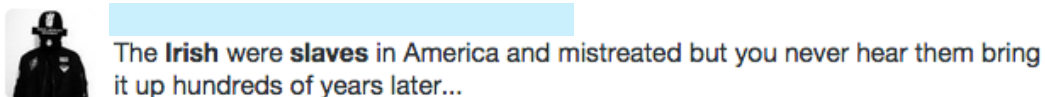
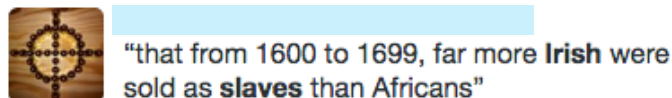
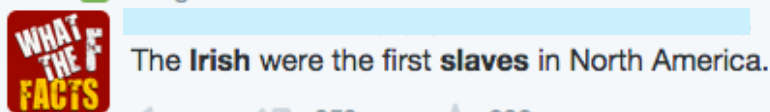
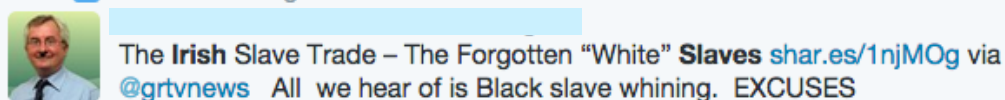
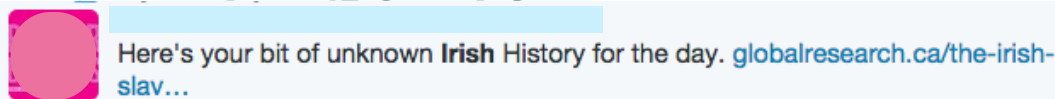
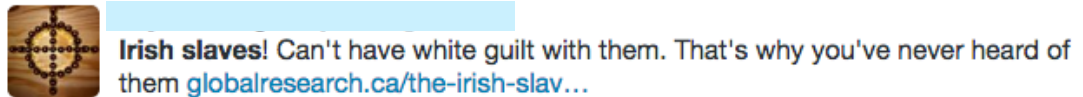


The Myth of “Irish Slaves” in the Colonies

confusion // conflation // co-option

Liam Hogan

Nationalist (and, indeed, racist) world views share the characteristics of gossip. Negative rumours about other groups are reiterated until seeming to express truths too profound for doubt, while negative facts about one’s own group are suppressed or rationalised. - G. K. Peatling¹



¹ G. K. Peatling, “Victorian imperial theorist? Goldwin Smith and Ireland”, *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837-1901* (Dublin 2004), Peter Gray (ed.), p.35

Introduction

Recent years have seen the marked growth of the “Irish slaves” narrative, which is itself a subset of the “white slavery” myth. This myth has been currency in ultranationalist, white supremacist and neo-Nazi circles for decades and their promotion of it frequently occurs on their websites and across social media.² The myth has recently entered the mainstream, partly due to the decision by national newspapers and popular websites to endorse a spurious “Irish Slave Trade” article that conflates indentured servitude or forced labour with chattel slavery.³ Surprisingly, this claim has gone relatively unchallenged in the public domain, thus this paper will analyse its veracity.

Confusion

As slavery is such a widely used, all-encompassing term, we need to clarify the relevant nomenclature. This is especially important when it is realised that the “white slavery” myth relies on disinformation, which in turn encourages confusion and the blurring of lines. The language used by some academics has not helped matters, as they have tripped over themselves to rationalise the baseline characteristic of chattel slavery in the New World, namely, that only non-Europeans were enslaved. In referring to a “slave” in this essay, it implies chattel slavery as it existed in the British colonies from the 17th to 19th century, i.e. a person who was condemned to perpetual, hereditary slavery, that was based on notions of “race”. Racism and slavery do not necessarily imply one another, yet when both are present they can help amplify the process of dehumanisation.⁴ Racism was a pillar of the Atlantic slave trade. The point here is that the Irish were not chattel slaves in the colonies.⁵ But many Irish did own slaves, traded slaves and made great fortunes on the backs of their human stock. Thousands of Irish were deported to the colonies by force, and their

² For example the white supremacist neo-Nazi website Stormfront, which was established by a Grand Wizard of the KKK. It hosts an article “The Truth About Slavery” URL: <https://www.stormfront.org/crusader/texts/bt/bt07.html> which quotes liberally from Michael Hoffman’s self-published book “They Were White and They Were Slaves”. Hoffman is a Holocaust denier.

³ See Appendix I, a series of Google Trends graphs which track how the myth spread

⁴ David Livingstone Smith, “Less Than Human” (New York 2011) pp. 112-123

⁵ I could have included hundreds of peer reviewed books and journal articles here as this is not a debate in academia. In this case I refer to W.T.M. Riches, “White Slaves, Black Servants and the Question of Providence: Servitude and Slavery in Colonial Virginia 1609-1705”, *Irish Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 8 (1999), p. 1

terms of service were sold to the highest bidder. But the overwhelming majority who settled there did so voluntarily.

The thesis of this paper is that confusion over the servile status of some of the Irish in the colonies has led, disturbingly, to their condition being conflated with that of the chattel slave. This use of the phrase “white slavery” or “Irish slave trade” in the same context as actual chattel slavery or the actual slave trade, is a political act, for it has no historical justification. This sophism makes the co-option of the legacy and truth of the Atlantic slave trade a logical next step. At its best this conflation is ignorance. At its worst it is an attempt to diminish responsibility for one of the greatest crimes committed in human history. It is vital that this mythology is challenged by historians in the public domain. To foster clarity, it is necessary to discuss the three primary forms of bondage that existed in the colonies, *Indentured Servitude*, *Forced Labour* and *Chattel Slavery*.

Indentured Servitude

The majority of the indentured labourers from Ireland who emigrated to the West Indies in the 17th and 18th century, did so voluntarily.⁶ This was part of a much larger migratory trend and it has been estimated that the majority of Europeans who emigrated to the American colonies were indentured servants.⁷ There is a dispute over the origin of the indenture system but it appears that it was an innovation of two English customs: apprenticeship and husbandry: this innovation occurred as “some such system was necessary to finance the crossing of the Atlantic.”⁸ Agreeing to an indenture meant that the cost of the migrants’ voyage to the colony was paid for, and the “recruits in turn promised to work for stated periods..”⁹ Once an indenture’s term of service was complete (usually between two to seven years) they were automatically emancipated. It is important to note that potential servants in Ireland did not board the transport ships without some knowledge of the conditions on the various colonies. Anchored in Kinsale in 1636, Capt. Thomas Anthony found that the Irish labourers had a surprising amount of knowledge about the different conditions on the islands. Akenson describes how they

⁶ Jerrold Casway, “Irish Women Overseas, 1500-1880”, *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, MacCurtain and O’Dowd (ed.), p. 127

⁷ M.A. Jones, “American Emigration”, (Chicago 1960), p. 9

⁸ Richard Middleton, “Colonial America: A History, 1607-1760” (Cambridge 2011) p. 40

⁹ David W. Galenson, “The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas: an Economic Analysis”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. XLIV No. 1 (March 1984), p. 6

were well informed about comparative wage rates and knew that they would be better paid in the West Indies than Virginia. So Captain Anthony was forced to change his plans and to make St Christopher his destination: this is where most of them wanted to go...[...].fifty-three survived the journey to St Christopher [there were eight deaths], where their contracts were sold for between 450 and 500 pounds of tobacco apiece.¹⁰

Once an indentured servant's term of service was over they received their "freedom dues" which was around £10 sterling, or its equivalent in tobacco or sugar. They were now free, with cash in hand. If they wished they could lease or buy land, buy or trade in slaves or hire them out to others. Alternatively they could migrate to another colony where there were better opportunities. This was all in accordance with the various colonial laws which treated indentures as bonded labour under strict contract and control, and which treated chattel slaves as non-human objects of property, i.e. livestock. In 1656, John Hammond, a former servant who had first hand experience of the indenture system, advised potential indentured labourers who were thinking of moving to Virginia that

Those Servants that will be industrious may in their time of service gain a competent estate before their Freedoms, which is usually done by many, and they gain esteem and assistance that appear so industrious.¹¹

The social mobility he refers to can be observed among Irish immigrants. In Montserrat, a colony where many Irish settled in the 17th century, we find that by 1729 over sixty six percent of all the sugar planters/slave owners on the island were Irish.¹² In 1670 ten percent of the property owners in Jamaica were Irish, and in 1729 "twenty percent of the colonial assemblymen possessed Irish names."¹³ This is further illustrated, in a moderate sense, in the case of Cornelius Bryan, an emigrant labourer from Ireland. Bryan was

¹⁰ Donald Harman Akenson, "If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730" (Liverpool 1997), pp. 52-53

¹¹ John Hammond, "Leah and Rachel, or, The Two Fruitful Sisters Virginia and Mary-land, Their Present Condition, Impartially Stated and Related" (London 1656)

¹² Nini Rodgers, "The Irish in the Carribean 1641-1837: An Overview" in "Irish Migration Studies in Latin America" 5:3 (November 2007), pp. 145-156. Available online (www.irlandeses.org/imsla0711.htm), accessed 22 November 2014.

