

CHAPTER 1

THE INTIMACIES

OF FOUR CONTINENTS

My study investigates the often obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940), Fernando Ortiz described “peoples from all four quarters of the globe” who labored in the “new world” to produce tobacco and sugar for European consumption.¹ Observing that sugar linked the histories of colonial settlers, native peoples, and slave labor, followed by Chinese and other migrants, Ortiz commented that sugar was “mulatto” from the start. C. L. R. James asserted in *The Black Jacobins* (1938), that the eighteenth-century slave society in San Domingo connected Europe, Africa, and the Americas. He declared that the fortunes created by the slavery-based societies in the Americas gave rise to the French bourgeoisie, producing the conditions for the “rights of man” demanded in the Revolution of 1789.² These understandings that the “new world” of European settlers, indigenous peoples, Africans, and Asians in the Americas was intimately related to the rise of liberal modernity are the inspiration for my investigation.³ Yet I work with the premise that we actually know little about these “intimacies of four continents,” despite separate scholarship about single societies, peoples, or regions. The modern division of knowledge into academic disciplines, focused on discrete areas and objects of interest to the modern national university, has profoundly

shaped the inquiry into these connections.⁴ Even the questions we can ask about these histories are influenced by the unevenly inhabited and inconsistently understood aftermath of these obscured conditions.

Historians, philosophers, and sociologists have written quite a lot about the origins of liberalism in modern Europe, whether they focus on the French Revolution of 1789 as a key event in the shift from feudal aristocracies to democratic nation-states, or whether they emphasize the gradual displacement of religious explanation by secular scientific rationalism, the shift from mercantilism to industrial capitalism, the growth of modern bureaucracy, or citizenship within the modern state.⁵ Yet these discussions have more often treated liberalism's abstract promises of human freedom, rational progress, and social equality apart from the global conditions on which they depended. I join scholars like Cedric Robinson, Saidiya Hartman, Uday Singh Mehta, Paul Gilroy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Saree Makdisi, Walter Dignolo, Susan Buck-Morss, Jodi A. Byrd, and others, in arguing that liberal philosophy, culture, economics, and government have been commensurate with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire.⁶ There is a distinguished historiography of the Atlantic slave trade and slave economies, which documents slavery throughout the Americas, but it is rare for these scholars to discuss the relationship between slavery and settler colonialism or imported indentured labor.⁷ There is work on indentured labor systems utilizing Europeans and Africans, with some attention to the role of Chinese and Indian migrations to the Americas, but there is less work that examines European colonial conquest and the complex history and survival of native indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, and scarcely any that considers the connections, relations, and mixings among the histories of Asian, African, and indigenous peoples in the Americas.⁸

In examining state archives out of which these historical narratives emerge, I observe the ways in which the archive that mediates the imperatives of the state subsumes colonial violence within narratives of modern reason and progress. To make legible the forcible encounters, removals, and entanglements omitted in liberal accounts of abolition, emancipation, and independence, I devise other ways of reading so that we might understand the processes through which the forgetting of violent encounter is naturalized, both by the archive, and in the subsequent nar-

rative histories. In a sense, one aim of my project is to be more specific about what I would term the economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding. This economy civilizes and develops freedoms for “man” in modern Europe and North America, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilized, and unfree. Liberal forms of political economy, culture, government, and history propose a narrative of freedom overcoming enslavement that at once denies colonial slavery, erases the seizure of lands from native peoples, displaces migrations and connections across continents, and internalizes these processes in a national struggle of history and consciousness. The social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which “the human” is “freed” by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from “the human.”

My study could be considered an unlikely or unsettling genealogy of modern liberalism, which examines liberalism as a project that includes at once both the universal promises of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade, as well as the global divisions and asymmetries on which the liberal tradition depends, and according to which such liberties are reserved for some and wholly denied to others. In this sense, the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, and not its particular exception. This genealogy also traces the manners in which the liberal affirmations of individualism, civility, mobility, and free enterprise simultaneously innovate new means and forms of subjection, administration, and governance. By genealogy, I mean that my analysis does not accept given categories and concepts as fixed or constant, but rather takes as its work the inquiry into how those categories became established as given, and with what effects. Genealogical method questions the apparent closure of our understanding of historical progress and attempts to contribute to what Michel Foucault has discussed as a historical ontology of ourselves, or a history of the present.⁹ By modern liberalism, I mean broadly the branches of European political philosophy that include the narration of political emancipation through citizenship in the state, the promise of economic freedom in

the development of wage labor and exchange markets, and the conferring of civilization to human persons educated in aesthetic and national culture—in each case unifying particularity, difference, or locality through universal concepts of reason and community.¹⁰ I also include in this definition the literary, cultural, and aesthetic *genres* through which liberal notions of person, civic community, and national society are established and upheld.

In this sense, my study involves connecting what we might call an “archive of liberalism”—that is, the literary, cultural, and political philosophical narratives of progress and individual freedom that perform the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions—with the colonial state archives from which it has been traditionally separated, and the anticolonial intellectual traditions infrequently considered alongside the imperial one. In this effort, I do not treat the colonial archive as a stable, transparent collection of facts. Rather, I regard its architecture of differently functioning offices and departments as rooms of the imperial state; they house the historically specific technologies of colonial governance for knowing and administering colonized populations, which both attest to its contradictions, and yield its critique.¹¹ As Ann Laura Stoler argues, the colonial archive is “a supreme technology of the . . . imperial state, a repository of codified beliefs that clustered (and bore witness to) connections between secrecy, the law, and power.”¹² As a material bureaucracy of rule, *and* the historical trace of imperial activities, the colonial archive portrays colonial governance as a strategic, permeable, and improvisational process: the tireless collection of tables, statistics, measurements, and numbers; the unending volumes of records and reports; the copied and recopied correspondence between offices; the production of legal classifications, cases, and typologies—these actively document *and* produce the risks, problems, and uncertainties that were the conditions of imperial rule. Inasmuch as Colonial Office and Foreign Office papers, India Office Records, War Department memoranda, and Parliamentary Select Committee reports constitute the very media of colonial administration, they likewise conjure what the colonial bureaucracy did not and could not know—its equivocation, ignorance, and incoherence—even as it performed the agency of an imperial will to know. In other words, the colonial state archive both mediates and

subsumes the uncertainties of liberal and imperial governance; in it, one reads the predicaments, both known and unknown, that give rise to the calculations, strategies, forms, and practices of imperial rule.

The vast collections of the Great Britain National Archives, formerly the Public Records Office, hold the papers of the British Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, the Slave Trade and African Department, the War and Colonial Department, the Records of the Treaty and Royal Letter Department, and others. Within these, there are separate records of the settling of territories around the world, the transatlantic slave trade, the governing of colonies, the abolition of slavery, and the emigration of Chinese labor to sites in the Americas. The papers are organized into distinct departments for Trade, Laws, Correspondence, Sessional Records, and so forth, with divisions within each for the administration of regions: for example, Africa and colonial exploration, America and the West Indies, Asia, the Atlantic, Australia and New Zealand, and so forth, and then individual series for each British colony within each area.¹³ There are separate files for acts, treaties, ordinances, taxes, and other specific subjects and functions. The National Archives are organized to preserve government records and information for the public; its imperatives are classification, collection, and documentation, rather than connection or convergence.¹⁴

Hence, it is fair to observe that there is scarce attention to the *relationships between* the matters classified within distinct stores; the organization of the archives discourages links between settler colonialism in North America and the West Indies and the African slave trade; or attention to the conjunction of the abolition of slavery and the importing of Chinese and South Asian indentured labor; or a correlation of the East Indies and China trades and the rise of bourgeois Europe. In order to nuance these connections and interdependencies, one must read *across* the separate repositories organized by office, task, and function, and by period and area, precisely implicating one set of preoccupations in and with another. It has been necessary both to examine the events that are well documented in the collected papers, as well as to heed those matters that are entirely absent, whether actively suppressed or merely deemed insignificant. I notice the aporia in the archives, often belied by discrepant tone or insistent repetitions, and remark the rhetorical anomalies

that obscure omissions, tensions, or outright illogic. While such reading practices deeply respect the primacy of material conditions, they also often defy or disrupt accepted historical chronologies. This approach does not foreground comprehensiveness and teleology, in either a historical or geographical sense, but rather emphasizes the relationality and differentiation of peoples, cultures, and societies, as well as the convergence and divergence of ideas, concepts, and themes. In pursuing particular intimacies and contemporaneities that traverse distinct and separately studied “areas,” the practice of reading across archives unsettles the discretely bounded objects, methods, and temporal frameworks canonized by a national history invested in isolated origins and independent progressive development.¹⁵

The consideration of the colonial archive as intrinsic to the archives of liberalism permits us to understand that as modern liberalism defined the “human” and universalized its attributes to European man, it simultaneously differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human. Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance.¹⁶ In this study of how liberal ideas of political emancipation, ethical individualism, historical progress, and free market economy were employed in the expansion of empire, I observe that the uses of universalizing concepts of reason, civilization, and freedom effect colonial divisions of humanity, affirming liberty for modern man while subordinating the variously colonized and dispossessed peoples whose material labor and resources were the conditions of possibility for that liberty.¹⁷ These processes that comprise the fifteenth-century “discovery” of the “new world,” consolidate themselves through modern liberal political economy and culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We see the longevity of the colonial divisions of humanity in our contemporary moment, in which the human life of citizens protected by the state is bound to the denigration of populations cast in violation of human life, set outside of human society.¹⁸ Furthermore, while violence characterizes exclusion from the universality of the human, it also accompanies inclusion or assimilation into it. Such violence leaves a trace, which returns and

unsettles the apparent closure of the liberal politics, society, and culture that establish the universal. *Race* as a mark of colonial difference is an enduring remainder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten. The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of modern race; racial differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality.

