GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS
AND THE ARCHIVES

Britain’s Empire in the Age of Horace Walpole (1717–1797)

An exhibition at the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University
October 20, 2017, through March 2, 2018

Curated by Justin Brooks and Heather V. Vermeulen,
with Steve Pincus and Cynthia Roman
In association with this exhibition the library will sponsor a two-day conference in New Haven on February 9–10, 2018, that will present new archival-based research on Britain’s global empire in the long eighteenth century and consider how current multi-disciplinary methodologies invite creative research in special collections.

Cynthia Roman
Curator of Prints, Drawings and Paintings
The Lewis Walpole Library

On this occasion of the 300th anniversary of Horace Walpole’s birthday in 2017 and the 100th anniversary of W.C. Lewis’s Yale class of 1918, Global Encounters in the Archives: Britain’s Empire in the Age of Horace Walpole embraces the Lewis Walpole Library’s central mission to foster eighteenth-century studies through research in archives and special collections. Lewis’s bequest to Yale was informed by his belief that “the most important thing about collections is that they furnish the means for each generation to make its own appraisals.” The rich resources, including manuscripts, rare printed texts, and graphic images, indeed provide opportunity for scholars across academic disciplines to explore anew the complexities and wide-reaching impact of Britain’s global interests in the long eighteenth century.

Global Encounters in the Archives is the product of a lively collaboration between the library and Yale faculty and graduate students across academic disciplines. A diverse selection of manuscripts, printed texts, and graphic images from the library’s holdings have been gathered to elucidate the interrelated themes of political economy, diplomacy, slavery, and indigeneity. These topics are the subjects of the four essays published here. Associated online resources include an enhanced digital version of the exhibition (http://exhibits.library.yale.edu/exhibits/show/globalencounters).

Foreword

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Britain’s imperial reach spanned the globe in the eighteenth century. Britons had established a dizzying array of outposts from Dublin to Bombay, from Edinburgh to New York, from London to Kingston. British merchants exported textiles, metalwares, ceramics, and furniture while importing slave-produced sugar, rice, indigo, and tobacco. At the same time, the British monarchs ruled over a wide variety of indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans.

The British conceived of their government in fundamentally imperial terms. British newspapers—whether published in Dublin, London, or Philadelphia—were filled with news items from across the Empire. Imperial rather than domestic issues dominated debate in the imperial Parliament in Westminster. Customers in coffee houses in Glasgow, Halifax, Charleston, Bridgetown, and Calcutta gossiped about events taking place half a world away.

The Empire—its goods, its peoples, its politics—fascinated Horace Walpole and those in his circle. This exhibition draws from the Lewis Walpole Library’s rich collections to bring Walpole’s global interests to light.

As befitting the son of a prime minister (Sir Robert Walpole), the nephew of the auditor-general of the Revenue of America (Horatio Walpole), and the close friend of a secretary of state (Henry Seymour Conway) who oversaw important imperial affairs, Horace Walpole well understood the partisan conflicts that helped shape the British Empire. Through the eighteenth century Britons debated and disagreed profoundly about how best to govern the Empire. Horace’s father, Robert, had long thought that the Empire should be organized hierarchically so as best to serve the people of England. He believed in a political economy of empire that gave preference to the colonial production of raw materials like sugar, rice, or tobacco. For this reason Walpole and his establishment Whig supporters gave preference to the sugar and slave colonies in the West Indies.

After the accession of King George III in 1760, British politicians sought similarly to extract wealth from the newly conquered Asian provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Oriza. The self-described Patriot opponents of Sir Robert Walpole and his post-1760 ministerial successors advanced a radically different vision of empire. Where the establishment Whigs had emphasized colonial production, the Patriots emphasized the importance of colonial consumption of British manufactured goods. Where the establishment Whigs insisted upon a hierarchically organized empire with London at its center, the Patriots called for a confederal empire with sovereignty distributed among the

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Randeligh Barrett (d. 1768). Portrait of Henry Seymour Conway, ca. 1765. Oil on canvas, 160.6 x 135.2 cm, framed. LWS, Pg. 129

STEVE PINCUS
various colonial assemblies, parliaments, and local institutions. Where the establishment Whigs insisted on the necessity of chattel slavery, the Patriots reasoned that slavery was not only morally suspect but also failed to create the kind of consumer society upon which imperial prosperity depended. Where establishment Whigs turned away from alliance to subjugate indigenous peoples—whether American Indian, Irish, or Bengali—the Patriots advocated a restoration of diplomacy as their primary mode of interaction.

These conflicting visions of empire—represented here in the domains of political economy, diplomacy, slavery, and indigenous peoples—dominated popular discussions. There were adherents of the establishment Whig vision in Calcutta, Boston, Dublin, and Kingston. There were Patriots in London, Edinburgh, Halifax, and Bridgetown. These competing visions of empire, always the source of conflict, came to a head in the 1760s and 1770s. In Ireland, in India, in Britain, and in America this struggle of ideas erupted into an imperial civil war. For the Patriots this was a struggle between Liberty and Tyranny, with the colonists often pictured as a woman being subdued by her tormentors. For the establishment Whigs, by contrast, the struggle was between Loyalty and Rebellion.