¹³ *ibid.*

charged with slandering the English (he was accused of threatening to drink their blood) before a Barbados Council in the 1650s. He received 21 lashes of the whip on his back as punishment. Yet by the time he died in 1687 he had progressed to the status of a small planter in Barbados. He had acquired thirteen slaves and twenty two acres of land.¹⁴

This potential for upward social mobility can also be observed in the case of two former indentured servants from Ireland, Daniel Dulany and William Killeen.¹⁵ Dulany, who was educated at Trinity College Dublin and indentured in Maryland in 1703, became the Attorney General of Maryland, while Killeen who, “was imported as an indentured servant from Co. Clare in 1737”, eventually became the Chief Justice of the state of Delaware.¹⁶

It shall be noted that in many cases indentured servants were abused and overworked. There was even an indentured servants’ revolt in Barbados in 1647 and one in Virginia in 1663. The leaders of the Barbadian revolt were hanged but “no particular part was imputed to the Irish.”¹⁷ Indentured servants were essentially the white, European underclass in colonial societies that were stratified by assumptions of racial superiority; ergo only non-white, non-Europeans were chattel slaves. The Indentured servants work was often brutal and the mortality rate in the colonies, across all classes, was extremely high, particularly among the first generation of settlers. Many did not survive to see the expiration of their contract.

Not all Irish indentures were employed as tradesmen, servants or labourers. Many served as soldiers in militias or in colonial armies. In this role they were charged with upholding their white supremacist society by suppressing the chattel slaves’ capacity to revolt, as well as protecting the colony from raids by other European powers. The former role was underlined in a letter sent from the Governor of Barbados, William Willoughby, to the Privy Council with regard to the shortage of white indentured servants in the colony

¹⁴ Jenny Shaw, “Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean, Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference”, (University of Georgia Press 2013), introduction

¹⁵ Audrey Lockhart, “Some Aspects of Emigration from Ireland to the North American Colonies between 1660 and 1775”, (New York 1976), p. 79

¹⁶ Richard J. Purcell, “Irish Settlers in Early Delaware”, *Pennsylvania History* XIV, p. 98

¹⁷ Rodgers, n.p.

..If the supply be not of good and sure men the [safety] of this place will always be in question; for though there be [no] enemy abroad, the keeping of slaves in subjection must still be provided for...¹⁸

Near the end of this letter the Governor implores the Council to not send any more Catholic Irish servants to Barbados. The Barbadian planters saw them as potential saboteurs who may coordinate with the French. This fear became a reality in St. Kitts in 1666 when during a French attack on the British forces it was recounted that “the Irish in the rear, always a bloody and perfidious people to the English Protestant interest, fired volleys into the front and killed more than the enemy of our own forces.”¹⁹

The planters in Barbados had cause for worry in this regard as by 1667 the Irish constituted over 50% of their 4000-man militia.²⁰ They were also paranoid that the poor Irish would connive with the African slaves to foment rebellion. But this fear was never realised; as Rodgers put it “in the last resort the Irish did not make common cause with the slaves..[...].they were white and wished to exercise the advantage it conferred upon them.”²¹ Nevertheless in Barbados in 1685, this paranoia spilled over into arrests. Twenty two slaves and eighteen Irish servants were interrogated on suspicion of being involved in a plot to revolt. All the slaves were executed and all the Irish walked free.²²

“White Slaves”

Famously, indentured labourers were sometimes referred to as “white slaves” by contemporaries, including chattel slaves. This was a solely derogatory label, as

destined as they were to be integrated into colonial society, they could neither regard themselves nor be regarded as slaves.²³

¹⁸ Hilary McD Beckles, “A ‘riotous and unruly lot’: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1614-1733”, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Oct., 1990), p. 510

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 519

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 508

²¹ Rodgers, p.44

²² *ibid*.

²³ Lockhart, p. 63

Rodgers perceptively suggests that the “white slavery” description springs “from an acceptance that slavery was for Negroes” and that this “took firm root in Ireland.”²⁴ The word ‘Slavery’ was often used in 19th century Ireland to describe any form of injustice. The addition of the word ‘white’ was intended as a criticism of a person condemning chattel slavery in the United States, but ignoring domestic strife. We see this in the case of Charles Lenox Remond, the famous black abolitionist, who toured in Ireland in 1841. During one of his lectures in Dublin he was asked “what are you going to do for the white slaves [in Ireland]?” This person was likely referring to the desperate situation of the poor tenantry, and while they also deserved advocacy on their behalf, this interjection illustrates the blinkered view that some had towards chattel slavery. Remond was accompanied on this tour by Richard Davis Webb, a founding member of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society. Webb believed that many in Ireland struggled to understand the full meaning of chattel slavery. He explains that his fellow citizens were so used to

abject want and enormous luxury, that slavery is not readily looked on so much in the robbery of rights, as a privation of advantages [thus] the wickedness of man’s holding property in man is forgotten in the description of the supply of food, the imposition of labour, the quantity of clothing, and the animal wants of the man [...] Slavery being unknown amongst us, we are tempted to confound it in our minds with the lowest position of humanity with which we are familiar. This is perfectly natural, but extremely fallacious.²⁵

The “white slave” term was also used in a classic piece of propaganda deployed by pro-slavery interests in the Antebellum South. At one meeting in South Carolina in 1833 it was toasted that “we of the South feed, clothe, and pay the doctor for attending our slaves. Let the North do as much for their *white slaves* as we do for our black ones.”²⁶

Were indentured servants from Ireland “cheaper” than slaves? This is another misunderstood aspect of colonial history. This was not a value judgement, they were simply less profitable (for obvious reasons) The Governor of Barbados wrote in 1676 that

²⁴ Nini Rodgers, “Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery” (New York 2007), p. 38

²⁵ ‘Remond in Ireland’, *The Liberator*, 24th September 1841

²⁶ ‘South Carolina - Celebration at Slab Town’, *Newbern Centinel*, 9th August 1833

..the planters are weary of [the Irish labourers] for they prove commonly very idle and [the planters] do find by experience that they can keep three blacks who work better and cheaper.²⁷

Better because they can be tortured/murdered at will to encourage the others to work harder and for longer. *Cheaper* because they are more profitable. They will own them for their entire life, feed them less expensive food, clothe them less, house them in worse conditions, will own their children, and will never have to pay them their freedom dues. Planters did attempt to extract the maximum amount of labour from their indentured servants while they were still in contract, but as soon as they had enough capital accumulated they invested heavily in slaves. McCusker and Menard (2004) relate a letter sent in 1645 from a Barbadian planter who explains that his colleagues had bought over one thousands slaves up to August of that year. This planter outlined how “the more [slaves] they buy, the better able are they to buy, for in a year and a half, they will earn (with god's blessing) as much as they cost.” McCusker and Menard surmise that

the cost of indentured servants who would work for five or six years no longer made any sense given the profits to be made in the sugar boom. Under the new circumstance, the larger investment in a slave could be recouped in eighteen months - and slaves could be worked a lifetime long.²⁸

Myth Mutation

Belief in the myth that Irish labourers were treated worse than slaves has endured and mutated; as evidenced by its frequent deployment in relation to Irish immigrants in the Antebellum South. This year an Irish blogger published a post which claimed that Irish immigrants, which he refers to as “Irish slaves”, were worse off than actual chattel slaves in the U.S. during the 19th century as “Irish workers were often used instead of Black slaves for dangerous jobs.”²⁹ This simplistic reading of labour relations unintentionally repeats the same spurious argument put forward by Michael A. Hoffman II, an infamous

²⁷ Beckles, p. 512

²⁸ John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, “The Sugar Industry and the Seventeenth Century: A New Perspective on the Barbadian “Sugar Revolution””, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, Stuart B. Schwartz (ed.)