To observe that the genealogy of modern liberalism is simultaneously a genealogy of colonial divisions of humanity is a project of tracking the ways in which race, geography, nation, caste, religion, gender, sexuality and other social differences become elaborated as normative categories for governance under the rubrics of liberty and sovereignty. Elaborations of racial difference were not universal or transhistorical; they did not occur all at once but were local, regional, and differential, articulated in dynamic, interlocking ways with other attributions of social difference within various spaces in an emerging world system.¹⁹ The operations that pronounce colonial divisions of humanity—settler seizure and native removal, slavery and racial dispossession, and racialized expropriations of many kinds—are imbricated processes, not sequential events; they are ongoing and continuous in our contemporary moment, not temporally distinct nor as yet concluded. To investigate modern race is to consider how racial differences articulate complex intersections of social difference within specific conditions.²⁰ We can link the emergence of liberties defined in the abstract terms of citizenship, rights, wage labor, free trade, and sovereignty with the attribution of racial difference to those subjects, regions, and populations that liberal doctrine describes as “unfit for liberty” or “incapable of civilization,” placed at the margins of liberal humanity. Over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal and colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered. Settlers represented indigenous peoples as violent threats to be eliminated in ways that rationalized white settlement and African slavery; they discounted native people as uncivilized or non-Christian, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable

or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past.²¹ Colonial administrators, traders, and company agents cast captive Africans as inhuman chattel, as enslaveable property. Colonial governors conceived the Chinese as if they were a plentiful, tractable form of labor that could alternately oppose, replace, or supplement slavery; colonial police and criminal courts represented the Chinese as diseased addicts, degenerate vagrants, and prostitutes. These distinct yet connected racial logics constituted parts of what was in the nineteenth century an emergent Anglo-American settler imperial imaginary, which continues to be elaborated today, casting differentiated peoples across the globe in relation to liberal ideas of civilization and human freedom. The safekeeping and preservation of liberal political society, and the placement of peoples at various distances from liberal humanity—"Indian," "Black," "Negro," "Chinese," "coolie," and so forth—are thus integral parts of the genealogy of modern liberalism.²² Not only differentiated racial classifications, but taxonomies that distinguished between continents and civilizations have been essential to liberal, settler, and colonial governance.²³ In this book, I suggest that the "coloniality" of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection.²⁴

Liberal myths about the "capacity for liberty" and narratives about the need for "civilization" serve to subjugate enslaved, indigenous, and colonized peoples, and to obscure the violence of both their separations and their mixtures. In classic liberal political narratives, the move from the state of nature to political society is justified by the need to contain the natural condition of war in which human life and property interests are threatened by violence. Liberal government secures the "peaceful" conditions of individual and collective security by transferring the violence of the state of nature to the political state, executed through laws that "protect" the subjects within civil society, and constitute other peoples as the very limit of that body. In this book, I elaborate what I believe to be key moments in this genealogy, in which racial classifications and colonial divisions of humanity emerged in the colonial acquisition of territory, and the management of labor, reproduction, and social space. Settlement, slavery, and colonial relations of production were conditions both for encounter and mixing, and for the racial classifications that both denied and yet sought

to organize such mixing. Liberal ideas of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade were articulated in and through the shifting classifications that emerged to manage social difference.

In the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), for example, Locke's state of nature prior to government serves as the means to outline the definition of liberal rights to property and against tyranny. The mythical state of nature alludes to the settling of the "new world" of the Americas, whose fictional "newness" would have been apparent for Locke, who was a member of the English company that settled the Carolina colony and the presumed author of its *Fundamental Constitutions*, and who served as Treasurer for the English Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations.²⁵ While many liberal thinkers from Locke to Mill were famously involved in colonial settlement and trade, my argument about liberalism and colonialism is not one of biographical complicity but rather observes that it is precisely by means of liberal principles that political philosophy provided for colonial settlement, slavery, and indenture. While Locke's natural law would seem to grant native people's rightful possession of the land on which they hunt, gather, and labor, natural law contributed to English settlement through the provision that "everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of the law . . . to preserve the innocent and restrain offenders."²⁶ After leaving the state of nature to form a political society, Locke maintains the liberal citizen's right "to destroy a Man who makes War upon him," as the native American people were regularly represented.²⁷ The treaties and correspondence collected in the Colonial Office papers repeatedly represent lands in the Americas and West Indies as "not possessed by any Christian prince or People" and refer to "Indians" or "native" peoples as "infidels" and "Savages," antithetical to "human civility," with whom the settlers are in "continual war."²⁸ The native resistance to European intrusion was regularly cast as a threat to the security of settler sovereignty, which rationalized war and suppression. For example, the "King's Bill containing a grant to Francis Lord Willoughby of Parham and Lawrence Hyde," May 6, 1663, with respect to settling an English colony in Guiana, guarantees settlers' rights "in case of invasion by the natives or any other enemies train and muster the inhabitants and fight with any persons not in amity with his Majesty, to proclaim martial law, and subdue all tumults, rebellions, and mutinies."²⁹

In King Philip's War, the Puritan war against the native American people in southern New England was justified by portraying them as threats to the settlers, and thereby giving up their rightful claims.³⁰ In Locke's *Two Treatises*, the provision for rightful conquest is described as "an Absolute Power over the Lives of those, who by an Unjust War have forfeited them."³¹

Moreover, settler powers were further justified by Locke's definition of the right to property, in which labor entitles one to possession of land, and which represents the lands in the Americas as if they were insufficiently cultivated, or devoid of inhabitants: "Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property."³² This "appropriation of any parcel of *Land*, by improving it," implies a principle of "vacante soyle," or *vacuum domicilium*, similar to *terra nullius* in international law, the term used to describe territory that has not been subject to the sovereignty of any state. The representation of the so-called new world as vacant and uninhabited by Christian civilized persons, was a central trope of settler colonialism, employed to banish, sequester, and dispossess indigenous peoples of their lands.³³

Indigenous studies scholars such as Glen Coulthard, Jodi A. Byrd, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Shona N. Jackson and others have distinguished the liberal rationale for settler colonialism, in which settler conquest sought to eliminate or assimilate indigenous people and appropriate their lands, from the liberal economic provisions for modern colonial projects that focused on the extraction of resources and exploitation of labor.³⁴ Because ongoing settler projects of seizure, removal, and elimination are neither analogous to the history and afterlife of racial slavery, nor akin to the racialized exploitation of immigrant laborers, the discussion of settler colonialism cannot be simply folded into discussions of race without reckoning with its difference. Jodi A. Byrd observes that "Racialization and colonization have worked simultaneously to other and abject entire peoples so they can be enslaved, excluded, removed, and killed in the name of progress and capitalism," but cautions that we do not "obfuscate the distinctions between the two systems of dominance and the coerced complicities amid both."³⁵ In other words, liberalism comprises a multifaceted, flexible, and contradictory set of provisions that at once rational-

izes settler appropriation and removal differently than it justifies either the subjection of human beings as enslaved property, or the extraction of labor from indentured emigrants, however much these processes share a colonial past and an ongoing colonial present. In this book, I stress that the differentially situated histories of indigeneity, slavery, industry, trade, and immigration give rise to linked, but not identical, genealogies of liberalism. I focus on relation across differences rather than equivalence, on the convergence of asymmetries rather than the imperatives of identity.

Lockean liberal political and economic rights to property and commerce were also notoriously employed to justify the slave trade and the ownership of slaves. The correspondence of colonial administrators, slave traders, and company agents are replete with statements that affirmed their rights to own and trade human beings, designated as chattel and cargo, without reckoning with the system of enslavement that depended on violence, violation, and dehumanization. Royal African Company papers describe “supplies of considerable Numbers of Negroes at very moderate rates” and boast, “This Cheapness of Negroes was the very Root that Caused such an Improvement and Growth of the Plantations, Such an Exportation of British Manufactures, Such an Importation of Sugar, Tobacco, Bullion, and other Products of America, and Such an Increase of Shipping and Navigation for those Purposes.”³⁶ The seventeenth-century traveler Richard Ligon wrote, “They Choose them as they do horses in a market.”³⁷ The transatlantic slave trade tore African captives from their social worlds and violently forced them into community with one another, aboard the slave ships, and then on the plantations. In *Saltwater Slavery*, Stephanie Smallwood’s study of the seventeenth-century slave trade, this brutal transformation of African persons into commodities as the origin of the racialization of Blacks as enslaved property is examined. In her analysis of the Royal African Company papers, Smallwood notes that the operative unit of the slave ship was never the individual person but was rather the “full complement” of human cargo. Being owned as property was the idiom that defined the slaves’ new condition, replacing kinship and location as cultural media that bound person to society. Smallwood eloquently extends Orlando Patterson’s observations that natal alienation committed slaves to “social death” and emphasizes that “salt-water slavery was something more, something horrifyingly different,” in

that the slaves were unable to “die honorably,” were no longer “dead kin connected with community of the living.”³⁸