Political Economy and the British Empire

STEVE PINCUS

From its inception Britons everywhere, all along the social spectrum and in a dizzying array of imperial locales, debated the value of the British Empire. They conducted this lively debate in newspapers, political caricatures, pamphlets, political correspondence, merchant missives, and even in paintings. Debate was all the more lively and engaged because it took place in the context of the emergence of the Enlightenment discussion of what came to be known as political economy. Politicians, clergymen, planters, humble manufacturers, and even indigenous peoples and occasionally the enslaved debated what government efforts could best promote the happiness or overall well-being of the subjects of the Empire. There was never a single imperial vision, a consensus about the best way to organize the Empire. Indeed what set Britain apart from its imperial rivals—the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese, and even the Dutch—was the very public nature of this debate about the political economy of empire. Other imperial states had similar debates, drew on a common transnational corpus of ideas and criticisms, but in those other empires the discussions took place exclusively in Royal Councils and among learned jurists. This exhibition brings together elements of this pan-imperial debate.

Political economy almost immediately became one—if not the central—organizing theme of the Enlightenment. Those who participated in, benefited from, or suffered at the hands of the British Empire framed their arguments in terms of the economic consequences of the activity of the British state. While this exhibition, reflecting in large part the strengths of the Lewis Walpole collections, focuses heavily on the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century, this Enlightenment debate began in earnest in the wake of England’s Revolution of 1688–1689. With the establishment of the Board of Trade in 1696, a body that oversaw Britain’s commercial and overseas activities and reported on them to Parliament and to the Cabinet, Britain became an imperial state. Parliamentary debates, the ever proliferating colonial and provincial press, and coffee house chatter throughout the Empire focused on the question of how best to organize the Empire so as to maximize prosperity.

In essence the fundamental question that divided British subjects throughout the Empire was Prosperity for whom? There were those, especially those close to the governments of Robert Walpole in the 1720s and 1730s and those attached to the governments of Prime Ministers George Grenville and Frederick Lord North in the 1760s and 1770s, who insisted that the only folks who mattered were the political and social elite—the landed classes—in England. In their view the purpose of empire was to exploit the labor of African slaves in the West...
world in which Britain's imperial rivals systematically excluded the exportation of British-made textiles, metalwares, and ceramics. It was this alternative, but very prominent understanding of the political economy of empire that informed the protests against the actions of the British governments in the 1760s, 1770s, and beyond. These protests were less anti-imperial than they were calls for radical imperial reform along Patriot lines. This was the point being made in two of the exhibition's opening images, *Hibernia in Distress* and *The Able Doctor, or, America Swallowing the Bitter Draught*. These prints draw on remarkably similar visual vocabularies to highlight the improprieties of the political economy of Lord North's government. In both images the colonial subjects, figured as women, are being violated by Britain. The North American Stamp Act protests and the Boston Tea Party also protested the ministerial political economy that prioritized colonial taxation over attempting to stimulate the most vibrant areas of the imperial economy. Perhaps more surprisingly, Patriot political economic arguments provided the rationale both for the opposition to British policies in India and for the case for the abolition of slavery. After Robert Clive had annexed the fabulously wealthy province of Bengal to the British Empire through his victory at Plassey (1757) and his assumption of the diwani, or right to tax, the British East India Company had sought to maximize profits from their new acquisition by militarizing the province and extracting as much revenue as possible from the Bengali textile manufacturers. The result was economic disaster and devastating famine. The Patriot critics argued that instead of pursuing policies aimed at providing revenue for the mother country,
Britain should pursue a narrowly commercial policy aimed at protecting the world’s most advanced manufacturing economy.

Similarly the Patriots had long decried Walpole’s and North’s preference for the sugar and slavery societies of the Caribbean. Like many, they deplored the cruelties and horrible abuses of the plantation system. But they developed a new and sharp critique of the slave trade and slave societies. They argued that insofar as consumption was a necessary component of promoting more equal societies and sustainable prosperity, slavery was an economic as well as a moral evil. Slave societies could not sustain growth, because slaves would never be good consumers. And slave societies necessarily promoted the most vicious concentrations of economic and social power. Slave societies promoted oligarchies of the worst kind. These Patriot arguments against slavery informed British policy when Patriots were closest to the center of power—in the 1750s and 1760s—and deeply informed resistance to the ministerial projects of the 1770s and beyond.

By recovering some of the contours and traces of the Patriot political economic argument, it becomes possible to reconfigure protest and resistance across the British Empire, less as isolated acts of desperation against imperial cruelty, and more as part of a global argument about how best to organize an imperial state.
By the early eighteenth century, British statesmen had developed a coherent view of the European state system and a strategic framework for negotiating their place within it. At the center of these foreign policy views stood a commitment to preventing French universal monarchy—that is, the dominance of France over all other European and increasingly world nations—by way of maintaining a balance of power among European states. Charles Hanbury Williams’s Observations on Trade in Europe after Peace (1748), in particular, characterizes Britain’s foreign policy as a “Scheme of preventing by their interposition the [French] House of Bourbon from attaining an absolute Monarchy in Europe, or rather such a degree of Influence, without being directly the Sovereigns, They might be able to give Law to the rest of the Continent.” For him and for others, Britain’s 1688 Revolution had established the nation as Europe’s principal counterweight to French dominance. This alone, statesmen argued, would prevent the specter of French domination to preserve both the “liberties of Europe” abroad and the integrity of the Revolution Settlement (1689) and the Protestant Succession at home.1