²⁹ Craig Considine, “How Irish Slaves Were Worse Off Than African Slaves During 19th Century, USA”, *MacConsáidín*, Published: 31st October 2014 URL: <http://craigconsidinetcd.com/2014/10/31/how-irish-slaves-were-worse-off-than-african-slaves-during-19th-century-usa/>

Holocaust denier, anti-semitic and conspiracy theorist.³⁰ This rationalisation erroneously removes all agency from the Irish workers, who were, unlike slaves, free to down tools and look for work elsewhere. If a slave refused to work it could lead to torture or possibly death. After all, many homicide laws in the South did not apply to the killing of “any slave dying under moderate correction.”³¹ It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that Irish workers were paid for their efforts, for that is the sole reason they were *choosing* to do the work in the first place. The work the slaves were forced to do enriched their owners, exclusively.

The foundation for this myth appears to be the belief that free workers who undertook dangerous work were worse off than slaves, but only if slaves were not doing said dangerous work. This is disingenuous for the same argument cannot exist in a situation where all the workers are freemen, i.e. “I don’t want to do this dangerous work, can I be a chattel slave instead.” To paraphrase David T. Gleeson, historians have yet to encounter evidence of a free labourer pining for enchattelment.³² Gleeson challenged this pervasive Irish-migrant-as-passive-victim narrative in his seminal work, *The Irish in the South 1815-1870*, and he found that

this implication that the Irish were passive and lacked control over their lives is incorrect. Unlike slaves, the Irish chose to live in the urban South. Those migrants [made a] conscious and rational decision [and] were not victims of this urbanisation..[they] came to the towns and cities for economic opportunity [...] the complex social networks created in the South by the Irish diaspora would not have existed if the immigrants had only dug ditches, laid railroads, and loaded steamboats..³³

³⁰ Michael A. Hoffman II, “They Were White and They Were Slaves” (1993) p. 20. See the section on Hoffman’s denial of the gas chambers etc. in Stephen Atkins, “Holocaust Denial as an International Movement” (2009), pp. 176-178

³¹ Thomas D. Morris, “Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860” (University of North Carolina Press 1999), p. 172

³² Informal point made during a discussion at the “Ireland, Slavery, Anti-Slavery, Empire” Conference, UCD Humanities Institute, 24th October 2013

³³ David T. Gleeson, “The Irish in the South, 1815-1877” (North Carolina 2001), p. 37

Forced Labour

The most common form of unfree labour in the present age are situations that involve Forced Labour. This was defined by the Forced Labour Convention (1930) as

all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.³⁴

The Irish that were forcibly transported to the West Indies in the 17th and 18th centuries can be classified in the first instance as forced labourers. This classification includes those souls who were deported from Ireland due to military design as well as the victims of notorious criminal activity such as deceptions and kidnapping. It is important to state that, with the exception of serious criminals, on their arrival to the colonies they were invariably prescribed the same rights as voluntary indentured servants.³⁵ Therefore we cannot exactly equate their form of servitude with the Irish POWs that suffered the horrific Nazi Forced Labour camp at Bunker Valentin, or with the women who spent most of their lives toiling in the Magdalene Laundries, institutions in which they were wrongfully detained and subject to forced labour practices. Forced Labour was also the central feature of the infamous penal colonies in Australia, to where so many Irish were deported.

Chattel Slavery

Persons from Ireland have been held in various forms of human bondage throughout history, but they have never been chattel slaves in the West Indies. A chattel slave was a slave forever. Children born to slaves were inherited by their owner. Chattel slaves were seen as livestock, not human beings. The last time a person from Ireland was reduced to chattel slavery was when it was a domestic institution, which was circa a millennium ago. Slaves were an integral part of the medieval Irish economy, and just like chattel slavery in the West Indies in the 17th century,

³⁴ Forced Labour Convention (1930), Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (Entry into force: 01 May 1932), Article 2.1

³⁵ Beckles, p. 514

If a slave owner begat a child on one of his slave woman, the resulting child was also his property...[...].the master was allowed to do whatever he liked with his slaves; killing your slave was not a crime..³⁶

It is a feature of those who advance the “white slavery” narrative, that they take particular care not to define chattel slavery before conflating it with indentured servitude or forced labour. The Atlantic slave trade was establishing itself as a legitimate enterprise in the European psyche as early as the 15th century. The terms “negro”, “black” and “slave” were becoming synonyms in increasingly white supremacist minds. The British did not get involved in the African slave trade until the 17th century, the Spanish, Portuguese had forged ahead from the mid-15th century on. Tens of thousands of African slaves were for sale in Lisbon in the first two decades of the 16th century.³⁷

What about Ireland? Early accounts of Africans in contact with the Irish were generally on a Slave/Master basis. Vikings brought African prisoners of war to Ireland in the 9th century, likely via Muslim slave traders. A German visitor to Ireland in 1591 records that there was a ship full of African slaves docked at an Irish port. It appears that the cargo were for sale as Ludolf von Münchhausen writes that

Indeed, there happened to be a ship full of negroes in Ireland, which had been intercepted at sea, at this time. I was willing to buy one of the negresses..³⁸

Coincidentally the Irish word for the devil (inherited directly from Old Norse) is *an fear dubh*, i.e. the black man, while the Irish for an African person is *an fear gorm*.³⁹ Did the former term have have some effect on attitudes in Ireland as the Atlantic slave trade developed, and interactions became more common? There are some references in Irish history to those of African descent being regarded as the devil. In a section of his memoirs entitled ‘Skinning a Black Child’, Sir Jonah Barrington recalled how in late 18th century

³⁶ Charlene M. Eska, “Women and Slavery in the Early Irish Laws”, *Studia Celtica Fennica* VIII (2011), p. 31

³⁷ Gad J. Heuman, “The Slavery Reader, Volume 1”, (London 2003), p. 458

³⁸ Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, “A German visitor to Monaincha in 1591”, *Tipperary Historical Journal*, Ed. Dónall Ó Fionnáin, Thurles, County Tipperary Historical Society (1998) page 223–233: 228–233

³⁹ Steve Garner, “Racism in the Irish Experience”, (London 2004), p. 72

Ireland his friend, a Lt. Palmer “brought home a black lad as a servant” from America. A reaction among the locals was that

all the old women agreed in believing, that the black lad from America was nothing else but the devil disguised, who had followed the Lt. as a servant boy, to gain over the family..[...]...and that he ought to be smothered by the priest or transported out of the country..⁴⁰

The former slave Thomas L. Johnson visited Belfast in 1885 and wrote how he saw someone watching him from across the street. It was a young man who was calling out to his friend “Bill! Bill! come here, come and see the devil!”⁴¹ There is an assumption in some quarters that the Irish did not show any signs of racism until they emigrated to the United States, but this is facile and tends towards Irish exceptionalism.⁴² Perhaps the latent racism that Ivan Duhig hinted at when he asked “[do you] know the word nigéar?” goes back centuries.⁴³ To wit, Richard Davis Webb, speaking of Charles Lenox Remond’s tour of Ireland, held no doubts that anti-black prejudice existed in Ireland in 1841

Remond has, hitherto, had no battle to meet in Ireland - neither unkindness, nor persecution.[..].Prejudice and ignorance have barred his way in England. The same elements exist in Ireland, but they have not been suffered to come in his way.⁴⁴

It was a relatively common practice among planters and merchants to return home to Great Britain and Ireland with some of their slaves.⁴⁵ They were still the property of their owner while in Ireland, and despite popular opinion to the contrary, the famous 1772

⁴⁰ Sir Jonah Barrington, “Personal Sketches of his Own Times”, Vol. III, (London 1832), pp. 51-66

⁴¹ Thomas L. Johnson, “Twenty-Eight Years A Slave: or the Story of my Life in Three Continents”, (London 1909), p. 172

