16-17).

Carlyle also recruited his friends to join the Eyre cause. As Ford (1948, p. 227, 228) has observed, Victorian support for Eyre stemmed from “Latent racial antagonism” that “sometimes appeared in unexpected quarters”. In fact, Dickens’s involvement was due to “the overpowering influence... Carlyle had upon many of his contemporaries”.¹¹ On September 3, 1866, Carlyle told the “muscular” Kingsley, “Froude has been written to, and is much wanted... Ruskin is coming; full of holy zeal” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 50). In his most scorching assault yet on the Jamaica Committee, Carlyle wrote to Kingsley that Eyre was

a faithful, valiant, wise and manful Representative of the English Govt... had *my* post been that of English King, to appoint Eyre *Dictator* over Jamaica for the next 25 years, as pretty much the one chance there was for saving the West Indies... few things in my time have more disgusted me than this receipt, by my *Writing Countrymen* [my emphasis], of a Hero who had, with such promptitude, sagacity & intrepidity, trampled out *fire in the powder-room*, and saved the whole W. Indies *ship* from flying aloft amid the deep seas,—not with human thanks and recognitn deep and universal, but with blatant clamours, rising to the height of execratns as I here & there find... Hence these lamentatns, shriekeries, and insanities; at once frightful, doleful, and abominable, as if Phlegethon and Houndsditch had run into one, and both good sense and common honesty had forsaken poor Engld for the time! (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 51)

Carlyle clarified his stance to Kingsley: “I will join the Eyre Comee; & personally *appear* among them, Wedny next, 3 p.m., if Heaven permit”? — We are a poor Comee, and do need help. Froude has been written to, & is much wanted” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 51-52). Carlyle was anticipating the second meeting of the Committee on September 5, 1866, where Ruskin, invoking Shakespeare’s Mark Antony, claimed to be “not there either to defend or accuse” Eyre. He wanted justice “not for black men only, nor for white, but for men of every race and colour. He detested

¹¹ For more on Carlyle’s influence on Dickens, see Nixon, 2001-2002.

all cruelty, and all injustice by whomsoever inflicted, or suffered” (Eyre Defence..., 1866, p. 21).¹² But Carlyle failed to sway Kingsley, who, though he had spoken eloquently at the Southampton reception for Eyre on his return to England, remained discretely sympathetic to the Jamaica issue because of his ignorance of the facts of the insurrection. Still, he advanced British adventurism and imperialism. Like Carlyle, Kingsley had long endorsed racial superiority of whites and the unfitness of blacks, Irish, and the working class for self-government. His recollections from the West Indies, especially his attraction/repulsion towards black women, are erotically telling, writing to his mother from the West Indies: “I am afraid I don’t like the negroes, especially the women” (Kingsley, 1878, p. 312). Because of public accusations of betrayal of the working-class over his attendance at the Southampton meeting, a group he had historically supported, Kingsley withdrew from further public support of Eyre.

Carlyle, however, succeeded with Ruskin, a self-styled lover of kings, and fast becoming a Carlyle acolyte. Carlyle’s September 15, 1866, letter to Caroline Davenport Bromley updated her on the progress of the committee and dramatized Ruskin’s involvement: “The Eyre Committee is going on better, indeed is now getting fairly on its feet. Ruskin’s speech — now don’t frown upon it, but read it again till you understand it — is a right gallant thrust I can assure you. While all the world stands tremulous, shilly-shallying from the gutter, impetuous Ruskin plunges his rapier up to the very hilt in the abominable belly of the vast blockheadism, and leaves it staring very considerably” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 58). Critical at a time when British potential for epical acts and angst over its leadership role, on the wane, Ruskin flexed his colonial muscle. His act modeled virility, striking at the belly, Carlyle’s organ for black indolence. Ruskin’s well-known flaccidity (Percival Leigh, the medical man at the *Punch* Table, would write, “Ruskin was only impotent with Mrs. Ruskin”, *apud* Leary, 2010, p. 62) rose on this occasion. His is the stuff of Arthurian mythology, far removed from the theater of real military engagement. “The affair of Governor Eyre had blown into white heat”, Froude recalled in a conversation he had with Carlyle, using the familiar Carlyle analogies (ship and fire), “as if the ship had been on fire; the captain, by immediate and bold exertion, had put the fire out, and had been called to account for having flung a bucket or two of water into the hold beyond what was necessary. He had damaged some of the cargo, perhaps, but he had saved the ship” (Froude, 1884, p. 279). Unaware, and perhaps unselfconsciously, Carlyle, in drawing the analogy of the ship, was employing familiar tropes of slave ships in the Middle Passage, an analogy Jane would recall in Carlyle’s complaint about his horrific journey by steamer from Liverpool to Anna.