From 1688 to 1815, a series of wars threatened these interests: the War of the Grand Alliance (1688–1697); the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713); the War of the Austrian Succession (1744–1748); the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763); the American Revolutionary War (1776–1783); and the French and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815). The collections at the Lewis Walpole Library, which hold the papers of some of the most preeminent eighteenth-century British diplomats, afford compelling glimpses into how they executed their strategic vision of foreign affairs through these conflicts and the periods of peace that punctuated them. First and most significantly, the materials gathered in this exhibition indicate that British ministers’ foreign policy aims—maintaining a balance of power and preventing French absolute monarchy—were not strictly European but also global and imperial in scope. Thus Lord Clive’s 1772 Speech to Parliament on the history of East India Company involvement in Bengal reads like a page out of Hanbury Williams’s diplomatic correspondence: “If ever France should lay hold of our possessions, she will soon add to them all the rest of the East Indies. The other European nations there will immediately fall before her … the Empire of the Sea will follow: thus will her acquisitions in the East, if any can, give her universal Monarchy” (47). Clive’s admonition to Parliament in 1772 fell on ministers well versed in thinking about their empire as the principal bulwark against French superiority; while

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_Bulwark Empire:_ 
_British Alliance in Global Perspective, 1688–1815_

**Justin Brooks**
they diverged on questions of policy, these individ-
uals understood all too clearly the significance of
Britain’s imperial holdings in the preservation of the
balance of power.

Diplomacy—as an elaboration of legal norms
through social interaction between the representa-
tives of governments of sovereign states—operated
as the conduit through which eighteenth-century
Britons pursued these foreign policy goals not just in
Europe, but also across the rest of the Empire. While
items like Hanbury Williams’s Observations on Trade
and Edward Digby’s “Letter to Charles Hanbury
Williams on Parliamentary Subsidy Debates”
(January 24, 1752) highlight the central importance
of European alliances to the foreign policy aims of
Britain, Clive’s Speech, alongside such other descrip-
tions of indigenous alliance as that contained in
Short View of the Disputes between Merchants (1750),
reveals an acute awareness by British statesmen that
European allies alone were insufficient. By position-
ing artifacts of European alliance like the letterbook
of Hanbury Williams, ambassador to Saxony and
envoy at the court of Russia, alongside artifacts of
indigenous alliance, like the print of Mohawk ally
“King” Hendrick Tejonihokarawa, this exhibition
foregrounds the shared importance to Britain of
negotiated rule with European and non-European
polities alike. Together they reveal that diplomacy
and alliance were in fact global strategies through
which the British government pursued its larger
foreign policy goals.

Britain’s European and indigenous alliances
shared these foreign policy objectives and negoti-
ated modes of rule because they operated within
the same networks of ministerial oversight. The
Duke of Cumberland’s letter to Secretary of State
the Duke of Newcastle on the rebellious clans of the

Robert Clive (1725–1774). Lord Clive’s Speech
in the House of Commons, March 30, 1772.
London: J. Walter 1773(?). 48 x 109 x 58.5

Anonymous. The Brave Old Hendrick, the Great Sachem or Chief of the Mohawk Indians.
Etching & engraving with stipple, 39 x 27.5 cm, sheet. Published 1755. 755.00.00.24+ 177
was to make alliance the subject of political scrutiny and public debate. Set within the highly partisan climate of eighteenth-century Parliament, this also meant that the political-economic positions set forth by MPs about Britain’s alliances with indigenous peoples often mirrored those same MPs’ positions on alliances with European monarchs. Indeed, the debates over the expense and efficacy of gifts from Britain to its Native American allies—referenced in Conway’s “American Drafts”—echoed almost exactly the Parliamentary debates outlined in Digby’s letter to Hanbury Williams over whether Britain owed subsidies to its European allies in peacetime.3

Connective positions were not identical positions, however. And while this exhibition affords opportunities to bring Britain’s European alliances and indigenous alliances into the same framework, it also highlights significant differences between these systems. Hanbury Williams’s “Observations on Trade in Europe after Peace” (1748), which aims to provide “a very true account of all the Principal Powers of Europe,” says nothing of those states’ indigenous allies or their contributions in times of war. The print What May Be Doing Abroad; What Is Doing at Home (1769) reflects a longstanding eighteenth-century pattern in which European states took the lead—to the exclusion of indigenous polities—in matters of treating for peace and dividing the spoils of war. These patterns depended in part on characterizations featured in objects like “Letters to Charlotte” (1734) and “Humorous Song on the Cherokee Chiefs” (1762), which contradicted dignified representations of indigenous envoys like that of “King” Hendrick Téonhokarawa and denigrated Britain’s indigenous allies as “Scalpers,” “savages,” or “stranger [C]impanzeys.” These portrayals of indigenous diplomats contrasted with (and perhaps, reflected) a
tendency by British statesmen to reimagine Europe as its own law-bound community of nations over the eighteenth century.