⁴² For a flawed treatise on the “whitening” of the Irish see Noel Ignatiev’s “How the Irish Became White” (New York 1995)

⁴³ John Redmond, “Interview with Ivan Duhig”, *Thumbscrew*, No. 3, Autumn/Winter 1995 URL: <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12263>

⁴⁴ *The Liberator*, 24th September 1841

⁴⁵ James Walvin, “Black and White: the Negro and English Society, 1555-1945” (London 1973) and also Travis Glasson, “Missionary Anglicism, Slavery, and the Yorke-Talbot Opinion, 1701-30”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 279-318

Somerset Case did not secure their freedom.⁴⁶ There is also evidence that slaves were traded in Ireland in the 18th century.⁴⁷ Thomas M. Truxes has highlighted an advert that appeared in the *Cork Evening Post* in 1767 for a “likely Negro boy about four years old, American born..” Additionally, in 1765 the *Freeman’s Journal* reported on the suspected murder of a possibly albino slave, referred to as a “white Negro Boy”, who was “lately exhibited as a Curiosity” in Dublin city.⁴⁸ *The Anti-Union* also confirmed that there were black slaves in Dublin at the close of the 18th century. As it described the scene in the city during an eclipse, it mentioned that

the Sun is not, by the natives of Ireland, held in such veneration as he is by the black slaves and certain other barbarians who are known to utter expressions of grief during an eclipse; and many of whom resident in Dublin, did on this day, persist in their lamentable customs against the general feeling, howling like dogs and grunting like swine during the whole of the eclipse.⁴⁹

While there are accounts of Irish indentured servants being freed from their contracts early after proving that they had been ill treated by their master, we find the opposite provision for the chattel slave. The “most dreaded [punishment] for a servant was an extension of indenture”;⁵⁰ but a slave, suffering perpetual bondage, could be subjected to an array of grotesque physical punishments such as castration, being burned alive, the mashing of limbs leading to dismemberment, broken bones, beheadings, beating out of eyes, slitting of ears and various other mutilations.⁵¹ The severe punishment meted out to “insolent” slaves was promoted by the colonial administrators who deemed such brutality necessary as a deterrent to disobedience and insurrection. Even the most minor offences could lead to ultra-violence, sadism, butchery. Review the case of

⁴⁶ James Walvin, “Black People in Britain: The Eighteenth Century”, *History Today*, Vol. 31, No. 9, (Sept. 1981)

⁴⁷ Thomas M. Truxes found that “despite no established commerce, slaves were even traded in Ireland.” See Thomas M. Truxes, “Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783”, (Cambridge 1988), p. 93

⁴⁸ *Freeman’s Journal*, 14th May 1765

⁴⁹ *The Anti-Union*, No. XXI, 12th February 1799

⁵⁰ Rodgers, p. 38

⁵¹ Rev. James Ramsey, “An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves in the British sugar colonies” (Dublin 1784), pp. 73-74

...Peter Boone, an African who managed to steal nine pigs. In August 1693 he was hanged, his bowels drawn out and burned, and then he was cut into four quarters and displayed on the main public paths. A traditional punishment for white murderers and mutineers, that, but for pig stealing? Or, worst offence, the black who had nearly beaten his overseer to death: he was suspended in chains without food or water and allowed to slowly expire.⁵²

The Councils were aware that slaves were a valuable asset and that it would be against the interests of their owners to destroy them. So weighing up the need for absolute coercion, they decided to offer generous compensation packages to those that murdered their troublesome humans. In 1695 the Council of Nevis proceeded to “amend the Act to check the insolencies of negroes” and so

The Council agreed that on the execution of any negro an order be issued for appraising his value, which shall be paid by the Treasurer up the value of 5,000 pounds of sugar.⁵³

This “justice” system was also in place in Montserrat. One slave who was found guilty of stealing a cow was “condemned to be burned [to death]” and 3,500 pounds of sugar was offered to his owner as compensation. That same day two other slaves were accused of stealing a different cow. The magistrates being unsure of their guilt, made them draw “lots for their lives, and he that drew the losing lot was condemned to death, the other being condemned to be severely whipped.”⁵⁴ The slave that survived this horrific game of chance belonged to John Ryan, an Irish planter.⁵⁵ The luck of the Irish?

⁵² Donald H. Akenson, “An Irish History of Civilization, Volume 1” (London 2005), p. 340; Colonial Records, Calendar of State Papers, Colonial 1693, Aug. 22. 520. Minutes of Council and Assembly of Montserrat.

⁵³ Colonial Records, Calendar of State Papers, Minutes of the Council of Nevis, 5th August 1695. The 1678 census records that the island of Nevis was 22% Irish.

⁵⁴ Colonial Records, Calendar of State Papers, Minutes of General Assembly of Montserrat, 16th July 1695. The 1678 census records that Montserrat was 50% Irish.

⁵⁵ Rodgers, p. 62

Conflation

Sean O’Callaghan’s *To Hell or Barbados* (2000) and Don Jordan and Michael Walsh’s *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain’s White Slaves in America* (2007) have done much to embolden the “Irish slave” narrative. Both publications are to be commended for highlighting relatively neglected aspects of British colonial history. They shine a light on the often cruel treatment that indentured servants and forced labourers experienced. However, their strained attempts to conflate white indentured servitude or forced labour with black chattel slavery is a fundamentally wrongheaded exercise that leaves a bitter taste. What’s more, their suggestion that chattel slaves were treated better than indentured servants crosses a line into white supremacy. Thorough critiques of both publications are long overdue, but the commentary that follows will be brief and to the point.

Sean O’Callaghan was at least considerate when he warned his readers that he was not a historian.⁵⁶ A review of his bibliography reveals a penchant for sensationalism. More pertinently, we find that he consistently used the umbrella term “slavery” to describe human trafficking, prostitution, child labour, forced marriage, forced labour and concubinage, across a series of books. A glance at the titles *White Slave Trade* (1967), *Yellow Slave Trade* (1968), *White Slave Traffic* (1969) shows that he was prone to using racial archetypes. Over the years O’Callaghan received criticism for his tenuous grasp on writing objective history. A review of his first book *The Easter Lily* (1957) laments that the author “loses no time in making it clear that history is not his strong suit.”⁵⁷

Brendan Behan was unimpressed with *The Easter Lily*, and he explained that he “would not trouble [himself] with [O’Callaghan] one way or another” but for the fact that the book suggested, without any supporting evidence, that many members of the I.R.A. were racist.⁵⁸ The *Negro Digest* believed that he marred *The Slave Trade Today* (1961) by

⁵⁶ Sean O’Callaghan, “To Hell or Barbados” (Brandon Press 2000), p. 9

⁵⁷ *The Irish Times*, 23rd March 1957

⁵⁸ Brendan Behan, “To the Editor of the New Statesman and Nation”, 9th March 1957, The Letters of Brendan Behan, p. 95. I did not have the time to review O’Callaghan’s reporting in the 1950s with the East African Standard, a colonial newspaper in Kenya. This newspaper represented the white colonists viewpoint and “continued in its great white way” until 1975 when it finally appointed its first African editor. See Frederick K. Iraki, “Cross-media Ownership and Monopolizing of Public Spaces in Kenya”, *(Re)membering Kenya: Identity, culture and freedom*, Mbũgwa wa Mũngai, G. M. Gona (ed.), (Nairobi 2010), p. 144

[intruding on the facts with] moralizing and myth. Mr. O’Callaghan seems to dull the edge of his own exploration with an unnecessary sense of horror and shock. He is also so steeped in racial clichés as to be disconcerting. Egyptians are fat and wet-palmed; Arabs are mysterious and skulking; Africans are amoral; and “Negresses” have cool bodies..⁵⁹

Drug Addiction in Britain (1970) was “informative, enriched by occasional insights and potentially very valuable” yet it was let down by being “unbalanced, out-of-date, lurid and sometimes inaccurate pop-journalism.”⁶⁰ In this case the reviewer noticed how he massaged his source material by

[using] a single interview, repeated from different angles, to illustrate different points in such a way as to make it seem like several different interviews.⁶¹