The “horrifying differences” included corporal tortures and sexual violation, and the subjection of slavewomen as breeders of enslaved offspring to whom they were forbidden maternal claim. In her discussion of the 1662 law of *partus sequitur ventrem* dictating that the children of a slavewoman inherited the mother’s status as slaves, historian Jennifer Morgan notes that the law is evidence that not only the most intimate spheres of slave relations were legislated, but that slavewomen’s bodies were the most vulnerable sites within colonial slavery’s permanent state of exception, forced to reproduce “kinlessness.”³⁹ Saidiya Hartman likewise observes that slaves were not civic persons, but dehumanized property, and she argues that slavery founded the conditions of possibility for liberal civil society to emerge, reproducing Black exile from individual will, domesticity, property, and social recognition in the aftermath of so-called emancipation.⁴⁰ Simon Gikandi observes that the distance of colonial slave societies from metropolitan Europe kept the overt horrors of slavery out of view for most eighteenth-century English, but slavery’s brutalities shaped and haunted English society, culture, values, and taste.⁴¹

While the language of both political and economic rights had been used to justify European ownership and trade in captive people, by the late eighteenth century, abolitionists employed liberal principles to argue for the emancipation of slaves, however much liberalism’s imbrication in colonial slavery paradoxically restricted the realization of freedom. Christian abolitionists, like William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp, submitted that slavery was cruel and immoral, and that its end was necessary for a just, humanitarian English society.⁴² Black British abolitionists like Robert Wedderburn, Mary Prince, Olaudah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoano were often persuaded to articulate their opposition to slavery in similar terms.⁴³ Adam Smith and his followers had insisted that freed men would work better than slaves, and that slave labor was the more expensive form of labor.⁴⁴ Notions of free labor were used by Francis Hutcheson to argue that “all men have strong desires of liberty and property,” and that no rational creature could be changed into “a piece of goods void of all right.”⁴⁵ Yet while such arguments brought

economic and political reforms to England, they failed to curtail the slave trade, and conditions of enslavement persisted for former slaves far beyond so-called emancipation. Abstract notions of individual rights neither removed social barriers nor included the material means necessary to fulfill the promised freedoms, and liberal abolitionist arguments were less important to the passage of the Slave Trade Act and the Slavery Abolition Act than were the dramatic revolts and everyday practices of enslaved peoples themselves. Nothing has been a more powerful force against the dehumanizing subjugation of a people than the imminent threat of their rebellion and uprising. As I contend in this chapter, the Colonial Office papers regarding the decisions to end the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in the empire in 1834, demonstrate that Colonial Office administrators were more concerned both to prevent Black revolution in the colonies, and to expand profits in the sugar industry, than with the immorality of the dehumanizing system. Liberal parliamentarians legislating the four-year “apprenticeship” and the postemancipation societies after 1838 were guided more by the interests of West Indian colonial governors and ex-slaveholders, than by the commitment to providing material resources that would make self-determination possible for former slaves.⁴⁶ In chapter 2, I discuss the abolitionist embrace of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written By Himself* (1789) as a narrative of liberal freedom and observe that the autobiography, as the narrative genre of liberal political subjectivity that affirms individual right, cannot resolve the persistent contradictions of colonial slavery. Equiano’s autobiography portrays his life as a freed man continuously threatened by the possibility of abduction and reenslavement.

The narrative overcoming of enslavement by freedom is found in political philosophy, as well, in which the opposition between slavery and right appears as the central contradiction to be resolved by political society. Drawing on the Greco-Roman tradition, modern European political philosophers defined “freedom” as the overcoming of “slavery,” yet “slavery” was often located in a temporally distant “old world” rather than in the “new world” of the Americas.⁴⁷ For example, in *The Social Contract* (*Du contrat social*, 1762), Rousseau stated, “These words *slave* and *right* are contradictory and mutually exclusive.”⁴⁸ Rousseau specified enslavement

as the illegitimate subjection of European man in the French ancien régime and associated this condition with ancient slavery, resolving the contradiction between slavery and right *temporally*, through the founding of a new republic representing the *general will*. In locating slavery in the distant past, or in European man's inequality, Rousseau performed a rhetorical elision of colonial slavery in spaces that were intimately connected, yet at a geographical distance, from eighteenth-century Europe. The connections between the French Caribbean and the prosperity of the maritime bourgeoisie in Nantes and Bordeaux were left unmentioned. At the end of the eighteenth century, political emancipation became a new form of human freedom, in which the individual person, dissolved into the concentrated sovereignty of the collectivity, became *human* through citizenship in the unity of political society. Posed in this way, political emancipation installed the elision of colonial slavery within liberal narratives of human freedom; moreover, the liberal narrative builds the disavowal of settler appropriation into the promises of freedom overcoming slavery. In chapter 5, I discuss the legacy of these erasures in the development of European freedom for the antislavery and anticolonial histories of C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois.

By the close of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, liberals defended wage labor, free trade, and liberal government against foreign barbarism and despotism as a justification for elaborating imperial trade and government. The economic theories of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill contributed to the end of mercantile monopoly, while the promotion of wage labor and free trade provided for accelerated industrial production and trade. Both the Slavery Abolition Act of 1834 and the end of the British East India Company as a commercial monopoly in 1833 appeared to signal moves away from colonial slavery, mercantilist exclusivity, and older forms of territorial conquest, toward a British-led worldwide trade in manufactured goods and new forms of imperial governance. In chapter 3, I interpret the papers of the Select Committees appointed by Parliament to investigate the renewal of the East India Company Charters in 1793, 1813, and 1830 and suggest that the decision to open the Asian trades to private merchants was very much an imperial innovation of both trade and government, a measure taken both to reckon with the trade deficit with

China, and to convert the company from an exclusive trading monopoly into a privately owned colonial military government, occupying India on behalf of the British state. I consider the links between “free trade” policies, which expanded the trades in colonial commodities like tea, chintz, calico, silk, and opium, and the transformation of imperial governance and the emergence of a new international order.

Liberal utilitarian and humanitarian arguments provided for the innovations in imperial governance that administered the conduct of trade in the treaty ports, and criminal justice in the new Crown Colony of Hong Kong. In chapter 4, I discuss John Stuart Mill’s writings on free trade and representative government together with India Office and Foreign Office records regarding post–Opium War coastal China and Hong Kong. While the promotion of liberty would appear to eradicate or vanquish despotic modes of governing, in the nineteenth-century liberal tradition exemplified by Mill, despotism was discussed not as counter to liberty, but as the very condition out of which liberty arises and the condition to which it is integral and bound. In cases of extreme exigency, Mill argued, despotism was “a necessary medicine for diseases of the body politic which could not be rid of by less violent means.”⁴⁹ In other words, Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* was as much a provision for the colonial state’s “necessary” use of force to educate those “unfit for liberty,” as it was the argument for liberal representation in Britain. Mill consistently defined liberty by distinguishing those “incapable of self-government” from those with the capacity for liberty, and his ideas of education, moral, and social development rationalized government authority to maintain “order and progress,” justifying militarized colonialism in India and the invention of modes of surveillance and security to conduct “free trade.”⁵⁰ “Liberty” did not contradict colonial rule but rather accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule, and colonialism as the expansion of imperial trades in Asia. In other words, one does not observe a simple replacement of earlier colonialisms by liberal free trade, but rather an accommodation of both residual practices of enclosure and usurpation with new innovations of governed movement and expansion. The new form of imperial sovereignty expressed by nineteenth-century “free trade” in India and China consisted in the power to adapt and improvise combinations of colonial slavery *with* new forms

of migrant labor, monopoly *with* laissez-faire, and an older-style colonial territorial rule *with* new forms of security and governed mobility.⁵¹ Modern notions of rights, emancipation, free labor, and free trade did not contravene colonial rule; rather they precisely permitted expanded Anglo-American rule by adopting settler means of appropriation and removal, and accommodating existing forms of slavery, monopoly, and military occupation, while innovating new forms of governance to “keep the peace.”⁵² The abstract promises of abolition, emancipation, and the end of monopoly often obscure their embeddedness within colonial conditions of settlement, slavery, coerced labor, and imperial trades.

Social relations in the colonized Americas, Asia, and Africa were the condition of possibility for Western liberalism to think the universality of human freedom, however much freedoms for slaves, colonized, and indigenous peoples were precisely exempted by that philosophy. Modern history and social science pronounce the universality of liberal categories of development yet omit the global relations on which they depended. Indeed, it is the pronounced asymmetry of the colonial divisions of humanity that is the signature feature of liberal modes of distinction that privilege particular subjects and societies as rational, civilized, and human, and treat others as the laboring, replaceable, or disposable contexts that constitute that humanity. What some have represented as a linear temporal progression from colonial abjection to liberal freedom actually elides what might be more properly conceived as a spatial dynamic, in which forms of both liberal subject and society in the imperial center are possible only in relation to laboring lives in the colonized geographies or “zones of exception” with which they coexist, however disavowed.⁵³ In other words, the management of life and death that we now associate with neoliberal security regimes and the state of exception in crisis and war are constituted in and through the colonial differences explored here.⁵⁴

In this first chapter, I read British Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) pertaining to Chinese and Indian emigration, to frame the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century “intimacies” that linked European liberalism with settler colonialism in the Americas, transatlantic African slavery, and Asian contract labor. In chapter 2, I consider the canonization of Equi-

ano's autobiography as the quintessential narrative of progress, which suggests that the slavery of the past is overcome and replaced by modern freedom. I observe the many ways that Equiano's autobiography illustrates the complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that promised freedom rests. By means of a discussion of C. L. R. James's interest in William Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*, I turn in chapter 3 to discuss "free trade," colonial commodification, and the end of the British East India Company monopoly. Early nineteenth-century ideas of free trade were intrinsic both to economic liberty in England and to the improvisation of new forms of sovereignty in the empire, as Britain moved from mercantilism to expanded worldwide trade, and integrated colonial practices of slavery and conquest with new forms of governance linked to the production of value through the circulation of goods and people. In chapter 4, I investigate the ways that ideas of liberty provided the means to combine colonial practices in the Americas *with* the expansion of British imperial reach in Asia, creating the conditions for new imperial modes of governance in the post–Opium War treaty ports in coastal China and in the new Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Finally, in chapter 5, I explore how the conditions that gave rise to the mass mobilizations of millions of Chinese workers after 1840 to sites around the world significantly shaped not only the British and U.S. imperial imaginations, but the Black anticolonial and antislavery imaginations, as well. As European and U.S. American liberalism reckoned with Asia, so too was Asia critical to anticolonial and antislavery notions of decolonization and emancipation.