Still, together the diplomatic items presented in this exhibition reveal a world of connectivity between eighteenth-century Britain’s European and indigenous alliance systems. Britain’s European and non-European alliances shared in the foreign policy aim of preventing French universal monarchy, and they both relied on the negotiation of legal norms through social interaction between the representatives of governments of sovereign states to achieve this goal. These alliances formed part of an integrated ministerial view of foreign policy, and one that was highly subject to the vicissitudes of British political and economic debate. As such, even public and parliamentary debates surrounding the usefulness of indigenous and European alliances drew on similar arguments and deployed connective reasoning.

Ultimately, then, eighteenth-century British diplomacy was global, it was connective, and it cannot be disentangled from the functions of the British Empire.

1 Brendan Simms, Three Victories and a Defeat (New York: Basic Books, 2009).
2 Treaties that entailed either a financial charge or a change in British law had to be brought before both Houses (%OC & HOC). Treaties were communicated to Parliament after they had been ratified, which limited the value of parliamentary discussion, and certainly of advice that might be given.
3 Specifically, opponents of Indian presents like the Earl of Halifax argued that they were of “much Expence, and Trouble, and productive of little, or no, advantage.” The same argument prevails in Digby’s letter among those opposed to European subsidies to German princes in peacetime. Letter from the Earl of Halifax to John Stuart, February 11, 1764. British National Archives at Kew, CO 5/65/2 ff. 196197.
The earliest print included in this exhibition is titled, simply, Slavery. Published in 1738, its referent is not enslaved persons from the African continent and their descendants, but rather, according to the inscription, “the Worthy and most Injur’d merchants of Great Britain.” In the print’s upper left, Spanish captain Juan de Léon Fandiño cuts off the ear of English captain Robert Jenkins. This event, which occurred seven years earlier, serves as a metaphor for what was an imperial conflict among European nations, including Great Britain and Spain, over efforts to achieve global supremacy through trade.1 In the print’s foreground, another Spaniard whips British “slaves,” forcing them to pull a plow. A lion (standing in for Great Britain) looks over his shoulder at Prime Minister Robert Walpole for orders and, in the process, threatens to impale himself—through his genitals—on the Spaniard’s sword. The print musters the language of “slavery” to cast Britain’s uncertain status among increasingly global empires in the language of compromised virility. However, without the context of transatlantic slavery, the print would lose its emasculating punch.

This essay reconsiders various forms of conscripted labor within a global British Empire that depended heavily—but neither solely nor consistently—on the enslavement of persons from the African continent. It asks how transatlantic slavery might be resituated as part of a broader network of power relations structured around race, gender, and class in the long eighteenth century.

Preceded by various charter companies, including the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa, established by King Charles II in 1660 (just five years after England wrested Jamaica from Spain), the Royal African Company (rac) was founded on September 27, 1672, to bring the West African and American colonial trade, including the trade in enslaved persons, more tightly under the Crown’s control. Simultaneously, then, it was an attempt to counter other European leaders’ aspirations to political and economic supremacy through trade, as well as an effort to keep the British colonies (especially Barbados, which was eager to purchase enslaved persons for its sugar plantations) subservient to the Mother Country.2 The rac, which forcibly transported over 90,000 enslaved Africans before its termination in 1752, nevertheless faced staunch opposition. Indeed, its deregulation in 1712 came in response to the outcries of those who, in historian William Pettigrew’s words, “mount[ed] a lobbying campaign that championed the right to trade in African slaves as a deeply cherished English liberty.”3

Shape-shifting as trading companies did throughout...
this period, the rac was succeeded by the African Company, which concluded its operations in 1811. British ships alone forcibly transported approximately 3 million enslaved African persons from the continent.

The same period that birthed the Enlightenment—hardly a uniform project, but a movement often characterized by notions of “universal” equality and freedom and an obsessive pursuit of knowledge—also saw the heights of transatlantic slavery, accompanied by the popularization of natural historians’ classificatory schemas. Works such as Carl Linnaeus’s widely influential Systema Naturae, first published in 1735, and in its tenth and massively expanded edition by 1758, sought to classify plants and animals, which included producing and ranking different “races” of people. Arguments for and against the enslavement of indigenous peoples and, subsequently, African peoples varied widely, drawing alternately on economics, theology, philosophy, and science. The racist hierarchies of being postulated by natural historians, which often positioned peoples from the African continent as a “missing link” between humans and apes, were among the sources mustered in support of their enslavement.4 The slave trade was abolished in 1807, and Britain abolished slavery in its colonies in 1833; this legislation came in response, rac officials sought to confiscate coastal Africans to sell enslaved persons directly to inland African traders often worked with example, inland African traders often worked with practices by which the slave trade operated. For example, inland African traders often worked with coastal Africans to sell enslaved persons directly to independent merchants, thereby circumventing the rac. In response, rac officials sought to confiscate the payments received for those sales once the coastal African intermediaries returned to shore.9 If an intermediary could not “make good the damage to the inland trader,” the author explains, “he [was] liable to be sold as a slave.”10

He then crosses out the geographically delimited “through Europe” (alone) to declare that the nation’s successes lay “[i]n Europe, in Asia, in Africa, & in America….Her fleets rode triumphant in all seas; her armies conquered, wherever they appeared.”11 In his concluding remarks for the previous year, 1758, he praises the “marine society, … by which vagrants, & poor boys were fitted out for the sea.”12 In other words, they were trained to join the British naval forces. According to the author, “[A]t least 6000 persons [were] enabled to serve their country.”13 Given their precarious class status, these “vagrants, & poor boys” likely were, at times, forced to enter such service out of necessity (for example, to avoid imprisonment), only to be used as imperial fodder.