Carlyle provided an update on the Eyre Committee to Caroline Davenport Bromley on August 30, 1866, writing, “Yesterday, in spite of the rain, I got up to the Eyre Committee, and even let myself be voted into the chair, such being the post of danger on the occasion, and truly something of a forlorn hope, and place for *enfants perdus* [lost children]” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 49-50). He called the committee “most feeble committee”, except for “a young city merchant,

¹² For more on a summary and text of Ruskin’s speech, see Eyre Defence..., 1866, p. 21-22.

Henry Kingsley.”¹³ (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 49-50). Although “a well-meaning man”, Charles (Kingsley) “still hanging back afraid” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 49-50). Carlyle planned “to set my own shoulders to the wheel”. He saw the Eyre cause tied to the nation and pointed to Eyre’s dire economic situation: “Poor Eyre! I am heartily sorry for him, and for the English nation, which makes such a dismal fool of itself. Eyre, it seems, has fallen suddenly from 6,000*l.* a year into almost zero, and has a large family and needy kindred dependent on him. Such his reward for saving the West Indies, and hanging one incendiary mulatto, well worth the gallows” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 49-50).

Eyre thanked Carlyle for his support. Carlyle replied on November 1, 1866, observing that it was he who was indebted to Eyre, the “insane uproar rising round such a man”, with whom “all sane citizens to stand forth as *yr* vindicators”. Carlyle voiced dismay with the Jamaica Committee “with all its noises” that will never “get to anything of practical”, needing some £10,000 to achieve its prosecution, but not “the slightest chance to get it”. The most it could raise with “all this bellowing & shrieking from the Friends of Humanity in mass” is “£475 some shillings & some pence”, generating not funds but only “noises and denunciatns”. Their outcry is analogous to “angry and hungry dogs barking in the gutter”. Expressing the desire to become personally acquainted with Eyre, Carlyle concluded by encouraging Eyre: “Courage, courage! Have not you been in *worse* than this before now (also witht *blame* of *yr* own), and yet have come out of it triumpht? Often in the blackest coil of tempests and distresses, there is found ultimately, for the brave man, new victory and brightness to have lain hidden” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2016, p. 82-84).

Punch, however, and especially Brooks, remained energized by the controversy. His piece for January 26, 1867, “The Jamaica Committee”, presented as an advertisement, accuses Mill and his cohorts of attempting “to divest Great Britain of its incumbrances called Colonies”, with no better example than “the prosecution of such of her Majesty’s officers as may be selected for colonial Governments, and who may have occasion to save the colonies in their charge” (Brooks, 1867, p. 37). Brooks’s “Free as Eyre”, for April 6, 1867, argues that “there was no evidence on which Governor Eyre could properly be committed”. The writer of a *Star* piece believed that Eyre “has floored the Jamaica Committee as completely as he floored the Jamaica Rebellion... We cannot murder a man for saving a colony”. According to Brooks, “Jamaica belongs to the Queen of England, and not to the ‘brown-skinned canting, disreputable agitator, Gordon... It is to be lamented that excessive punishment was awarded to some of Gordon’s dupes; but on the other hand, English ladies and children were saved”. Rather than be prosecuted, Eyre should be appointed to a government post: “why not return Mr. Eyre for Middlesex?” (Brooks, 1867, p. 143).

Richard Forster Sketchley’s cryptic, punning advertisement for July 6, 1867, “What are the Jamaica Committee About?” announces: “The following horrifying notice may be seen in a respectable shop window hardly more than a stone’s throw from one of our largest Metropolitan Churches — ‘Blacks dyed twice a week!’” (Sketchley, 1867, p. 4). Silver’s Diary for May 28,

¹³ Charles’s young brother, Henry, who knew Eyre in Australia, and was a member of the executive committee, was unequivocal in his support of Eyre. For more on his role and the Kingsley family West Indian background, see Ford, 1948, p. 231-32.