In my formulation of the "intimacies of four continents," I join Ann Laura Stoler, Amy Kaplan, Laura Wexler, Antoinette Burton, Philippa Levine, Peggy Pascoe, Nayan Shah, and others whose important work has demonstrated that the intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government.⁵⁵ Yet unlike their excellent work on the "intimate" sphere of sexual, reproductive, or household relations as a site of empire, I do not focus on this sphere, *per se*. Rather I use the concept of intimacy as a heuristic, and a means to observe the historical division of world processes into those that develop modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life, and those processes that are forgotten, cast as failed

or irrelevant because they do not produce “value” legible within modern classifications. Just as we may observe colonial divisions of humanity, I suggest there is also a colonial division of intimacy, which charts the historically differentiated access to the domains of liberal personhood, from interiority and individual will, to the possession of property and domesticity.⁵⁷ In this sense, I employ the concept of intimacy as a way to develop a “political economy” of intimacies, by which I mean a particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy. This understanding unsettles the meaning of intimacy as the privileged sign of liberal interiority or domesticity, by situating this more familiar meaning in relation to the global processes and colonial connections that are the conditions of its production. Put otherwise, I emphasize a constellation of asymmetrical and unevenly legible “intimacies,” rather than the singular “intimacy” of what the political theorist C. B. Macpherson famously termed “the possessive individual.”⁵⁷ I suggest instead we may unsettle the “dominant” notion of intimacy as the possession of the individual, if we consider both the “residual” and “emergent” forms of intimacies on which that dominance depends.⁵⁸ This involves considering scenes of close connection in relation to a global geography that one more often conceives in terms of vast spatial distances. It means drawing into relation with one another the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean and the development of colonial modes of biopolitical violence in Asia that sought to replace African enslaved labor with Chinese “free” labor there and elsewhere; it means revealing the proximity of the geographically, and conceptually, distant sites of the Caribbean and China, and appreciating together settler practices with the racialized laboring figures of the slave and the “coolie.”⁵⁹

Among the definitions of *intimacy* offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is first, the “quality or condition of being personally intimate,” including the meanings of intimate friendship, close familiarity, closeness of observation or knowledge, and it is often employed as a euphemism for “sexual intercourse”; a second meaning, characterized as “rare” and confined to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is expressed as “intimate or close connexion or union”; and a third meaning noted as “obsolete” after the eighteenth century is “inner or inmost nature; an inward quality or feature.”⁶⁰ While a “dominant” understanding of intimacy, from

the early nineteenth century and into the present is “being personally intimate,” which includes sexual and romantic intimacy within and in relation to bourgeois marriage and family, we may situate this meaning in relation to “residual” and “emergent” ways of construing the sense of intimacy as “close connexion,” that is, the implied but less visible forms of alliance, affinity, and society among variously colonized peoples beyond the metropolitan national center.

By *residual*, the literary critic Raymond Williams referred to elements of the past that continue, but are less legible within a contemporary social formation; for example, Williams considered organized religion and rural pastoral society to be still active residues in the modern English bourgeois society that was more visibly organized in terms of urban industrial capitalism, secular history, and rational science. Residual processes persist and may even deepen, despite a new dominant rendering them less legible. I modify the concepts that Williams developed for the analysis of English society to observe that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the newly dominant form of national liberal republics made less available the residual intimacies of colonialism and slavery that nonetheless continued as the practical conditions for liberal forms of personhood, society, and government; in other words, settler practices and the afterlife of slavery are residues that continue beyond declarations of independence and emancipation. Williams used the term *emergent*, akin to Antonio Gramsci’s idea of the “subaltern,” to refer to the incomplete, still unfolding meanings, practices, and relationships associated with the emergence of elements in a new social and cultural formation. Elements in active, but not yet fully articulated emergent, social worlds may be appropriated or incorporated into the dominant, while others may develop into explicitly oppositional activities. Thus, the emergent may only be recognized with hindsight, in retrospect, since its potential power to contest, shift, or transform the dominant is not yet disclosed within its time of emergence.⁶¹ Because residual processes are ongoing, residual elements may be articulated by and within new social practices, in effect, as a “new” emergent formation. In this sense, we might consider the political, sexual, and intellectual connections and relations among slaves, peoples of indigenous descent, and colonized laborers as an emergent “intimacies of four continents” forged

out of residual processes, whose presence is often eclipsed by the more dominant Anglo-American histories of liberal subjectivity, domesticity, and household.

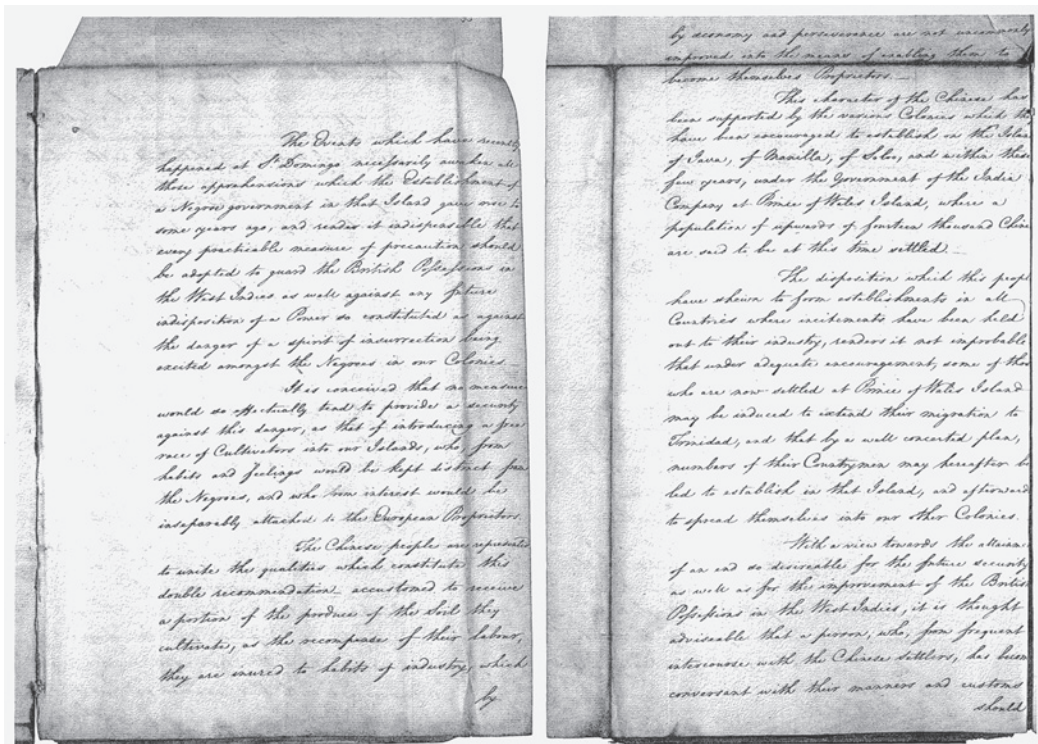
Thus, the project of specifying “the intimacies of four continents” is one of examining the dynamic relationship among the always present but differently manifest and available histories and social forces. It includes, on the one hand, identifying the residual processes of settler colonialism that appropriated lands from indigenous people, and the colonial logics through which men and women from Africa and Asia were forcibly transported to in the Americas, who with native, mixed, and creole peoples constituted colonial societies that produced the assets for the bourgeois republics in Europe and North America out of which intimacy, as liberal possessive individualism, became the hallmark. Even before the British began transporting captive African slaves to work on West Indian plantations, European settler colonialism dispossessed but did not destroy indigenous peoples in the so-called new world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The destructive subjugation of native people to confiscate their land created the conditions in which European mercantile powers imported African slaves to establish plantation economies in the Americas.⁶² Yet while the Europeans displaced the native peoples in the Caribbean, and converted their resistance as “threat,” to understand these settler practices as having totally eliminated indigenous peoples to the point of extinction, as some modern histories have suggested, or to ignore the ongoing nature of settler colonialism by consigning native people exclusively to the past, is to continue to erase indigenous people and history in a manner that echoes and reproduces earlier dispossessions.⁶³ What we might identify as residual within the histories of settler or colonial capitalism does not disappear. To the contrary, it persists and endures, even if less legible within the obfuscations of a new dominant. Reading British Colonial Office papers on the conquest of the Americas and the West Indies—with papers on Chinese emigration, and in tandem with anti-slavery and pro-slavery debates among British parliamentarians and West Indian governors and planters—the intimacies of four continents becomes a way to discuss the coeval global processes of settler colonialism, slavery, and imported colonial labor, as the conditions for British and American national for-

mations of liberty, liberal personhood, society, and government at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.⁶⁴