Anonymous. “Annum Mirabilis (Britain’s Year of Wonders)” in History of the Seven Years’ War, LVI. MHS vol. 101, 1759, part iii, page 96 Rejoicing further, the manuscript’s author transcribes the opening stanzas of British poet-laureate William Whitehead’s 1760 New Year’s ode. There, Whitehead imagines future readers marveling over Britain’s history, “while round ye globe her conquests run: | From ye first blush of orient day, | To where descend his noontide beams | On sable Afric’s golden streams, | And where at eve ye gradual gleams decay.”
The subsequent use of conscripted "foreign" enslaved and colonized soldiers as a parallel strategy to the Marine Society’s suspect practices for recruiting domestic citizens. It likewise resonates with the Royal Navy’s use of impressment (forced naval service), more broadly—a chief complaint against the Crown in its North American colonies. “Though British officers routinely remarked upon the value of enslaved black West Indians’ military labors,” Boletino explains, it was “because they died in the place of disciplined European regulars and sailors, whose lives they treasured more.” Thus, perhaps another valence underlies the armed black soldiers’ designation as “shot negroes.” Moreover, Britain’s control of Havana, however short-lived, enabled British merchants to sell their goods there, including enslaved Africans, whose conscripted labor, in turn, drastically boosted the sugar industry in Cuba. As Laird Bergad points out, “Between 1762 and 1792, land planted in sugar cane soared from 10,000 acres to over 150,000 acres.” Meanwhile, Britain’s enslaved soldiers were forced back onto plantations after their tours were complete. One wonders what became of the Marine Society’s “vagrants, & poor boys” when the wars ended. It is telling that military service did not seem to appeal to most free black people in the British West Indies, even with promises of compensation. It did not appeal to most Europeans, either. Other free black people combatted the Empire directly. The Maroons were enslaved persons who escaped to live in remote, difficult-to-access areas and founded rebel communities. From the British capture of Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655 until the conclusion of the First Maroon War there (1727–1739), Maroons attacked and burned plantations, policed roads, and seized foodstuffs, terrifying and often killing white residents. Eventually,
Jamaican governor Edward Belafonrney made treaties with Maroon leaders. The treaties “gave them land and limited rights as British subjects, including the right to bear arms and administer justice for noncapital crimes,” provided that the Maroons “help return runaway slaves and defend the country in case of invasion.” In other words, their “freedom” came at the expense of those still enslaved. However, as Jamaica became an increasingly wealthy sugar colony, members of its Assembly sought to restrict the Maroons’ freedom and bring them further under the control of the colonial government.31 As their ultimate status with respect to the British Empire and its Caribbean colonial representatives was never assured, the Maroons, in the words of Kathleen Wilson, were “formidable adversaries as well as loyal subjects.”32 Their ability, at turns, to assist and resist British rule became evident with the outbreak of Jamaica’s Second Maroon War (1795–1796) fifty-six years later, while Britain itself was at war with France—in the middle of the French Revolution, no less. As Wilson points out, the Maroons seem to have played one nation against the other: “the Windward Maroons [in eastern Jamaica] intrinsically refused to declare their loyalty to the colonial government, and rumors swirled that the Leeward Maroons [in western Jamaica] were in contact with French agents.”33 At the same time, as was the case following Jamaica’s Second Maroon War, in which General George Walpole (second cousin of Horace Walpole) led the British forces, colonial officials might refuse to honor treaties. Going against General Walpole’s negotiations with Jamaica’s Leeward Maroons of Trelawny Town, “which promised to enlarge their landholdings and protect their established rights,” Governor Alexander Lindsay deported the Maroons to Nova Scotia (and, subsequently, to Sierra Leone) and burned their habitations.34 Included in this exhibition is a letter sent by army officer and politician Henry Seymour Conway (first cousin of Horace Walpole) to Robert Melville (then-governor of Dominica, St. Vincent, the Grenadines, and Tobago) in 1766, in which the author expresses relief that Melville’s “Government is freed from the Outrages of the Maroon Slaves.”35

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Contemporary prints at turns crafted idyllic images of plantation slavery, sublimated its violence through “humor,” and spectacularized its horrors to elicit abolitionist sympathies. Thomas Vivarès’s engraving A View in the Island of Jamaica, of Roaring River Estate, Belonging to William Beckford Esqr. near Savannah la Marr, after George Robertson (pub. March 25, 1778), purports to represent one of the four sugar plantations that William Beckford, a white man born in Jamaica, inherited from his father in 1744. While, on Beckford’s plantations, nearly one thousand enslaved persons experienced brutal working conditions, the artist imagines an orderly, proto-industrial, and picturesque colonial stronghold carved out of an otherwise “unruly” and “uncultivated” landscape. Enslaved laborers are a minuscule presence within the scene. Moreover, the two most prominently figured individuals are depicted at rest, conversing casually, instead of engaged in grueling labor or undergoing the forms of “disciplinary” torture upon which plantation slavery relied.