Now aware of O’Callaghan’s indiscriminate use of the umbrella term “slavery” and his tendency to exaggerate, simplify and conflate, it is predictable that he recruited these writing habits *en masse* in his book on the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland *To Hell or Barbados* (2000). The contents of this feverish book recalls Henry Barnby’s lamentation that “actuality is never sufficient; it must always be embellished” as he debunked a series of myths surrounding the Sack of Baltimore in 1631.⁶² O’Callaghan was evidently frustrated that peer reviewed historians are in unanimous agreement that indentured servitude and forced labour, while also a form of bondage and exploitation, cannot, and should not, be conflated with chattel slavery. Nevertheless he was determined to sensationalise. He quickly discarded all pretense of a historical methodology when he assumed, despite having no evidence, that Irish deportees were forcibly transported on “slave ships” to the West Indies in exactly the same manner as African slaves.⁶³

⁵⁹ ‘Book Notes’, *Negro Digest*, May 1962, p. 51

⁶⁰ *The Irish Times*, 5th September 1970

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Henry Barnby, “The Sack of Baltimore”, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 220, (1969), p. 129

⁶³ O’Callaghan, p. 87

As if the truth of being a forced exile was not awful enough in its own right, O'Callaghan believed it was necessary to mine the "many records" of the Atlantic slave trade to directly co-opt the experience of African slaves for his own narrative. In proceeding to treat such a serious subject matter, that is the forced migration and forced servitude of thousands of our ancestors, in such a manner, he has inadvertently diminished their particular experience of exploitation. Lacking sufficient gore to heighten a sense of shock at this traumatic event, O'Callaghan repeatedly tells the reader that the Irish experience was the same as the African experience, and thus the accurate Irish story that deserves to be told is soon left far behind. In one conjecture laden section he declares that the public auction of the contracts of indentured servants was *possibly* the same as the sale of chattel slaves

Like the African slaves, it is even possible that they were stripped before being put on the auction block.⁶⁴

In total there are nearly one hundred instances in *To Hell or Barbados* where O'Callaghan conflates indentured servitude or forced labour with chattel slavery. As Nini Rodgers previously noted, O'Callaghan's shocked-and-appalled narrative appears to arise from his horror at seeing "[white people] being on a level with blacks."⁶⁵ The enslaved 'black' is an accepted norm, whereas the 'white' being treated *like* a slave is an abomination. This racial bias is crystallized by O'Callaghan in the final section of the book wherein he discusses the "Redlegs" or "poor whites" of Barbados. He introduces a local named Patrick Kelman Roach, who was his guide and mentor during his time on the island. Roach, it is claimed, is of Irish descent and his ancestors were from Limerick and they apparently settled in Barbados in 1638.⁶⁶ This Roach family were planters and O'Callaghan praises them for "[alleviating] the sufferings of their fellow countrymen transported by Cromwell."

Yet he makes no reference to the slaves these planters would have owned, bought and sold. These slaves, whose history he has relentlessly hijacked, do not exist in the text when they are no longer useful to his central narrative. Thus O'Callaghan obscures the possibility that this particular family of Roach's exploited chattel slaves for nearly two hundred years. It is shown in the slave compensation records that close to forty different

⁶⁴ O'Callaghan, p. 113

⁶⁵ Nini Rodgers, "Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery" (New York 2007), p. 38

⁶⁶ O'Callaghan, p. 216

individuals in Barbados with the surname Roach claimed for the loss of their slaves in 1834.⁶⁷ The author laments that although he was not searching for his “roots”, he did not find a fellow O’Callaghan among the “Black Irish” of Barbados. If he had widened his research into the links between the O’Callaghan’s and slavery he might have discovered the story of Michael Callaghan, a slave trader based in Bristol who shipped over a thousand slaves to the colonies in the early 18th century.⁶⁸

Disturbingly O’Callaghan occasionally moves from conflation to outright fabrication. Without a shred of evidence, nor a single citation, he asserts that Irish servants were branded like slaves on their arrival to Barbados; that paedophiles and homosexuals (yet another notorious conflation) bought Irish children; that Irish women were sold to small planters who operated “stud farms” and forced them to breed with African slaves; that Irish women were “sexually cold and unresponsive, having to be whipped into submission.”; that Irish women were stripped naked and whipped by mulatto drivers who then “satisfied their lust by taking them from the rear.”⁶⁹ In the absence of proof, all of this is part of O’Callaghan’s fantasy and its inclusion helps to explain Akenson’s barbed quip that this book is “an end-of-the-pier-act that is just a shade short of being hate literature.”⁷⁰

O’Callaghan then resolves to quote William Dickson to support his claims about “this type of planter”, but ‘forgets’ to relate that Dickson was referring to actual slaves and was based in Barbados over a century later than the time period in question.⁷¹ Much worse than this is his decision to include Dickson’s description of the miserable conditions and horrific punishments that chattel slaves had to endure in the late 18th century. Here O’Callaghan has purposefully endeavoured to deceive the reader into believing that this is how Irish

⁶⁷ University College London, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*, URL: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>, Search term: ‘Roach’. None of these claimants were large planters in 1834, this suggests a complex genealogy.

⁶⁸ Rodgers, p. 97

⁶⁹ O’Callaghan, pp. 112-116 and p. 119. The author is guilty here of insidiously conflating homosexuality and paedophilia. He also blatantly appropriates the history of slaveowners in the West Indies prostituting their female slaves. See Marisa Joanna Fuentes, “Buried Landscapes: Enslaved Black Women, Sex, Confinement and Death in Colonial Bridgetown, Barbados, and Charleston, South Carolina”, (Berkeley 2007), PhD Dissertation, p. 51

⁷⁰ Donald Harman Akenson, “Ireland, Sweden, and the Great European Migration, 1815-1914”, (Liverpool 2011), p. 130

⁷¹ ‘To Hell or Barbados’ claims that William Dickson “lived in Barbados for thirteen years towards the end of the seventeenth century..” This is 100 years out. See William Dickson, “Letters on slavery” (London 1788)

deportees were treated in Barbados in the 17th century.⁷² In conclusion *To Hell or Barbados* is a work that is riddled with basic errors and is spoiled by flights of fancy allied with a compulsive need to conflate indentured servitude or forced labour with the experience of the chattel slave.

As for “White Cargo” (2007), the authors Jordan and Walsh uncritically conclude that one should refer to indentured servants as slaves because Daniel Defoe said so. Damningly, they don’t bother to inform the reader, in a coherent manner, what the differences are between chattel slavery and indentured servitude or forced labour. They attempt to justify the subtitle of their book (“Britain's White Slaves”), when they claim that “slavery is defined not by the time but by the experience of the subject.” This is sophistry and a curious attempt to redefine slavery as a subjective “feeling”. It irresponsibly leaves the reader with a watery definition of slavery, broadened out to such an extent that it applies to any situation (real, psychological, metaphorical) where an individual feels oppressed or coerced to do something. Thus the conflation is complete. Now that the two statuses are conflated, co-option is easy.

Yet the authors of “White Cargo” are fully aware of these fundamental differences. A closer review reveals that these differences are buried in an erratic fashion throughout the book. It must be confusing for any reader to follow what is going on, when after one hundred pages of conflation, the authors redraw their definitions by explaining that “one of the fundamental differences drawn between white indentured servitude and black slavery [is that black slavery means forever].”⁷³

The authors are fond of anachronistic comparisons; in one jaw dropping case they find it necessary to follow Theodore W. Allen down the rabbit hole by trawling back to 13th century Ireland in an attempt to equate the abuse of the native Irish with that of the chattel slaves in colonial America in the 18th century.⁷⁴ This is whataboutery with a TARDIS. Their decision to include *Arbeit Macht Frei* in the text, implying that indentured servitude could be as futile as the work carried out at Dachau or Auschwitz during the Holocaust, is

⁷² O’Callaghan, p. 117

⁷³ Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, “White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America”, (London 2007), p. 111

⁷⁴ Jordan and Walsh have taken this extremely tenuous analogy from Theodore W. Allen’s otherwise valuable work “The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1” (London 1994), p. 46

dramatic comparison at its most puerile. Overall “White Cargo” is mess of confused narratives and their efforts to conflate the experience of the indentured Irish in the West Indies with that suffered by African slaves leads to some choice non sequiturs. In one passage they acknowledge that many Irish emigrated voluntarily to St Christopher in the 17th century, but claim, in absolute terms, that “they became, in their multitudes, slaves in the plantations.” Yet almost the next sentence informs the reader that “those Irish who survived their indenture could start up their own smallholdings on the island’s fertile lands..” and that “some Irish went on to become major planters and slave owners themselves.”⁷⁵ With this passage alone the authors have essentially refuted the central argument of their book.

