Edited by

JOHN MCALEER & CHRISTER PETLEY

The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, *c. 1750–1820*

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John McAleer • Christer Petley
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palgrave
macmillan

Editors
John McAleer
University of Southampton
Southampton, UK

Christer Petley
University of Southampton
Southampton, UK

ISBN 978-1-137-50764-8 ISBN 978-1-137-50765-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016941472

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

Acknowledgements

Most of the chapters in this book were first presented as papers at a conference held during the summer of 2014 at the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth. We are grateful to the museum for hosting the conference and to all those who participated, as well as to the Southampton Maritime and Marine Institute and the Discipline of History at the University of Southampton for their financial support. The Centre for Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies and the Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies, both based in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Southampton, also provided valuable support.

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Notes on Contributors

Stephen Conway is a professor of History at University College London. He is the author of *The War of American Independence* (1995); *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (2000); *War, State, and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (2006); *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities* (2011); and *A Short History of the American Revolutionary War* (2013). He has also published scholarly articles on a variety of subjects in periodicals such as *English Historical Review*, *The Historical Journal*, and the *William & Mary Quarterly*. He is currently working on a book, with the provisional title, 'Britannia's Auxiliaries: Continental Europeans and the British Empire, *c.* 1740–1800'.

James Davey is a curator of Naval History at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. He is the author of *The Transformation of British Naval Strategy: Seapower and Supply in Northern Europe 1808–1812* (2010) and *Broadsides: Caricature and the Navy, 1756–1815* (2012). His latest monograph, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars*, was published by Yale University Press in 2015.

John McAleer is a lecturer in History at the University of Southampton. He is the author of *Representing Africa: Landscape, Exploration and Empire in Southern Africa, 1780–1870* (2010), *Monsoon Traders: The Maritime World of the East India Company (2011),* and a number of scholarly articles, which have appeared in periodicals such as the *British Journal for the History of Science*, *International History Review*, and *Atlantic Studies*. His

latest monograph, *Britain's Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763–1820*, was published in 2016.

Christer Petley is a senior lecturer in History at the University of Southampton. Among his publications are *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (2009) and articles in *Atlantic Studies*, *Slavery & Abolition*, and *The Historical Journal*. He is currently working on a study of the Jamaican planter class during the Age of Revolution.

Patrick Walsh is a teaching fellow in British History in the Department of History at University College London. Among his publications are *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: The Life of William Conolly, 1662–1729* (2010), *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland: Money, Banking and Investment, 1690–1721* (2014) as well as articles in *The Historical Journal*, *Eighteenth-Century Life* and *Scottish Historical Review*.

Siân Williams received her PhD in History from the University of Southampton in 2015. Her thesis, 'The Royal Navy in the British Caribbean, 1756–1815', examined interactions between naval personnel and West Indian societies and cultures.

Mary Wills is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE), University of Hull, working on the AHRC-funded project, 'Antislavery Usable Past'. Before taking up her current post, she held an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award based at WISE and the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Her thesis examined themes of anti-slavery, imperialism and identity in the Royal Navy's suppression of the transatlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century.

Kathleen Wilson is a professor of History at Stony Brook University. Her books include *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (1995); *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (2003); and, as editor, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660–1840* (2004). She is currently completing a project entitled 'Strolling Players of Empire: Theatre, Culture and Modernity in the English Provinces', which explores the politics of theatrical performances and colonial rule in sites across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Ocean worlds.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic

Christer Petley and John McAleer

In March 1806, the Court of Common Council met in London's Guildhall to discuss one of the latest events in the ongoing war with Napoleonic France. At the end of the meeting, the assembled councilmen and aldermen resolved to award the freedom of the city to Admiral John Thomas Duckworth, together with a sword valued at 200 guineas, 'as testimony of the high sense the City of London entertains of his gallant conduct'.[1] The presentation sword—now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich—was made by Richard Teed, the leading sword manufacturer of the day (Fig. 1.1).[2] Duckworth's actions, which inspired such appreciation in London, took place on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The inscription on the beautifully damascened, straight steel blade of the sword acknowledged Duckworth's 'zeal and alacrity' in pursuing a French fleet to the Caribbean and 'more especially for the skilful and gallant attack made by him on that fleet on the 6 Feb[ruary] … off St Domingo'.[3]

The incident recorded in the inscription, and recognised in the award of the sword, demonstrates the crucial role played by the Royal Navy in defending and extending Britain's Atlantic empire. Learning that a large French raiding squadron had mobilised in Caribbean waters a single day's sail from Jamaica, Britain's most valuable colonial possession, Duckworth took the powerful enemy force by surprise. His successful actions during the ensuing Battle of Saint Domingo ultimately secured the British Caribbean islands and paved the way for the capture of Curaçao, Martinique, Cayenne and Guadeloupe later in the war.[4] The gift of the