1868, noted “Brooks’s racial fears of mob violence” that “had already made their mark in *Punch* in the famous double-page ‘Bengal Tiger’ cartoon, which was entire Brooks’s idea”, along with the accompanying verse, “The Revolt League Against Eyre”, which appeared in the May 30, 1868, issue of *Punch* (Leary, 2010, p. 123). Brooks’s poem attacked local Jamaicans “thirsting for bloodshed and plunder”, “miscreants burning for repine and prey”, who “Run riot, destroy, revenge, kills without pity”, and determined to “ruin” and “hunt gallant Eyre”. It also attacked the Jamaican Committee, “A set ever ranged on the side of sedition”, who are “touched by the hemp that chastised their black brothers” and so “extend a hand” to “mutinous negroes” for whom “The foe of the Ruler is always their Friend”. The Committee is doing its “worst to make certain that, never / Again, shall rebellion encounter a check... Conspiring against one, from maddened brutes fury / Who saved Englishwomen, and Englishmen’s lives” (Brooks, 1868 p. 237). Eyre expressed appreciation for *Punch*’s unstinting support, especially Brooks’s: “Many thanks for... the able and valuable aid you have so generously afforded me throughout the long prosecution to which I have been subject... The support given me in *Punch* has I am sure been most efficacious. People are affected by ridicule when they are scarcely affected by strong argument—and everybody sees *Punch*” (*apud* Leary, 2010, p. 123).

Carlyle’s role on the Eyre case was nearing its end. On February 9, 1869, Sir Roderick Murchison lost his wife and geological companion, Charlotte Murchison (he would succeed her two years later). Carlyle had to step in to replace Murchison on the Committee, as he shared with Eyre in a February 20, 1869, letter, believing that nothing could be done before Murchison’s return. Carlyle (now seventy-three) admitted failing health, being out of touch with the case (“I have known absolutely nothing for above a year past, and can or could take no useful part in the discussion”), and exulted that the “‘Jamaica Comittee’ got evidently knocked on the head, & ignominiously flung out as dog’s meat, by the genl People of Engl^d”. In fact, he added, “I regard the conduct of the “Govt” (so-called “Govt”) towards you all along since yr heroic service, with a mixture of indignatn and contempt, whh is absolutely painful to me”. He blamed the lack of muscular effort from the Committee, its failure to appeal to the “people of England, as the one ‘Authority,’” and wished that they had “taken a more courageous, declaratory, and as it were aggressive attitude; virtually that of *appeal to said people of Engld*, as the one ‘Authority’ that had any chance to help us. But as that proved to be my own opinⁿ only, I willingly left it, as the Ostrich does her egg in the desert, and went my ways” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2018, p. 14-15). In Carlyle’s gendering, it was not the man in him who failed but the woman and mother: an ostrich forsaking its egg in the desert. On that same day, February 20, 1869, he provided an update to his brother, John, on Murchison’s loss, his role in replacing him temporarily, and the change in Eyre’s status: “he petitioned me, above a week ago, to provide for him in Comee, — tho’ nothing was done, except agree to ‘wait for Sir Rk.’ Eyre, meanwhile, has been himself applyg to the Govt”. Carlyle acknowledge his withdrawal from the Committee: “I don’t purpose to *write* another word on the subject, still less to speak any syllable at Comee or other meeting” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2018, p. 16).

Many of Carlyle’s close friends and acquaintances broke ranks with him over Eyre and his racist attitude, such as Henry Crabb Robinson, Charles Darwin, and his brother Erasmus, a

close acquaintance of Jane in the early years. But not Charles Lyell and James Antony Froude. Froude called himself “one of the cowards”, fearing that as editor of *Fraser’s* he would “disturb the proprietors”. On reflection, however, he attributed his disinclination to “mere paltry excuses to escape doing what I knew to be right” (Froude, 1884, p. 280). Froude admitted that while he took no part in Eyre’s defense, he still felt that Eyre was a scapegoat to “public clamour”, and would have been blamed for the spread of the insurrection as he was condemned for quelling it. Eyre was between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Gordon’s hanging was an overreaction — not enough evidence on which to hang a dog, Froude had earlier asserted — because of paranoia from the numerical imbalance between whites and blacks. The incident further exposed the poor state of personal relations and reciprocal interests between blacks and whites in Jamaica and manifested the fear of black insurrection embedded in the psyche of whites because of the history of white atrocities. Froude felt that Gordon, a black, prominent member of the opposition, was correct to marshal support from his constituency, and so was not transgressing the bounds of constitutional legality. His public declarations, although “violent and inflammatory”, was not “any more so than what we listen to patiently at home”. But here was an opposition from former slaves “now raised to political equals” challenging white authority and with each group “regarding the other on the least provocation with resentment and suspicion” (Froude, 1888, p. 256-58).¹⁴