“White Cargo” had the potential to be an important work on the history of labour and exploitation of the poor, but the unfortunate decision to conflate the plight of its subjects with chattel slavery has critically damaged the book’s import.

Jordan and Walsh’s book was inevitably mined by agents of far less repute in an renewed effort to spread this dangerous conflation. It appears that this is how the prevalence of the myth of the “Irish slaves” has been ensured; by editors who appear to care more for click-bait than the veracity of the text. The article that deserves special mention in this regard is entitled *The Irish Slave Trade – The Forgotten “White” Slaves - The Slaves That Time Forgot* by John Martin, which is hosted on the *GlobalResearch.ca* website.⁷⁶ If you type ‘Irish slaves’ into Google, it will be the first hit, and its derivatives will also abound. The article was evidently based on a skim reading of Walsh and Jordan’s already problematic book. It is written as a polemic, is packed full of untruths, has had over 100,000 shares on Facebook, and is a showcase for how disinformation can go viral. The popular *Irish Central* site poured fuel onto the fire by sharing the article, while also going so far as to call its author, the illusive John Martin, an “expert” in this field.⁷⁷ This *Irish Central* endorsement had a further 60,000 shares on social media.

⁷⁵ Jordan and Walsh, p. 143

⁷⁶ John Martin, “The Irish Slave Trade - The Forgotten “White” Slaves - the Slaves that Time Forgot”, Global Research, Published: 14th April 2008, URL: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>

⁷⁷ *Irish Central*, “Irish are ‘the forgotten white slaves’ claims expert”, 25th July 2014 URL: <http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/irish-the-forgotten-white-slaves-says-expert-john-martin-188645531-237793261.html#>

The *Irish Examiner*, a national newspaper in Ireland, also carried a news item based on John Martin's article.⁷⁸ The *Irish Examiner*, affording the myth considerable legitimacy, took the article at face value, including the absurd claim that "300,000 Irish were sold slaves". It turns out that the source for this particular number is John Martin's misreading of the blurb on the back of Jordan and Walsh's book. This news item received 1,400 shares on Facebook, along with appearing in print in Ireland's third highest circulation newspaper. The following week the *Irish Examiner* published a letter which fully endorsed Martin's assertions. It was entitled "Cromwell and the Irish Slave Trade", and it appeared in the paper without comment or critique.⁷⁹

The disquieting aspect of this is that every single line of John Martin's article is either untrue, misleading or objectionable. The strange website which hosts the article, *GlobalResearch.ca*, maintains that its mission is to cut through all the "media disinformation" and to publish "unspoken truths". One of these "truths" is presented in the form of a free e-book, authored by the website's editor/owner, Prof. Michel Chossudovsky of Ottawa, which claims that 9-11 was an "inside job", that Bin Laden was innocent, that planes did not cause the collapse of the towers. It has also been criticised for hosting the views of Holocaust deniers on their forum. Chossudovsky, an admirer of the late Col. Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad, has published claims that the US have weapons that can trigger climate change, and a recent article on the site posits that an anti-tetanus campaign in Kenya is part of a "de-population experiment" that includes the controlled use of the Ebola virus.

Pertinently, a renowned historian of the Irish diaspora, Donald Harman Akenson, has identified the danger in presenting African chattel slavery and white indentured servitude as overlapping constructs. He argues that as "white indentured servitude was so very different from black slavery as to be from another galaxy of human experience" the use of terms such as "white proto-slavery" or phrases like "Black men in white skins" leads to confusion rather than explanation.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Irish Examiner*, 29th January 2013

⁷⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 4th February 2013

⁸⁰ Donald Harman Akenson, "If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730" (Liverpool 1997), p. 49. For "white proto-slavery" see Beckles, "Plantation Production and White "Proto-Slavery": White indentured servants and the colonisation of the English West Indies, 1624-1645", *The Americas*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (Jan., 1985), pp. 21-45

Akenson, whose scholarship paints a harrowing picture of “Irish” imperialism on Montserrat, bemoans the “melodramatic miasma” that “beclouds any discussion of the poorer members of the Irish colony on Montserrat” which he claims “floats in from the historiography of Barbados”; which was the extreme case in the Caribbean for indentured labourers, especially from an Irish perspective.⁸¹ He is adamant that such erroneous ideas must be resisted as they

[Conjoin] with a stream in Irish historical writing that presents Irish settlers in various New Worlds as being passive emigrants, victims, and therefore blameless in their furtherance of the several imperialisms in which they participated. The overwhelming majority of Irish indentured servants who went to Montserrat did so by personal choice, with information in hand, and, in fact, made reasonable decisions as between two alternatives: remain in Ireland or emigrate. That neither of these two alternatives may have been very attractive does not detract either from the self-preserving agency of the individuals involved, nor obfuscate the impact on that cultures which the exercise of that agency involved.⁸²

Akenson play down the fact that indentured servants, like slaves, were bought and sold, or that they were included in wills. In reality the person was not traded, rather it was their labour, for a certain period of time, that was the commodity. Akenson concurs with Orlando Patterson’s comment that “the concept of ownership of work-time through a labour contract is specious to the definition of slavery” and maintains that even if “contemporaries spoke of “buying “ or “selling” servants, instead of buying and selling labour, we should not for it is historically misleading.”⁸³ That is not to say that a planter’s level of control over their Irish servants dropped to zero once a day’s work was done. In some situations where they sensed that they may be losing control, or anticipated a revolt, they implemented temporary repressive measures that restricted an Irish servant’s movement. This is seen in Barbados (again the extreme case) in 1657 where a new law was passed that ensured that an Irish servant needed to obtain a pass before they could leave their master’s plantation.⁸⁴ They were also barred from having arms and ammunition; such measures put

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 48

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 49-50

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.51, See also Orlando Patterson, “Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study” (*New York 1982*)

⁸⁴ Rodgers, p. 44

them on the same level as slaves, in this regard at least. This law was repealed three years later.

Co-option

Slavery is a word that has endured continuous use within Irish political rhetoric for centuries. Nationalists have used it as a metaphor to describe everything from the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland to the Nice Treaty. Its primary use is to highlight matters regarding subjugation. Memorably, the Anglo-Irish MP, Montague James Mathew, invoked a direct comparison when he castigated the Protestant Ascendancy's intentions. He asked them if they wished "[Ireland] should sink at last into a condition of such abject abasement, as, like negro slaves, to lick the very feet of the odious tyrants who trod them down."⁸⁵

It is therefore understandable that the "Irish slaves" narrative could be so easily assimilated by so many. Does that sense of ownership over our central narrative possibly aid a collective historical obscurantism? How else could we arrogantly co-opt another's suffering, in which many of our forebears played a part? Let's hear what the Father of Irish Exceptionalism has to say about this.

11th June 1843: The height of the Repeal campaign. Daniel O'Connell rose to his feet in Mallow and angrily railed against the British establishment's attempt to derail his political endeavour. In a speech that has since become known as his "Mallow Defiance" O'Connell condemned the Coercion Act and rhetorically asked the enraptured crowd

If they take this step of coercion to deprive us of our liberties ought they not make at once make us their serfs? May they not send us to the West Indies, as they have lately emancipated the negroes, to fill up their places? Oh! It is not an imaginary case at all; for the only Englishman that ever possessed Ireland sent 80,000 Irishmen to work as slaves, every one of whom perished in the short space of twelve years beneath the ungenial sun of the Indies.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ The Freeman's Journal, 18th June 1817

⁸⁶ The Freeman's Journal, 26th January 1844

This was a powerful section of the speech, but it was a flawed history lesson. The case he described was a half-truth which he exaggerated for oratorical effect. O’Connell’s number of 80,000 is absurdly high and was apparently pulled out of the air. Due to the paucity of records we do not know for certain how many Irish were deported, but scholarly research estimates that, despite malevolent designs to the contrary, at most, between ten and twelve thousand were forcibly deported from Ireland to the West Indies during the Cromwellian era.⁸⁷

O’Connell states that they were to “work as slaves” (which of course is different to being *made a chattel slave*) but what is his source for this? In his *Memoir on Ireland Native & Saxon* (1843), O’Connell referenced Lingard’s *History of England* (1829), which in turn referenced John Lynch’s 17th century latin text *Cambrensus Eversus* (1662), as claiming that the transplanted Irish “were sold as slaves.”