The dominant meaning of intimacy, as sexual or reproductive relations of the individual person within the liberal private sphere, is a defining property of the modern citizen in civil society. Critically engaging with this dominant sense, Lauren Berlant has examined the formation of intimacy as the affective medium for republican citizenship and the subject's felt sense of individual belonging in liberal society; fantasy, sentiment, and desire in literature and popular culture produce the contours of intimacy that mediate the individual's inhabiting of everyday life in social relations.⁶⁵ This mythic and affective individualism is central to the constitution of domestic household as the property and privileged signifier of the liberal person and articulates the disciplining of gendered subjectivity and desire in relation to family and home. Further, intimacy as interiority is elaborated in the philosophical tradition in which the liberal subject observes, examines, and comes to possess knowledge of self and others.⁶⁶ Philosophy elaborates this subject with interiority, who apprehends and judges the field of people, land, and things, as the definition of human being. Ultimately, I would wish to frame this sense of intimacy as a particular fiction that depends on the "intimacies of four continents," in other words, the circuits, connections, associations, and mixings of differentially laboring peoples, eclipsed by the operations that universalize the Anglo-American liberal individual. Yet we appreciate that such configurations—heuristically termed dominant, residual, and emergent—are not static, transparent, or fixed in time, but are precisely in dynamic and unstable flux, with particular formations becoming more or less available in response to the material conditions of specific historical forces. To write about the intimacies of four continents is thus intended to open an investigation, and to contribute a manner of reading and interpretation, and not to identify an empirical foundation or establish a new historical object.

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In a "Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company," written in 1803 just following the Haitian Revolution, colonial administrator John



1.2 “Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company” (1803). Colonial Office Correspondence, Great Britain National Archives, London.

Sullivan laid the groundwork for the introduction of Chinese indentured laborers into the British West Indian island of Trinidad. He wrote:

The events which have recently happened at St. Domingo necessarily awakes all those apprehensions which the establishment of a Negro government in that land gave rise to some years ago, and render it indispensable that every practicable measure of precaution should be adopted to guard the British possessions in the West Indies as well against . . . the danger of a spirit of insurrection being excited amongst the Negroes in our colonies.

. . . no measure would so effectually tend to provide a security against this danger, as that of introducing a free race of cultivators into

our islands, who, from habits and feelings could be kept distinct from the Negroes, and who from interest would be inseparably attached to the European proprietors. . . . The Chinese people . . . unite the qualities which constitute this double recommendation. (*Great Britain Colonial Office Correspondence*, CO 295, vol. 17)

For two centuries, British mercantile colonialism depended on the settlement of the Americas and West Indies that displaced and dispossessed native peoples, and the command of the British Atlantic slave system that transported captured West and Central African peoples to labor on plantations in the Americas. After two centuries, this British plan to import Chinese workers appears to mark a significant, yet largely ignored shift in the management of race and labor in the West Indian colonies. The decision to experiment with a different form of labor was explicitly racialized—“a free race . . . who could be kept distinct from the Negroes”—but moreover it framed the importation of this newly, and differently, “raced” Chinese labor as a solution to both the colonial need to suppress Black slave rebellion and the capitalist desire to expand production. Yet by the late eighteenth century, British dominance appeared contested by “transcolonial” rivalries from the French West Indies and Spanish Cuba and Peru, and by U.S. independence—all of which prompted the innovation of sugar production and recalibrated the importance of the West Indies to the British economy.⁶⁷ In this sense, many historians explain the end of slavery in the Americas throughout the nineteenth century as a response to humanist arguments in Britain, France, Spain, and the United States about the immorality of slavery, and they conceive abolition and emancipation as resolutions within national narratives of progress in which slavery is legible as a distant origin out of which free modern societies are established. In the words of David Brion Davis, “the emergence of an international antislavery opinion represented a momentous turning point in the evolution of man’s moral perception, and thus in man’s image of himself.”⁶⁸ Yet we might view the British decision to end the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in its empire in 1834, as equally pragmatic attempts to stave off potential Black revolution, on the one hand, and to resolve difficulties in the sugar economy resulting from the relative inflexibility of slave labor within colonial mercantilism, on the other.⁶⁹

The “Trinidad experiment” imagined the Chinese as a “racial barrier between [the British] and the Negroes,” the addition of which would produce a new division of labor in which the Black slaves would continue to perform fieldwork, and imagined the Chinese as “a free race of cultivators” who could grind, refine, and crystallize the cane.⁷⁰ The British described the Chinese workers as “free,” yet the men would be shipped on vessels much like those that had brought the slaves they were designed to replace; some would fall to disease, die, suffer abuse, and mutiny; those who survived the three-month voyage would encounter coercive, confined conditions upon arrival. In this sense, the British political discourse announcing a decision to move from “primitive slavery” to “free labor” may have been a modern utilitarian move, in which abolition proved an expedient, and only coincidentally “enlightened,” solution. The representations of indentured labor as “freely” contracted buttressed liberal promises of freedom for former slaves, while enabling planters to derive benefits from the so-called transition from slavery to free labor that in effect included a range of intermediate forms of coercive labor, from rented slaves, sharecroppers, and convicts, to day laborers, debt peonage, workers paid by task, and indentureship.⁷¹ The Chinese were instrumentally used in this political discourse as a *figure*, a fantasy of “free” yet racialized and coerced labor, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and the indentured alike. In other words, in 1807, the category of “freedom” was central to the development of what we could call a modern racial governmentality in which a political, economic, and social hierarchy ranging from “free” to “unfree” was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of metropolitan and colonized peoples; this racial governmentality managed and divided through the liberal myth of inclusive freedom that simultaneously disavowed settler appropriation and symbolized freedom as the introduction of free labor and the abolition of slavery. In 1807, as Britain moved from mercantilist plantation production toward an expanded international trade in diversified manufactured goods, the Chinese “coolie” appears in colonial and parliamentary papers as a *figure* introducing this alleged transition from slavery to freedom.

In the British colonial archive, one finds the term *coolie* used variously to refer to workers of both Chinese and South Asian origin who

were imported to work in the West Indies, Cuba, Peru, Brazil, Australia, the western United States, Hawaii, Mauritius, South Africa, and Fiji.⁷² The great instability and multivalence of the term *coolie* suggests that it was a shifting, historically contingent designation for an intermediary form of Asian labor, used both to define and to obscure the boundary between enslavement and freedom, and to normalize both. As Moon-Ho Jung eloquently states, *coolies* “were never a people or a legal category. Rather coolies were a conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged worldwide in the era of slave emancipation, a product of the imaginers rather than the imagined.”⁷³ Madhavi Kale likewise examines the variable construction of Indian *coolies* in British debates, who were celebrated as “free labour” when arguing for importation, and villified as “like slaves” in arguments against the trade. Kale emphasizes that “labor is a category, a role and not people.”⁷⁴ In the British colonial archive, the use of “coolie” to refer to Asian labor from China, India, and other parts of the world suggests that, from the British colonial perspective, it was the instrumental use of a particular category of labor, rather than the precise Asian origin of the workers, that was emphasized. After emancipation, West Indian Governors and planters were at pains to convince the Colonial Office and British government that they suffered an acute labor shortage due to the exodus of former slaves from the plantations.⁷⁵ As Walton Look Lai has documented, the importation of Chinese workers began in earnest in 1834, with movement to the West Indies reaching its peak between 1853 and 1866.⁷⁶ By 1837, the Colonial Office sought to address the postemancipation demands for labor on West Indian sugar plantations with the additional recruitment of indentured workers from colonial India, and by the 1870s, the indentured workers on the West Indian plantations were overwhelmingly South Asian. This “imperial reallocation labor strategy,” as Madhavi Kale terms it, which sought to profit from the portability of capital and labor, was affected not only by British liberals and antislavery advocates, but also by conditions on the subcontinent, which encompassed Indian responses to the extensive effects of British colonialism.⁷⁷