In the first frame of the satirical print West India Luxury!! (1803), the artist labels the white male planter “A West India Nabob.” He thereby links British imperial rule in the West and East Indies—a “nabob” being an Englishman who acquired wealth working for the East India Company—and insinuates that some of this “Nabob’s” wealth is in enslaved women. In the final frame, a light-skinned and presumably enslaved woman washes his feet.
black suffering was spectacularized in the name of inciting anti-slavery sentiments among whites. The pained and individualized expressions of the enslaved onlookers contrast starkly with the uniform, emotionless presence of the militiamen. At the same time, the representation, regardless of its potential sympathies with enslaved persons, partakes in what Saidiya Hartman has termed a “libidinal investment in violence.”

The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), during which enslaved and free black people overthrew the French to create the first free black state in the Western hemisphere, also sparked panic among European nations—just as many in Britain recoiled at the bloody events accompanying the French Revolution (1789–1799). The latter is the ostensible subject of James Gillray’s print Alecto and her Train at the Gate of Pandæmonium, or, The Recruiting Sarjeant [sic] Enlisting John-Bull into the Revolution Service (July 4, 1791). Published, not coincidentally, on the anniversary of the declaration of American independence from Britain, it deploys the mythological fury Alecto, avenger of wrongs, as a furious personification of the seductive powers of (French) revolution.

With the rise of abolitionism, depictions of the violence that undergirded and enabled transatlantic slavery became more common. As in William Elmes’s The Horrid Torture of Impalement [sic] Alive as a Punishment on Runaway Slaves (September 9, 1808), black suffering was spectacularized in the name of inciting anti-slavery sentiments among whites. The pained and individualized expressions of the enslaved onlookers contrast starkly with the uniform, emotionless presence of the militiamen. At the same time, the representation, regardless of its potential sympathies with enslaved persons, partakes in what Saidiya Hartman has termed a “libidinal investment in violence.”

Anonymous. West India Luxury!! Etching & aquatint with hand coloring, 26.5 x 39 cm, sheet. Published 1803. 803.04.00.02

Anonymous. West India Luxury!! Etching & aquatint with hand coloring, 26.5 x 39 cm, sheet. Published 1803. 803.04.00.02

William Elmes. The Horrid Torture of Impalement [sic] Alive as a Punishment on Runaway Slaves. Aquatint with etching, 18.5 x 27 cm, sheet. Published September 1808 by T. Tegg. 808.09.09.01

Gillray critiques, in particular, British sympathizers, like Charles James Fox (second from right). Both Alecto and Fox endeavor to “recruit” British people to the new republic. Three months earlier, Fox had spoken out against the slave trade in Parliament. Thus the print—which dubs brown-skinned Alecto the “Black Sarjeant [sic]”—is also about the fate of transatlantic slavery. French (and British) desires to overthrow metaphorical “slavery” rub uncomfortably close to enslaved persons’ demands for—and seizure of—their own liberty. The line between a convenient metaphor and a brutal reality bursts into flame.
or, The Recruiting Sarjeant
James Gillray (1756–1815).

Alecto and her Train at the Gate of Pandaemonium,
Service.
1791, by S.W. Fores.

Enlisting John-Bull into the Revolution
Perspective, “al.,” Transoceanic Mortality: The Slave Trade in Comparative
Estimates are notoriously difficult. See Herbert S. Klein et
Hayes, Warwick-Lane, 1745), italics in original, 3.
CR: The New Centennial
Overrepresentation—An Argument, “Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its
Imperialism: The Shaping of Imperial Administration,
Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/
Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire (New
Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), esp. ch. 3, “Restoration Imperialism: The Shaping of Imperial Administration,
1816–1833,” and ch. 4, “Politicized Empire: The Crown, the
African Company, and Centralization, 1817–1877.”
Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1729–1752
http://mcuse.jmu.edu/books/9781401848139.
4. See Sylvia Wray, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/
Power/Terror/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its
Overrepresentation—An Argument.” CR: The New Centennial
5. Charles Hayes, The Importance of Effectually Supporting the
Royal African Company of England Impartially Considered ...
(London: printed by E. Say, and sold by J. Roberts, in
Warwick-Lane, 1745), italics in original, 5.
7. Hayes, The Importance, 32.
8. Estimates are notoriously difﬁcult. See Herbert S. Klein et
Charles Hayes, “Transoceanic Mortality: The Slave Trade in Comparative
9. Anonymous, A Short View of the Dispute Concerning the
Regulation of the African Trade, included in A Short View of the
Dispute Between the Merchants of London, Bristol, and Leveerpool ...
and the Advocates of a New Joint-Stock Company, Concerning the
10. Anonymous, A Short View, 3.
11. Anonymous, History of the Seven Years’ War manuscript
12. Anonymous, History of the Seven Years’ War, 1759–1760,
pt. 3, f. 9b.
15. Maria Alessandra Bollettino, “Of Equal or of More Service”: Black Soldiers and the British Empire in the Mid-
Eighteenth-Century Caribbean, Slavery & Abolition 37
17. Anonymous, History of the Seven Years’ War, 1758, pt.
18. See Daniel Marston, The Seven Years’ War (New York:
Routledge, 2013), 45 ff.
19. Marston, The Seven Years’ War, 46.
20. Marston, The Seven Years’ War, 68.
22. Swingen, Competing Visions of Empire, 7.
23. Bollettino does suggest as comparable the British Empire’s
use of sepoys (“Of Equal or of More Service”), 5.
29. See Bernard Marshall, Slave Resistance and White Reaction in the British Windward Islands 1783–1817,
37. See also Katherine Hart, “James Gillray, Charles James Fox, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Caricature and Displacement in the Debate over Reform,” in Angela Rosenthal and David Bindman, eds., No Laughing Matter:
Visual Humor in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), 76–119 (100).
Across the British Empire, officials, merchants, and ordinary subjects of the Crown conceived of indigenous peoples—from North America, to Scotland’s Highlands, to Bengal—within a similar conceptual framework. Though Britons lacked a consistent term for bringing into one framework the sovereign peoples living at the frontiers of expansion, they nonetheless used a series of overlapping terms to indicate their thinking. On their own, the materials gathered in this exhibition offer only fragmentary insights into the ways in which British imperial officials ordered native peoples into a series of comparable categories across the globe. When brought together, however, they reveal some of the most significant axes along which policymakers framed these comparisons and reimagined both indigenous peoples and indigenous governance over time.