Lynch, a priest from Galway, wrote *Cambrensus Eversus* in France, where he had been exiled since 1652. It was published in Saint Malo in 1662 and was dedicated to the restored English monarch, Charles II.⁸⁸ Lynch’s original latin is far more detailed than the English translations which followed, and he explicitly states that the priests that were forcibly exiled to the West Indies were sold into indentured servitude and not chattel slavery. In the relevant passage of *Cambrensus Eversus*, Lynch does not mention *servus*, *servi*, *servitium* or *serviti(i)*, the latin words for slave and slavery. Charles Doyle has translated this passage from Latin into English and it reads as follows.

Many [priests] were sent to the Indies, those who were, were to be subjected to the rod and would be sold, so that they would undertake the most degrading labour of

⁸⁷ For the most logical estimates see Patrick J. Corish, “The Cromwellian Regime, 1650-60”, *A New History of Ireland, Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691*, Vol. III, Moody, Martin & Byrne (ed.), p. 361-367, John W. Blake, “Transportation from Ireland to America, 1653-1660”, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 3 (Mar. 1943), pp. 266-218, Donald Harman Akenson, “If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730”, pp. 61-65. They reason that around ten to twelve thousand Irish were forcibly transported during the Cromwellian period. This figure is based on the population levels of the West Indies at this time, which includes the original Irish settlers or their descendants and allows for a high death rate. This contrasts with the farcical claim by John Martin (300,000) and the understandable, yet incorrect estimate by Aubrey Gwynn (50,000). As Akenson explains, Gwynn’s estimate is impossible as “it would equal or exceed all Irish migration to all the Caribbean islands in the seventeenth century.”

⁸⁸ Salvador Ryan, “Reconstructing Irish Catholic History after the Reformation”, *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford 2012), Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan(ed.), p. 191

all drudgeries, all of them had to braid tobacco. There also, their masters were not temperate to them.⁸⁹

Despite this important distinction in the source material, John Lingard claimed that Lynch “says that they were sold for slaves.”⁹⁰ Over two decades later Rev. Matthew Kelly (Maynooth) translated this passage as “many [priests] were banished to the West Indies, where they were sold as slaves.”⁹¹ Both of these translations were coterminous with the institution of chattel slavery in the United States, and therefore the liberty they’ve taken with the source text can be regarded as a willful conflation of terms. The other problem with this claim is that it never actually happened. Despite Lynch’s reference to “many” priests, only nine were actually sent to the West Indies and none of them were sold into indentured servitude.⁹² Lynch’s reference to the civilians who were forcibly transplanted during this period is more accurate as he states that the men had to endure *illi dura servitute* i.e. hard servitude or slavery there.⁹³ This should not be misconstrued to mean chattel slavery, but rather the penal ‘slave labour’. This accuracy is then undone by his absolutist claim that all the Irish women who were transplanted had to “support themselves by prostitution.”⁹⁴ It is thus salient to point out that Irish prostitutes were brought by some Irish settlers to the West Indies. This is evidenced in the case of John Blake, a merchant settler from Galway, who in 1675 admitted to his brother that

⁸⁹ Original translation by Charles Doyle, PhD candidate at National University of Ireland, Galway (30th November 2014) Original text: *multi ad Indiarum insulas amandati, ut qui illic hastae subjecti venundentur, et abjectissima quaeque mediastinorum ministeria in tobacco constringendo obirent; inde quoque magistratus non modicum sibi*

⁹⁰ John Lingard, “A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans”, Vol. XI, 3rd Edition, (London 1829), p. 131

⁹¹ John Lynch, “Cambrensis Eversus”, Edited with translation and notes by Rev. Matthew Kelly, Vol III., Part 1, (Dublin 1851), p.

⁹² Matteo Binasco, “The Activity of Irish Priests in the West Indies: 1638-1669”, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (Nov. 2011) URL: http://www.irlandeses.org/ims1a2011_7_04_10_Matteo_Binasco.htm

⁹³ Lynch, p. 183

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

he had brought a 'whore' from Ireland to Barbados along with his wife..[and that] he could not dispense with the services of the prostitute until the African girl he had bought was properly trained in household matters.⁹⁵

It goes without saying that there *were* many chattel slaves of Irish descent in the colonies, on their father's side at least.⁹⁶

But what became of these deportees? Akenson chronicles how the transplanted Irish, both political prisoners and the impoverished,

were sent to the one place that they were least wanted and least-needed:

Barbados. They were not martyred. Vagabonds and petty criminals were handed four to six year indentures as servants and the soldiers on ten-year stints. The only ones who received life sentences were murderers and other very serious felons.

Save the felons, everyone was freed at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.⁹⁷

How could Daniel O'Connell claim with any certainty that all those deported had died within 12 years? It seems he fabricated this information, as he had previously declared, without proof, that "not a single one survived at the end of twenty years."⁹⁸ This eight year difference should not be taken lightly, it being of greater duration than an entire term of indenture, in a context where few settlers in the West Indies lived beyond the age of forty.

It's especially notable that O'Connell did not refer to the forced deportation of his contemporaries after the 1798 rebellion. The Liberator was surely aware that an estimated 1,500 Irish rebels were transported to the West Indies after the war.⁹⁹ Did O'Connell not regard these men as slaves as well? Was his reference to Cromwell a case of political commemoration? O'Connell, who aligned himself with the liberal policies of the United Irishmen, was repulsed by their insurrection, and in 1803 was

⁹⁵ Nini Rodgers, "The Irish in the Caribbean 1641-1837": An Overview", *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov. 2007), p. 151.

⁹⁶ For a famous example of this, see the genealogy of Michelle Obama

⁹⁷ Akenson, p. 231-232

⁵¹ Daniel O'Connell, "A Memoir on Ireland Native & Saxon" (Dublin 1843), p. 367

⁹⁹ Michael Durey (ed.), "Andrew Bryson's Ordeal: an Epilogue of the 1798 Rebellion", Cork University Press, (1998)

a member of the Lawyers' Yeomanry Corps of Dublin, [who] turned out on duty to serve against the rebels on the night of Emmet's insurrection, and in Daunt's *Recollections* he relates that O'Connell pointed out to him a house in James's Street which he (O'Connell) had searched for 'Croppies' (patriots)¹⁰⁰

O'Connell was an Irish nationalist, but he was also a Royalist and a Catholic. Is it too much to suppose that he would show bias towards the historical suffering of the Irish Catholic Confederates, martyred by Cromwell for Ireland, the English throne and the Faith? That aforementioned *Global Research* article is positive that the 1798 deportees were also "slaves". It states that "after the 1798 Irish Rebellion, thousands of Irish slaves were sold to both America and Australia." This is patently false, they became indentures and soldiers, but it is always useful to look closer at the evidence. One of those "Irish slaves" deported to the West Indies was the United Irishman Andrew Bryson, who was forced into compulsory service with the British Colonial Army in Martinique. Bryson, keenly aware that his own liberty was now taken from him, expressed his horror at the plight of the chattel slaves on the island. Shortly after arriving he wrote to his sister how

The Negroes who were to take us round were everyone naked and the poorest set of Boatmen I have ever seen in that country ...[they could not use their sails].. so that the poor blacks had to take to their oars, some against their will.¹⁰¹

While he admired the natural beauty of Martinique, the spell that it held over him was shattered when he noticed hundreds of slaves in the background. Some of whom were being viciously tortured for trivial reasons.

But alas, when we look into the background and see 300 or 400 of our fellow creatures with small howes tearing up the ground that had never been entered by the plough, the eye turns back disgusted, saying that the former is only visionary pleasure while the latter is real misery. But be not too hasty; turn your eyes again; perhaps they may have deceived you in the first look. Hark: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 lashes inflicted on a poor old man who has not as much clothes on him as would cover a

¹⁰⁰ James Connolly, "Labour in Irish History" (Dublin 1910), p. 100

¹⁰¹ Durey, p.81

pincushion. And for what? The head of his hoe is loose and when it should fly off and hurt some of his fellow sufferers, [he is punished for it?]