The 1803 “Secret Memorandum” alludes to “intimacies” between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas and reveals that the idea to import laborers from Asia was closely linked to the British decisions to end the

slave trade and to emancipate slaves in the West Indies. Yet “freedom” no more described the coerced workers from coastal China and later India, or the indigenous peoples from whom the colonizers had usurped land and local knowledge, than it did the emancipated slaves. In 1834, Britain initiated the four-year period of “apprenticeship” in the West Indies that was to grant full “emancipation” to slaves in 1838. This “emancipation” was to promise slaves this set of institutions comprising “freedom”: “emancipation” proposed a narrative development in which wage labor, contract, marriage, and family would be the formal institutions through which modern freedom could be attained and the condition of slavery overcome. However, “emancipation” clearly did not establish freedom for Black peoples in the British West Indies, many of whom were still confined to the plantation, and others were left bound in economic servitude and poverty. Indeed, as Thomas Holt argues, the socialization of former slaves into liberal promises of freedom in Jamaica was part of the gradual disciplining of Blacks into wage work, which Marx would call another form of slavery.⁷⁸ Demetrius Eudell demonstrates that the laws that governed emancipation in the West Indies in effect disciplined, controlled, and punished former slaves as it protected the interests of the estates and plantations. Strategies for the obstruction of freedom for former slaves ranged from Vagrancy Acts, which criminalized their departures from the estates, to the pricing of land out of their reach, which both raised property values, and created a continuing supply of labor for the former slaveholders. The paternalistic political language of the four-year “apprenticeship” was concerned to protect “justice” for the ex-slaveholder, not the former slave, and questioned whether Blacks were “prepared” or “fitted” for freedom.⁷⁹ Saidiya Hartman observes that legal and political emancipation, invoked through notions of property, self-possession, and individual will, effectively inserted former slaves into a temporality of belatedness and social debt in relation to a freedom never earned and always yet to come, actually obscuring the endurance of pervasive practices of subjection and dispossession.⁸⁰ Catherine Hall suggests that the disciplining of former slaves in Jamaica likewise included their “civilization” into English bourgeois notions of gender, morality, and family, as well as inculcating in the newly freed the judgment that they were essentially “savage” and unable to adapt to the requirements of civi-

lization.⁸¹ The British introduction of the Chinese as so-called free laborers at the critical time of slave emancipation calculated that they would occupy an intermediary position within this governmentality in which the colonized joined the universally human through development of ethical, political, and economic freedom. In other words, the liberal promise that former slaves and native and migrant workers could enter voluntarily into contract was a dominant mode for the initiation of the “unfree” into consensual social relations between “free” human persons: in the crucible of American modernity, Amy Dru Stanley has observed, the contracts of labor and marriage became the very symbols of humanity and freedom.⁸²

To appreciate the particular plasticity of the figure of the *coolie* within liberal capitalist modernity, we need only realize that toward the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. discourses about the Chinese laborer contradicted the British discourse that portrayed the Chinese contract laborers as “free.”⁸³ In the United States, for example, those arguing for the prohibition of Chinese female immigration in the Page Law of 1875, and the end to all further Chinese immigration in Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, emphasized that Chinese laborers recruited to work in mining, agriculture, and railroad construction in the mid-nineteenth century were precisely “unfree” and therefore ineligible for citizenship.⁸⁴ Moon-Ho Jung observes of the nineteenth-century U.S. debates that the Chinese *coolie* was opportunistically constructed as a transitional figure, midway between slavery and free labor.⁸⁵ The Chinese contract laborer occupied a liminal, ambiguous intermediary position throughout the nineteenth century, brought to the Americas to supplement, replace, and obscure the labor previously performed by slaves, yet to be differentially distinguished from them. In the British West Indies, the Chinese were cast as a freely contracted alternative to slave labor, yet in the U.S. they were more often described as antithetical to modern political forms.⁸⁶ In Cuba, where the Chinese were indispensable to the modernization of the sugar industry, *coolies* were presented as a new source of unfree labor, a viable supplement to slavery.⁸⁷ In Australia, the Chinese replaced convict labor; the introduction of Chinese labor into New South Wales was not precipitated by the end of African slavery as it was in the Americas, but generated by the shortage of another form of unfree labor, that of prisoners in penal settlements in which over half of the population had

arrived as convicts, yet whose numbers by 1851 had dwindled to fewer than 15 percent.⁸⁸ In Hawaii, the Chinese were introduced to replace indigenous workers.⁸⁹ In each context, the Chinese *coolie* figured not merely another labor supply, but moreover, a shift from colonial mercantilism to a new division of labor and the expansion of international trade. Yet whether in the British West Indies, where slavery was legally terminated in 1834; in the United States, where the Civil War ended slavery in 1865; or in Spanish Cuba, where slavery was not abolished until later in the 1880s, African, Asian, and mixed native workers labored alongside one another and often struggled together, even if these associations are unacknowledged in the archives.

We may situate this residual condition of the intimacies across continents in relation to the more dominant concept of intimacy as the property of the individual, often figured as conjugal and familial relations in the bourgeois home distinguished from the public realm of work, society, and politics. For European and North American subjects in the nineteenth century, the dominant notion of intimacy in the private sphere became central not only as a defining property of the modern liberal individual in civil society, but ideas of privacy in bourgeois domesticity were constituted as the individual's possession to be politically protected, as in "the right to privacy." We can trace this narrative of the modern individual, or Western man, who possesses interiority of person, as well as a private household, in the political philosophical tradition from Locke and Rousseau to Kant and Hegel. In *Philosophy of Right* (*Philosophie des Rechts*, 1821), for example, Hegel traced the dialectical development of freedom for the individual and the state through the forms of property, family, and civil society.⁹⁰

Property in oneself and in the objects one makes through will, labor, and contract are all levels in Hegel's dialectical development; the individual's possession of his own person, his own interiority, is a first sense of property. He then invests will and work into nature, making that nature objective, transforming world and himself.⁹¹ The ethical actions of marriage and the development of the family are then more complex developments within Hegel's teleology of freedom. The individual man establishes his relation to family through marriage to a woman whose proper place is the "inner" world of the family, the family constituting

the key intermediary institution between civil society and the state. Marriage is defined by Hegel as a primary principle and social relation on which the ethical community depends; it is necessary to the founding of the ethical state: "The ethical side of marriage consists in the consciousness that the union is a substantive end."⁹² In this sense, Hegel defined "freedom" as achieved through a developmental process in which the individual first possessed himself and his own interiority, then put his will in an object through labor, and then made a contract to exchange the thing. Marriage and the family were primary and necessary stages in the investment in civil institutions and the progressive unfolding of the ethical life; "inner" life within the family was the property of the individual becoming "free." Hegel elaborates the dominant European notion of "intimacy," in which property, marriage, and family were conditions for the possibility of moral action, and the means through which the individual will was brought consciously into identity with the universal will, expressing the realization of true "freedom," rather than mere duty or servitude.

The feminized space of domestic intimacy and the masculine world of work and battle became a nineteenth-century ideal for European, British, and northeastern American societies. The art critic and essayist John Ruskin famously wrote, for example, "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest. . . . But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. . . . This is the true nature of home."⁹³ Yet despite this regulative ideal, the separation of the feminine private sphere and the masculine public sphere has been criticized at length by feminist scholars as various as Nancy Fraser, Patricia Hill Collins, and Evelyn Nakano Glenn as an abstraction for ordering relations in civil society that is contradicted by the social realities of women's lives.⁹⁴ The paradigm of separate spheres, moreover, cannot be easily extended to colonial or slavery societies, where the practice of private and public spheres was unevenly imposed: colonial households and districts may have aspired to such divisions in manners reminiscent of the European metropolis, but colonized subjects were at once differentiated

from, and yet subordinated to, regulating imperial notions of privacy and publicity. Furthermore, in the colonial context, sexual relations were not limited to a “private” sphere but included practices that disrespected such separations, ranging from rape, assault, domestic servitude, or concubinage, to “consensual relations” between colonizers and colonized, what Ann Laura Stoler has termed the “intimacies of empire.”⁹⁵ We must thus situate this ideal of intimacy—sexual and affective intimacy within the private sphere of the bourgeois household—within the material conditions of colonial relations. Bourgeois intimacy was a regulating ideal through which the colonial powers administered the enslaved and colonized and sought to indoctrinate the newly freed into forms of Christian marriage and family. The colonial management of sexuality, affect, marriage, and family among the colonized formed a central part of the microphysics of colonial rule.⁹⁶ Bourgeois intimacy, derived from the private and public split that was the socio-spatial medium for both metropolitan and colonial hegemony, was produced by the “intimacies of four continents”—both in the sense that settler colonial appropriation with enslaved and indentured labor founded the formative wealth of the European bourgeoisie, and as I discuss in chapter 3, in the sense that colonized workers produced the material comforts and commodities that furnished the bourgeois home.

Reading British documents on the design of introducing Chinese contract laborers to West Indian plantations, we can observe that the *figure* of the Chinese woman held a significant place in the colonial discourses that conveyed the idea of bourgeois intimacy to the colonies. The Chinese woman is repeatedly mentioned throughout the plans for importing Chinese labor to the Americas, as a trope in the colonial imagination for the capacity of the colonized to develop into a reproductive, family community. From the inception of the plan to introduce Chinese into Trinidad, throughout the nineteenth century, administrators stated their desire to import Chinese women, although other historical sources indicate that Chinese female emigration was actually quite rare. Attorney-General Archibald Gloster wrote:

I think it one of the best schemes possible; and if followed up with larger importation, and with women, that it will give this colony a

strength far beyond what other colonies possess. It will be a barrier between us and the Negroes with whom they do not associate; & consequently to whom they will always offer formidable opposition. The substituting of their labour instead of Negro labour is out of the question, as to the common business of the plantation. They are not habituated to it, nor will they take to it in the same way, nor can we force them by the same methods; but their industrious habits, and constitutional strength, will I think greatly aid the planters. They will cut and weed cane. They will attend about our mills. They will act as mechanics.⁹⁷