Britons believed that indigenous peoples shared in a certain relationship to state expansion that disposed them to overlap. Texts like *Reasons for Settling the Trade to Africa* (1750) and Lord Clive’s *Speech to Parliament* (1772) similarly framed West African and Bengali polities as targets of English expansion since at least the seventeenth century. Erskine’s tract on the ancient liberties of Britain (1777) shared this framework but opened it up to regions like the Irish and Scottish Highlands by highlighting Britain’s own history as a colonized space. In addition to

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sharing in this history of English expansion, the indigenous communities featured in this exhibition retained significant autonomy well into the eighteenth century. Highland clans retained the right of heritable jurisdictions, or a set of traditional rights that empowered chiefs to judge in cases among their dependents, until 1747. Lord Clive in his Speech (1772) was emphatic that indigenous potentates overwhelmingly held the power in India. A map published in The Importance of Effectually Supporting the Royal African Company (1743) featured the names of West African kingdoms for the same reason. The sovereignty of these indigenous polities, coupled with their shared encounters with expansion, formed two crucial axes of connection for eighteenth-century contemporaries.

Eighteenth-century observers also gestured toward more cultural connections. Indigenous peoples’ cultures differed from those of expanding European states. Many retained languages, cultural markers, and modes of social and political organization dissimilar to those of the English. Most continued to observe religious traditions that diverged from those of England’s established Church. Peoples native to sites of global English expansion therefore also, at times, became objects of stereotypes stressing what Britons believed to be their deviation from “civilized” society. The Duke of Cumberland wrote to the Duke of Newcastle of the “wild manner” of Highland clansmen (1746). An anonymous Seven Years’ War tract cast Native Americans as “savages” (1761). Lord Clive in his speech to Parliament contended that the “inhabitants, especially of Bengal, in inferior stations, are servile, mean, submissive and humble. In superior stations they are luxurious, effeminate, tyrannical, treacherous, venal, cruel.”

In policy terms, however, eighteenth-century British statesmen also took seriously the many considerations that prevented pejorative views from translating directly into state policies of violence. They advocated instead a negotiated mode of indigenous governance, by which Britain entered into alliances or diplomatic arrangements with native head people and exchanged gifts, protections, or patronage for concessions on the ground. This manuscript material demonstrates that this strategy transcended continents: both Lord Clive’s Speech (1772) and the anonymous Seven Years’ War tract highlight the historical importance of indigenous alliances in India and North America, respectively. The Thomas Walpole papers, moreover, establish that eighteenth-century Britons could be engaged in multiple, geographically disparate indigenous policies: after serving as an East India Company director from 1753, Walpole then led a group of investors to seek a land grant ceded by the Iroquois to the Crown in 1772. Finally, the materials in this exhibition conclusively prove that policymakers transposed insights about indigenous governance across regions: A Short View of the Disputes between Merchants (1720) calls for the extension of Britain’s North American indigenous strategies to alliances in West Africa, noting “that a great inland trade may be carried on in the country behind the Gold Coast, and that it is not more difficult there, than among the Indians of North America.” Doing so would “bring as much treasure into Great Britain as ever was brought into Europe from New Spain” while protecting Britain’s African alliances from French machinations. As A Short View suggests, however, Britain entered into alliances with indigenous peoples to achieve larger strategic ends. And whenever war erupted between Britain and its most powerful imperial rival, France — in the War of the Austrian Succession (1744–1748), the Carnatic Wars in the East Indies (1749–1754), the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), and the French and Napoléon Wars (1793–1815) — the conflicts rapidly engulfed arenas of Anglo-French imperial competition around the world. The manuscript materials selected for this exhibition convey an obsession on the part of both British and French officials to compete for indigenous allies in each of these colonial arenas. In addition to the Short View’s concerns about French alliances with African Gold Coast kingdoms, Henry Seymour Conway’s American Correspondence offered glimpses into ministerial anxieties over French- and Spanish-allied Native American peoples. From South Asia, a “Copy of a Letter of Intelligence from the Secretary of State” (1747) informed Charles Hanbury Williams that “The French, to facilitate their design” of sacking Fort St. George in Madras, “contriv’d to bribe the Black Governor, who join’d them with all his forces and assisted them in plen- dering the settlement.” These materials indicate that when conflicts flared, France and Britain doubled down on competing for indigenous allies globally.