While the punishment is inflicting, the poor feeble old man stands erect, braces every nerve, and casting his languid eyes toward heaven seems to call on the judge of all the earth to attest his innocence. Not a word, not a sigh escapes his lips, though they should beat the flesh in slices off his emaciated body. Poor miserable creatures; what a lot is yours in this world, or rather, what will be the fate of your tormentors in the next? Surely it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the inhabitants of these isles, in that day when the world and the inhabitants thereof will be judged by him who is able to make manifest the secrets of all hearts; and not only for them, but for every person who has been concerned in that cruelest of all traffics.¹⁰²

Bryson's revulsion makes this 21st century conflation of chattel slavery and indentured servitude even harder to stomach, and one imagines that he would have had little patience with its present day advocates. He would also have felt betrayed by one of his commanders who escaped from Ireland and became a slave trader. Dr. Madden writes how

[The United Irishman] James McGlaherty, who fought at Antrim, in what he considered the cause of liberty, proved a recreant to his principles. He escaped from Ireland - he ended his days on board a slave ship, on his way to the coast of Guinea." - R.R. Madden (1844)¹⁰³

If one of *our* mythical "Irish slaves" can appreciate the separate world of dehumanisation that a chattel slave had to endure, why are attempts being made, over two centuries later, to commingle the two? Do its roots lie in nationalist revisionism, racism, myopia, denialism or ignorance? Is the conflation of these histories a ham-fisted attempt to co-opt the victimhood of one of the greatest crimes in human history, the Atlantic slave trade? In his PhD dissertation on the "Poor Whites" of Barbados, Matthew C. Reilly of Brown University

¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 82-84

¹⁰³ R.R. Madden, "Antrim and Down in '98: the lives of Henry Joy M'Cracken, James Hope, William Putnam M'Cabe, Rev. James Porter, Henry Munro" (Glasgow 1844), p. 126

acknowledged that the “historical veracity of the existence of “white slavery” is a complex issue” but that the promotion of the “white slavery” narrative was

a claim of historical victimization whereby descendants vindicated themselves from any involvement in processes of racial inequality or oppression in the past and present.¹⁰⁴

Reilly is clear that the racial line drawn between indentured whites and enslaved blacks, codified by a range of Barbadian laws, is of fundamental importance. He unambiguously concludes

that there was no such thing as “white slavery” within the Barbadian context despite widely read popular culture histories that have argued otherwise.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

The refutation of the ahistorical claim that the Irish were chattel slaves in the Colonies does not lead to a zero-sum conclusion. The exploitation, abuse and oppression that many indentured servants, bondsmen, and political prisoners suffered was very real. Nor does it diminish the pain and psychological dislocation incurred due to the mass deportations of the poor, the vagrants, the orphans, the widows, the kidnappings, the persecutions, the “spiriting away”. For those who think this paper disregards these lives, I would suggest that they are spectacularly wrong. It is unfortunate that due to the insidious nature of the “Irish slaves” myth, this work has been constructed to help explain the differences between indentured servitude and chattel slavery, rather than discuss any commonalities. Be assured that it does not devalue their truth to state that their form of servitude can not be conflated with chattel slavery. Alas, Nationalism, the “cocaine of the middle classes”, tends to stamp its nihil obstat on histories that overlook the negative aspects of the in-group. In appreciation of the full story we must look at history with our coveted victimhood set to one side.

¹⁰⁴ Reilly, Matthew Connor, "At the Margins of the Plantation: Alternative Modernities and an Archaeology of the "Poor Whites" of Barbados" (2014). *Dissertations - ALL*. Paper 132.p. 13

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

The Irish that landed in the West Indies and the American colonies were not all weeping men and women. Most who made the journey did so of their own volition, albeit often under the most trying of circumstances. They wished to make money, have a better life, ensure that their children would have more. They wished to own land, to prosper or, to escape their turbulent homeland. Beginning in the late 16th century, they entered all layers of colonial society. Mainly in British colonies but also in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

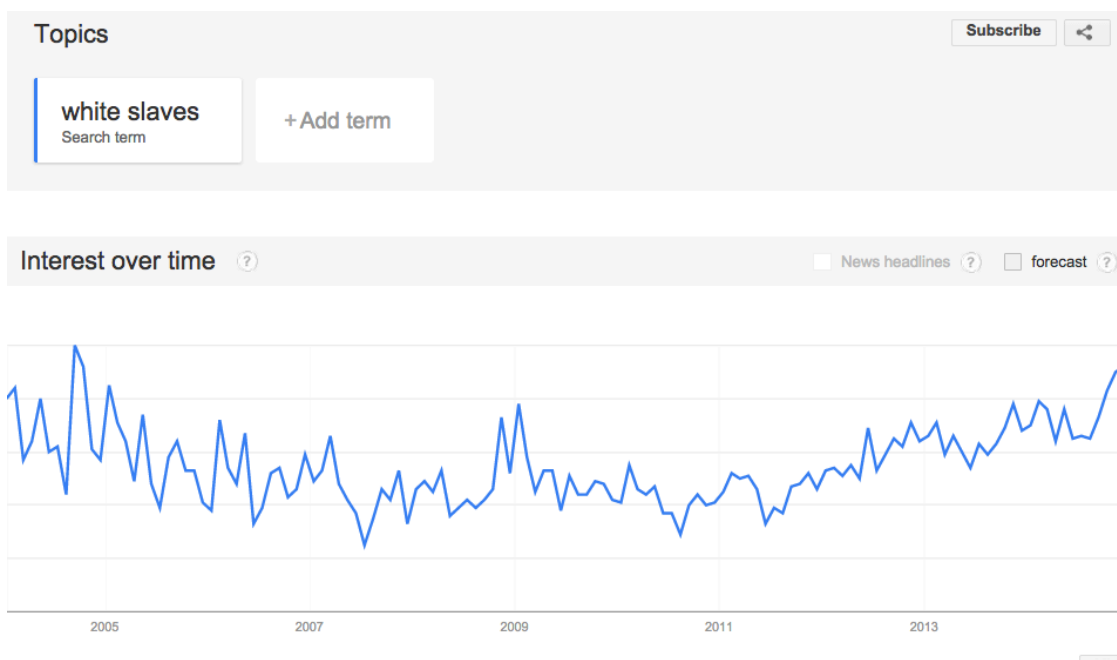
They became indentured servants, Governors, landowners, barristers, sugar planters, slave owners, merchants, slave traders, provisioning agents, indigo farmers and privateers. The list goes on and on and the diversity of Irish involvement increased over time. The British Empire's acquisition of new territories in the West Indies in the 1760s "broadened Irish participation in the colonial bureaucracy, tropical agriculture and trade."¹⁰⁶ Some died with nothing, some amassed great wealth and influence. There were those who served their term of indenture and bought land in the American colonies. Others were beaten lame by their masters or died from malaria near a swamp. Irish merchants based in the colonies imported butter, beef, herrings and pork from their business partners in Ireland, which most of their former neighbours could not afford, and in turn they exported sugar and tobacco, which all of their former neighbours did not need. In the final analysis, the Irish colonial population became a part of the white supremacist paradigm, and they lived and died by its tenets. None were chattel slaves, but many benefitted from the institution, or at least attempted to do so, in a myriad of ways.

¹⁰⁶ Mark S. Quintanilla, "From a Dear and Worthy Land": Michael Keane and the Irish in the Eighteenth-Century Irish West Indies", *New Hibernia Review*, (Vol. 13 No. 4, Winter 2009) p. 61

Appendix I

Tracking the Myth Online (Interest over time via *Google Trends*)

(1) The term “White Slaves” as constantly appeared in web searches over the last decade. Most searches originated in the United States. Almost zero data for searches originating in Ireland.



(2) “Irish Slaves” - appeared in web searches in 2006 due to Kate McCafferty’s novel “Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl” and searches grew exponentially after the release of *White Cargo*. Massive spike due to endorsement by *Irish Central* et al.