The introduction of the Chinese into the slave plantation economy was in this way described in terms of a need for a nominally “free” labor force, one that would not substitute for the slaves, but would perform different labors and would be distinguished racially and socially from both the white European colonial planters and the Black slaves. In Gloster’s imagination, the importation of “Chinese women” would permit the establishment of Chinese families that would secure the “racial barrier between us and the Negroes.” The British introduced the Chinese into the community of settlers and slaves as a contiguous “other” whose liminality permitted them to be, at one moment, incorporated as part of colonial labor, and at another, elided or excluded by its humanist universals. Neither free European nor the white European’s “other,” the Black slave, neither lord nor bonded, the Chinese were represented as a paradoxical figure, at once *both* an addition that would stabilize the colonial order *and* the supplement whose addition might likewise threaten the attainment of any such stability.⁹⁸ The Chinese woman was handmaiden to this colonial fantasy of assimilating the colonized to forms of bourgeois family and freedom at a time when the possession and determination of life or death was unavailable for both the enslaved and the indentured.⁹⁹ That Gloster goes on in the same document to liken the Chinese to “our Peons, or native Indians . . . Mulattoes or Mestees” indicates no actual similarity between the Chinese laborer and the mixed, part-native, or native-descendant peoples with whom the Chinese may have worked. Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein describe the invention of race and ethnicity in

the Americas as shifting, flexible classifications of difference devised for governing different peoples for labor extraction within the colonial division of labor: plantation slavery, various forms of coerced cash-crop labor (*repartimento*, *mita*, peonage), indentured labor (*engagés*), and so on.¹⁰⁰ The British colonial conflation of the Chinese with indigenous and racially mixed people expresses this moment in the history of coloniality, in which a racial taxonomy gradually emerged both to manage and modernize labor, reproduction, and society among the colonized, as well as to rationalize the conditions of creolized mixing and to discipline the range of potential “intimacies” among them.¹⁰¹

With respect to the longer history of Black African and Native American interethnic contacts from the fifteenth century onward, Jack Forbes has argued that native, as well as part African and part native persons, were mostly misclassified with terms ranging from “loro,” “mestizo,” “gens de couleur,” or “mulatto,” to “dark” or “brown,” to even “negro,” “noir,” or “black.”¹⁰² The late eighteenth-century topographer of St. Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry, presented eleven racial categories of 110 combinations ranked from absolute white (128 parts white blood) to absolute black (128 parts black).¹⁰³ We can explain the dramatic, encyclopedic proliferation of both racial classification and racial misattribution of this period by observing that racial governance continually innovated new terms for managing populations and social spaces in the Americas. Even as racial categories drew on fictions of distinction and purity, an insistent discourse about racial difference admitted the existence of a creolized and miscegenated population borne of colonialism. The colonial relations of production, which precisely required racial mixing, constituted what we might call the “political unconscious” of modern European taxonomies of race; the relations of production were the absent yet necessary context that founded the possibility for racial classification, and the context with which such ordering was in contradiction.¹⁰⁴ Joan Dayan has written of Haiti that “if racial mixing threatened to contaminate, the masters had to conjure purity out of phantasmal impurity. This sanitizing ritual engendered remarkable racial fictions.”¹⁰⁵

The West Indian Governors’ offices stated that the needs of the plantation demanded male workers, but even in the early correspondence, we see the Colonial Office rationalizing the idea of creating Chinese fami-

lies through the desire for a stable racial “barrier” between the colonial whites and the enslaved blacks. Yet the recurring figure of the Chinese woman, which persists in the colonial correspondence and parliamentary debates prior to the abolition of the slave trade through the peak years of Chinese emigration in the 1850s–60s, suggests a curious colonial fantasy that projected this dominant meaning of intimacy, as bourgeois-style household, on the Chinese indentured community. In the colonial archive, the repeated refrain “with the import of Chinese women” belies the histories that suggest the Chinese in the Caribbean and North Americas did not establish family communities in significant numbers until the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ The persistent mention of Chinese reproduction implies that for some colonial administrators, the “value” of the Chinese may not have been exclusively labor, but also the instrumental use of the figure of Chinese women’s sexuality as resembling the “civility” of European marriage and family, in an implicit contrast to the sexualized representations of female African and African-descendant peoples.¹⁰⁷

In the discussions during 1803–7 before the British decision to end slavery, this fantasy of Chinese family civility was a way of marking a racial difference between “Chinese free labor” and “Negro slaves,” through imagining the Chinese as closer to liberal ideas of human person, family, and society. Later, in the 1850s–60s, following the “end” of slavery in the British West Indies in 1834, by which time there were significant numbers of working “free” people of color and South Asian Indian emigrant laborers, this phantasm continued to figure as a part of a racialized classification of laboring cultures. For example, in 1851, the agent in charge of Chinese emigration, James T. White, fantasized a class hierarchy among the groups of the “Chinese,” “Bengalees” and “Negroes” based on the races’ ostensive physical traits and capacities for forming families, stating the social potential of the Chinese to form “middle class” families through Christian marriage and reproduction. White wrote: “Chinese have sufficient intelligence and ambition to rise in the world, and in a short time would become useful and valuable *as a middle class* in the West Indies . . . one difficulty . . . is the impossibility of obtaining women and families.”¹⁰⁸ The regulating abstraction of the bourgeois family form required representations of “Chinese culture” that defined it as one whose traditions could be summarized by the protection

of chaste virtuous women who would stabilize the laboring community. Ironically, Chinese women could be imagined as virtuous only to the extent that “Chinese culture” would not permit them to migrate. As a figure who promised social order, the Chinese woman was a *supplement* who appeared to complete the prospective future society of the colony; yet her absence, around which desire was reiterated, marked the limit of a social field whose coherence and closure depended on ideas of racial purity and distinction. In contrast, while later nineteenth-century British and Indian nationalist discourses idealized middle-class upper-caste women in India, the *bhadramahila*, as “pure” and “chaste” symbols of the nation, both discourses represented migrant lower-caste Indian women in the indentured communities in the West Indies as licentious and immoral, precisely *because* they migrated.¹⁰⁹ The colonial archive reveals the altogether fantastic structure of racial imaginations based on ideas about Asian female sexualities. Throughout the nineteenth century, the racialized sexual differentiation of Africans and East and South Asians emerged as a normative taxonomy that managed and spatially distanced these groups from the spheres within which “freedom” was established for European subjects.

I wish to emphasize, finally, an *emergent* meaning of the “intimacies of four continents.” An emergent social or cultural formation does not necessarily require completely “new” subjectivities or constituencies but can comprise elements of residual ongoing conditions like settler colonialism, colonial slavery, and trade, yet rearticulated in other ways through new practices. In this sense, we could consider one emergent formation of the intimacies of four continents as the variety of contacts among slaves, indentured, and mixed peoples living, working, and surviving together in the Americas. In the British colonial archive, such intimacies between contracted emigrants, indigenous people, slaves, and slave-descendant peoples are referenced by negative means, in cautionary rhetorics and statements of prohibition with respect to possible contacts between colonized groups, all implying the fear and anxiety of racial proximity in a context of mixture and unstable boundaries. For example, White’s 1851 letter to the Governor of British Guiana warned: “The Chinese are essentially a social and a gregarious people and must be located in masses together, not scattered throughout the colony. They

must be kept in the first instance distant and separate from the Negroes, *not only at their work, but also in their dwellings.*"¹¹⁰

The repeated injunctions that different groups must be divided and boundaries kept distinct indicate that colonial administrators imagined as dangerous the sexual, laboring, and intellectual contacts among enslaved and indentured nonwhite peoples. The racial classifications in the archive arise, thus, in this context of the colonial need to prevent these unspoken "intimacies" among the colonized.¹¹¹ Reading the archive, one notes explicit descriptions and enumerations, as well as the rhetorical peculiarities of the documents, the places where particular figures, tropes, or circumlocutions are repeated to cover gaps or tensions; these rhetorical ellipses point to illogic in the archive, as well. So, while this emergent sense of intimacies—the varieties of contacts between laboring peoples—is not explicitly named in the documents, it is, paradoxically, everywhere present in the archive in the presence of such detours. This emergent idea of "intimacies," then, can be said to include the range of laboring contacts that are necessary for the production of bourgeois domesticity, as well as the intimacies of captured workers surviving together, the proximity and affinity that gives rise to political, sexual, intellectual collaborations, subaltern revolts and uprisings, such as the Haitian Revolution, the Louisiana cane workers strike of 1887, or the cross-racial alliances that underlay the Cuban struggles for independence in 1895–98.¹¹² These imminent, potential alliances among subjugated people are referenced negatively in policies and prohibitions against contacts, and are legible as apprehension and anxiety in the unwritten, blank spaces of the colonial archive. These alliances appear later, in the work of twentieth-century anticolonial and antislavery thinkers such as Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, Fernando Ortiz, Cedric Robinson, Sylvia Wynter, and others, who allude to connections between slavery-based settler colonies, Chinese and Indian labor, and the prosperity of Europe. Douglass, for example, linked African slavery to a global system that used Chinese and Indian "coolie" labor and wrote in 1871: "the rights of the coolie in California, in Peru, in Jamaica, in Trinidad, and on board the vessels bearing them to these countries are scarcely more guarded than were those of the Negro slaves brought to our shores a century ago."¹¹³ Du Bois described "that dark and vast sea

of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa, in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States” and called for “the emancipation of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown, and black.”¹¹⁴ In his history of the colonial division of labor in Guyana that separated Blacks and Asians and permitted the postemancipation exploitation of those divisions, Walter Rodney imagined the “definite historical achievement” that would have been possible if Black and Asian workers, the descendants of slaves and indentured laborers, could have forged solidarity across the residues of colonial division.¹¹⁵ These “flashes” of the intimacies of four continents critically frame the more restricted dominant meaning of intimacy as the interiority and private property of the European and North American individual.