Within these shifting geopolitical configurations, indigenous peoples found space to imagine new possibilities for withstanding or even resisting the pressures of imperial encroachment. Most native peoples entered into alliances with European powers not because they sympathized with European expansion, but because alliance enabled them to contain the deleterious effects of expansion and cement a position as coveted military or trading partners. Some — like the Mohawk and Cherokee delegations that visited London in 1710, 1710, and 1762 — entered into alliances to maintain their prestige or preserve
their autonomy relative to rival or neighboring poli-
ties. Significantly, alliance also afforded opportunities
to consolidate political power. Scottish Highland
clans closely aligned with the Whig government
received positions through patronage and served as
MPs. Others, like Suraj-ud-daula, Britain’s allied
nawab of Bengal, and Orontony, ally and head of an
Ohio Valley Indian republic, parlayed their respective
accords with the British to forge distinct successor
polities. The Kingdom of Whydah in West Africa
and the Iroquois in North America both emerged as
regional power brokers by playing European powers
off of one another. Across the world, then, many
indigenous peoples imagined new possibilities in
defiance of the existing social and political order,
shrewdly using alliance with Europeans to reclaim or
newly assert power over the very diplomatic relations
those allies sought to control.

Two items within this exhibition—the Duke of
Cumberland’s account of the Battle of Culloden
(1746), and the Secretary of State’s Letter of
Intelligence regarding the fall of Fort St. George
(1747)—attest to the ongoing power of indigenous
resistance to challenge ministerial aims. Crucially,
however, these artifacts of resistance also gesture
toward an asymmetry of indigenous political
outcomes that developed over the course of the eigh-
teenth century. By Lord Clive’s account mentioned
above, Bengalis faced an unprecedented escalation of
East India Company involvement after that company
deposed three successive nawabs and became
sovereigns of Bengal in 1765. Britain’s American
indigenous allies found themselves embroiled in an
imperial civil war that, by 1834, had relegated their
status to that of “domestic dependent nations.” As
prints like The Able Doctor (1774) and The Female

"Copy of a letter of Intelligence from the Secretary’s Office, outlining French seizure of
Madras,” April 21, 1747. Charles Hanbury Williams Papers. LWL Mss 7, vol. 10, ff. 4–5

William Augustus Duke of Cumberland
(1721–1765). “Copy of a letter to the Duke
of Newcastle,” April 1746. Edward Weston
Papers. LWL Mss 6, vol. 1, page 187
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6 In Whydah, European trade companies were in constant competition to curry favor with King Haffon, while in North America the Iroquois used the Great Peace of 1701 to establish a “playoff system” to keep France and Britain at bay. Daniel K. Richter, The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

7 This legalistic creation was formed over the course of three Supreme Court cases—Johnson v. M’Intosh (1823); Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831); and Worcester v. Georgia (1832)—and forms the basis of Native Americans’ legal status in American Indian law.


1 Robert Clive, Lord Clive’s Speech in the House of Commons, 30th March 1772, on the motion made for leave to bring in a bill for the better regulation of the affairs of the East India Company (London: J. Walter, 1773), included in Horace Walpole’s Tracts, Lewis Walpole Library 1001. 49. 1609: 58: 3, ff. 42–45.
3 To Charles Hanbury Williams, Copy of a Letter of Intelligence from the Secretary of State’s Office outlining French seizure of Madras (April 21, 1747) in MS. 855 vol. 7, ff. 4–5.
5 P. J. Marshall, Bengal: The British Bridgehead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76; Richard White, The Combatants (1776) attest, they also became monolithic symbols for a nascent American nationhood.

These materials confirm one historian’s observation that “the very notion of ‘indigenous people’ within the British Isles was fundamentally re-worked” in the decades after 1760, making the period covered by this exhibition “a critical one in the epistemological and economic creation of ‘indigenous peoples’ as a series of comparable categories across the globe.” This alone may not surprise; indigenous peoples occupied a fluid place in the British imagination—allies to “enemies,” diplomats to “savages,” transatlantic diplomatic envoys to icons of a nascent American nationhood—throughout the eighteenth century. As this exhibition suggests, however, the reworking of ideas about indigeneity owed not to British perceptions about indigenous “backwardness,” but rather to ministers’ ongoing awareness of indigenous peoples’ indispensability to even the most powerful of European empires. One cannot account for the expansion of the eighteenth-century British Empire, these sources tell us, without confronting the central shaping role of indigenous peoples.

Anonymous. The Female Combatants. Etching & engraving with hand-coloring, 22 x 17 cm, sheet. Published January 26, 1776. 776.01.26.01

George Townshend (1724–1807). Sawney Discover’d, or, The Scotch Intruders. Etching, 18 x 30 cm, sheet. Published 1761. 761.00.00.03.1
Further Reading