During Froude’s travel to the West Indies, a veritable “Garden of Eden” (Froude, 1888, p. 159), recalled in *The English in the West Indies, or The Bow of Ulysses*, he visited Jamaica. “All my thoughts were fixed upon Jamaica”, he wrote, “not two decades distant in the Eyre and Gordon time” (Froude, 1888, p. 179). Froude took a pilgrimage to Gordon’s estate and home, garnished with “a collection of orchids, the most perfect, I believe, in the island”. His travel narrative is built on the poetics of anaphora and parallelism. It recognizes Gordon’s heroism, ironically, quite British: “And here Gordon had lived. Here he had been arrested and carried away to his death; his crime being that he had dreamt of regenerating the negro race by baptising them in the Jordan of English Radicalism... But to hang him was an extreme measure, and, in the present state of public opinion, a dangerous one”. At the conclusion of the eulogy, Froude brings along Eyre to unite these two heroes, no doubt to appease his British audience, lest Eyre reputation be eclipsed by too much praise of Gordon. Froude becomes one with Gordon, seeing through his own eyes and sharing a vision sustained from morning until night. The passage ends with Gordon, or his cause, impregnable as a lighthouse sending forth its redemptive light to an equally formidable ship of State adrift on the open sea. Froude’s sympathy extends to Gordon and Eyre, black and white, the West Indies and England. Surely, this fancy does not cheat too well:

One does not associate the sons of darkness with keen perceptions of the beautiful. Yet no mortal ever selected a lovelier spot for a residence than did Gordon in choosing Cherry Garden. How often

¹⁴ As Semmel (1969, p. 188) has observed, for over a century England has successfully managed “the distinction between domestic liberty and imperial authority”. The few people killed and the limited destruction of property indicate the absence of premeditation on the part of blacks. Froude believed that there was no evidence and no reason to suppose that Gordon intended mass insurrection.



had his round dark eyes wandered over the scenes at which I was gazing, watched the early rays of the sun slanting upwards to the high peaks of the Blue Mountains, or the last as he sank in gold and crimson behind the hills at Mandeville; watched the great steamers entering or leaving Port Royal, and at night the gleam of the lighthouse from among the palm trees on the spit. Poor fellow! one felt very sorry for him, and sorry for Mr. Eyre, too (Froude, 1888, p. 267).¹⁵

In an intriguing December 7, 1870, letter to Thomas Dixon, Carlyle meditated on philanthropy versus justice. Drawing from Omar Khayyam, he believed that “Justice is the Soul of this Universe, and that against Justice nothing whatever will have weight”. To confuse justice with pity is wrongheaded, Carlyle believed, even though his understanding of justice is the age-old syllogism of might and right: “Justice is eternally the Soul of the Universe; and it is not always a soft or pleasant thing, it is oftenest a stern and severe”. Carlyle sees pity as the antonym, twisting the meaning of justice to justify his authoritarianism, while ignoring the fact that justice, connected etymologically to upholding legal rights, fairness, righteousness, and equity, requires the sympathetic imagination to truly realize its referential value. Over the last forty years, Carlyle had become bitter, “growing gradually into ominous foreboding and, of late, I may say into silent anger and even abhorrence” over “the present humour of the world” as “preliminary of universal downbreak into slush and mud” (Carlyle; Carlyle, 2019, p. 122). It is unfortunate that among the transformative reforms that defined Victorian Britain and the Condition of England Question, which Carlyle, ironically, coined, he would commit his creative and financial energies to the cause of a small group of planters profiting from cheap black labor and a leader censured by his country for a miscarriage of justice and for creating a climate that excited the reckless killing of approximately 500 blacks, the majority bystanders whose only guilt was being black.

The Eyre controversy “posed an important imperial question” (Semmel, 1962, p. 133). Carlyle’s involvement in it was “judged as elevating and sustaining the tone of the nation in a conservative, ethnocentric, and racist conception of Englishness” (Hall, 1989, p. 196). He and his supporters had perhaps forgotten what Blake earlier had asserted about the arts and sciences, especially the literature of the nineteenth century when English colonial expansion was at its pinnacle: “The Foundation of empire is Art & Science. Remove them or Degrade them & empire is No More — empire follows Art & Not Vice Versa” (Blake, 1982, p. 636). The Morant Bay Rebellion was an important index of British colonialism, adventurism in the West Indies, and attempt to control the economics of labor. Most disappointing, however, were the humanities endorsing Eyre, given its historical and now hypocritical claims for moral preeminence. The misunderstandings that informed the Morant Bay Rebellion were shaped by certain prejudices, among them an exertion of Victorian manliness and the recognition that anyone not white nor English should be accorded dignity, respect, civil rights, and agency in the ongoing quest for social justice.

¹⁵ On Froude’s recollection of events surrounding the Morant Bay Rebellion and his historical stance on it, see *English* (Froude, 1888, p. 255-268). Throughout the retelling, Froude, given his objectivity and dispassionate stance, is the statesman not a partisan.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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