Interpreting the multivalence of “intimacy” is a means to understand the process through which the “intimacies of four continents” were rationalized and sublated by a more restricted notion of “intimacy” as the property of the possessive individual. Reading the colonial archive, I observe how colonized populations were differentially racialized through their proximities from normative ideas of family reproduction that became central to early nineteenth-century liberalism. Reading literature, autobiography, political philosophy, political economy, and cultural genres of liberalism, I observe likewise how the racialized distributions of freedom and humanity were equally a part of this legacy. Modern hierarchies of race appear to have emerged in the contradiction between liberal aspirations to universality and the needs of modern colonial regimes to manage work, reproduction, and the social organization of the colonized. Racial governance was underwritten by liberal philosophies that at once disavowed the violence of settler colonialism and narrated modernity as the progress from slavery to freedom. The “intimacies of four continents” may be the “political unconscious” of this modern fiction of progress and redemption. However, these “intimacies” remain almost entirely illegible in the historiography of modern freedom, making the naming and interpretation of this global conjunction a problem of knowledge itself. It has been estimated that between 1451 and 1870, 11,569,000 African slaves were brought to the “new world,”¹¹⁶ and that after the sixteenth century, out of eighty million native peoples in the Americas, there remained ten.¹¹⁷ Between 1834 and the end of the century, a

reported half a million Asian immigrants made their way to the British West Indies, in the context of tens of millions more going to Latin America, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia.¹¹⁸ But, while these numbers powerfully convey the labor of working peoples in the building of the “new world,” I am less concerned to pursue the significance in demographic terms, and more concerned to inquire into the politics of knowledge with respect to connections between Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas that were critical to the imbrication of liberal freedom with the rise of a global capitalist system. We still seek new methods, not only to understand settler colonialism as the condition for African slavery in the Americas, but also to examine how the liberal narratives that symbolize freedom in the abolition of that slavery erase this connection and further impede our access to indigenous and slave histories. We require new archives and readings to link the introduction of Chinese and Indian indentured laborers to the Americas with the abolition of the slave trade, and moreover, to reckon with how the figure of Asian labor was used to buttress promises of freedom that remained out of reach for enslaved and indentured peoples alike, even following abolition. We require new ways to interpret India Office, Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and Parliamentary Papers together with literature and culture, as we elaborate the convergence of liberal abolition with new imperial experiments, linking older methods of territorial colonialism with new forms of sovereignty enacted through the governance of trade and movement, in treaty ports and across the seas.

What we know of these links and intimacies is shaped by existing fields and by our methods of disciplinary study. Europe is rarely studied in relation to the Caribbean or Latin America, and U.S. history is more often separated from studies of the larger Americas. Work on comparative U.S. racial formation is still at odds with American history, which disconnects the study of slavery from immigration studies of Asians and Latinos; the histories of gender, sexuality, and women is often separated from the study of race. Native Caribbeans have been rendered invisible by both the histories that tell of their extermination in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent racial classifications in which their survival is occluded.¹¹⁹ While anthropological studies have focused on ethnic mixings of Asian and African peoples in the Caribbean, historians are just beginning

to explore the braided relations of indenture, slavery, and independence among these groups.¹²⁰ Scholars of the Black diaspora have undertaken the histories of both forcible and voluntary African dispersion as means for understanding the longer global past of new world modernity. Eric Williams, Walter Rodney, C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Cedric Robinson all observed the centrality of Black labor to the development of modern global capitalism, which exactly depended on the resources of African slaves just as Europeans moved from agrarian to factory work. Later studies like Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* illuminated the encounter between Europe and the "new world"; others bring to light the circuits and connections among Yoróban Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African Americans.¹²¹ Robin D. G. Kelley emphasizes that the significance of Black diaspora projects to the field of U.S. history may be precisely their capacity to chart *more* than Black identities and political movements, what he calls "other streams of internationalism not limited to the black world."¹²²

Robin Kelley's call to investigate "other streams of internationalism not limited to the black world" is suggestive with respect to imagining a global past in which Asia and Asian labor signifies both within and independently of Anglo-American empire built on settler colonialism and African slavery. Like "the intimacies of four continents," Kelley's "other streams of internationalism" require new investigations that uncover and interpret connections and relation, but it also means that we must reckon with how the selection of a single historical actor may be precisely a modality of "forgetting" these crucial connections. While we might suspect that Chinese indentured labor in the early Americas has been "lost" because of indenture's ambiguous status with respect to freedom and slavery, dialectical terms central to narratives of modernity, it is important not to treat this as the particular exclusion of the Chinese. Rather, this "forgetting" attests to the more extensive erasure of colonial connections that include but are not limited to indentureship: that implicate the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the settler logics of appropriation, forced removal, and assimilation that are repeated in contemporary land seizures, militarized counter-insurgency at home and abroad, and varieties of nationalism in our present moment; that allude to the ubiquitous transnational migrations within neoliberal globalization of which

Chinese emigrant labor is but one instance. Moreover, the forgetting reveals the politics of memory itself, and is a reminder that the constitution of knowledge often obscures the conditions of its own making.¹²³ In this sense, my interest in Chinese emigrant labor is not to pursue a single, particularist cultural identity, not to fill in a gap or add on another trans-oceanic group, but to explain *the politics of our lack of knowledge*, and to be more specific about what I would term the economy of affirmation and forgetting that characterizes liberal humanist understanding.

Colonized peoples created the conditions for liberal humanism, despite the disavowal of these conditions in the European political philosophy on which it is largely based. Racial classifications and an international division of labor emerged coterminously as parts of a genealogy that were not exceptional to, but were constitutive of, that humanism. “Freedom” was constituted through a narrative dialectic that rested simultaneously on a spatialization of the “unfree” as exteriority and a temporal subsuming of that unfreedom as internal difference or contradiction. The “overcoming” of internal contradiction resolves in “freedom” within the modern Western political sphere through displacement and elision of the coeval conditions of settler dispossession, slavery, and indentureship in the Americas. In this sense, modern liberal humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom. The differentiations of “race” or “nation,” the geopolitical map of “south,” “north,” “east,” and “west,” or the modernization discourse of stages of development—these are *traces* of liberal forgetting. They reside within, and are constitutive of, the modern narrative of freedom but are neither fully determined nor exhausted by its ends. They are the remainders of the formalism of affirmation and forgetting.

We might pursue the observation that liberal humanism is a formalism that translates through affirmation and forgetting in a variety of ways. Some have recovered lost or hidden histories, to provide historical narratives for the “people without history,” those forgotten in the modern tales of national development, or have challenged existing historiography with new studies of the political economy of British imperialism in nineteenth-century China and India that produced the impoverishment that led to the emigration of Asian laborers. In new ethnographies

interpreting the syncretic cultures of Caribbean “créolité,” “mestizaje,” and “métissage,” anthropologists Aisha Khan and Viranjini Munasinghe have found other versions of person and society, beginning and end, life and death, quite different remnants of the earlier affirmation and forgetting.¹²⁴ We could study representations of the rise and fall of the plantation complex in the Americas in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean literature, or its recasting in the twentieth century by Alejo Carpentier, Jean Rhys, or Maryse Condé.¹²⁵ We could look at how the problem of forgotten intimacies is thematized in recent Caribbean diasporic or postcolonial literature: Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda* (1999), for example, imagines the coexistence of Chinese and Indian immigrants, Afro-Caribbeans, whites, and creoles in nineteenth-century Jamaica; Cristina Garcia’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003) imagines the union of an escaped Chinese indentured laborer and the slavewoman he buys and frees, and follows their Afro-Chinese-Cuban descendants from China to Cuba to the United States and Vietnam. Each and all, rich and worthy directions to pursue.

In this book, however, I do not move immediately toward recovery and recuperation, but rather pause to reflect on what it means to supplement forgetting with new narratives of affirmation and presence. There is an ethics and politics in struggling to comprehend the particular absence of the intimacies of four continents, to engage slavery, genocide, indenture, and liberalism, as a conjunction, as an actively acknowledged loss within the present. David Eng and David Kazanjian describe a “politics of mourning” that would “investigate the political, economic and cultural dimensions of *how* loss is apprehended and history is named—how that apprehension and naming produce the phenomenon of ‘what remains.’”¹²⁶ Historian of the seventeenth-century Atlantic slave trade Stephanie Smallwood has put it this way: “I do not seek to create—out of the remnants of ledgers and ships’ logs, walls and chains—‘the way it really was’ for the newly arrived slave waiting to be sold. I try to interpret, from the slave trader’s disinterest in the slave’s pain, those social conditions within which there was no possible political resolution to that pain. I try to imagine what could have been.”¹²⁷ The *past conditional temporality* of the “what could have been,” symbolizes aptly the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene

of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, and also the matters absent, entangled, and unavailable by its methods. I suggest that understanding the relation of the intimacy of the possessive individual to the intimacies of four continents requires a *past conditional temporality* in order to reckon with the violence of affirmation and forgetting, in order to recognize that this particular violence continues to be reproduced in liberal humanist institutions, discourses, and practices today. However, in doing so, we do not escape the inhabiting of our present, and the irony that many of the struggles we would wish to engage are not only carried out in the languages of liberty, equality, reason, progress, and human rights—almost without exception, they must be translated into the political and juridical spaces of this tradition. We must reckon that present contests over the life and death of the “human” are often only legible in terms of those spaces still authorized by liberal political humanism.



2.1 Olaudah Equiano. Illustration by W. Denton and D. Orme. Frontispiece from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, originally published in London, 1789. Courtesy of the British Library.