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_1

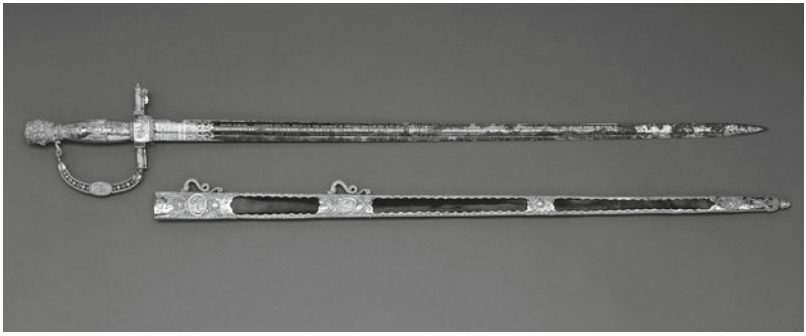

Fig. 1.1 Presentation sword, by Richard Teed, *c.* 1806 (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, WPN1121)

sword marked this out as a remarkable achievement. But Duckworth's behaviour and its sparkling rewards were in keeping with British naval priorities during the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and the preceding century. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Royal Navy defended British interests overseas as well as at home: it ranged far and wide in Atlantic waters, defending British commercial and colonial concerns and attacking those of the enemy in times of war.

The men who made up the Common Council at the Guildhall might never have seen Jamaica, but they understood the defence of Britain's empire in the Caribbean to be of profound importance to them in London. For British merchants and politicians alike, the coasts, islands and ports of the Atlantic—with its trading enclaves in Africa and settler colonies in the Americas—constituted an extended community with commonalities of interest and of experience, all linked together by the British (and other) ships that criss-crossed the ocean. The transatlantic colonial commerce of this British Atlantic world included the Newfoundland fisheries and export markets for British manufactures around the Atlantic littoral. But it was imports of American produce, and particularly of slave-grown plantation staples like tobacco and sugar, that made up its most important element. This activity brought luxury items to British consumers and provided tax revenues that helped to bankroll the war effort against France, including the naval protection of the British Isles themselves. Moreover, colonial trade underpinned economic activity and employment in Britain, not to mention the creation of some of the huge fortunes amassed by merchants in port cities like Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, as well as

London. Therefore, the loss of key colonial assets had the potential to cause economic hardship and financial loss throughout the British Atlantic empire, and it fell to naval officers like Duckworth and the seamen who served under them to risk or give their lives to secure, protect (and sometimes expand) these British webs of production and exchange.

However, the integration of the navy into this world of colonisation, commerce and migration went far deeper than its military responsibilities. Between 1802 and 1805, Duckworth lived in Jamaica as the admiral in charge of the naval station and dockyard at Port Royal, across the harbour from the large port town of Kingston on the island's south coast. His main duty was to protect the colony from foreign invasion. But, as in all Caribbean plantation colonies, where the enslaved population vastly outnumbered white colonists, the force Duckworth commanded also stood poised to assist the army and local militia in case of slave uprisings. In all of these matters, the admiral on station liaised closely with the governor of the colony and was involved in a continual round of socialising: hosting fellow officers of both services on his flagship or at his country residence on the outskirts of Kingston, visiting the plantations of the powerful local slaveholders and attending balls organised by members of the local legislative assembly. When he left, in 1805, the assembly offered Duckworth their profuse thanks for his work, along with a ceremonial sword, and the merchants of Kingston presented him with a silver tea kettle, inscribed to express their respect and regard for his protection of Jamaican trade.[5] It was therefore not just London's elite who ostentatiously demonstrated its approval of the sea officers of the British Atlantic. Whilst confronting the enemy and fighting battles in wartime were important parts of the navy's role, this mobile and pan-imperial arm of the British state cannot be understood outside of the complicated social, cultural and political contexts in which it worked throughout the oceans and settlements of a far-flung empire.

Historiography

Historians interested in the British Atlantic world, and Britain's eighteenth-century empire more generally, have yet to integrate a detailed view of the Royal Navy and its various roles into their work. The British Atlantic was, as Trevor Burnard notes, 'a remarkably underinstitutionalized world', in which government played a relatively small role in policing the movements of people and goods or controlling interactions between British

colonisers, Native Americans and enslaved Africans.[6] It was, nevertheless, given its shape by Navigation Acts designed to strengthen the Royal Navy, and naval warfare and the raising of government revenues to support its huge costs were 'at the heart of the historical processes of integrating the Atlantic World'.[7] The navy protected its sea routes of transatlantic trade and migration. Moreover, warships and their personnel were a pervasive presence in the various entrepôts, harbours and port towns that acted as nodes within this extended network, potent as both active representatives and patriotic symbols of the British state and its military power. This defining imperial institution must therefore form a key part of any analysis of the British Atlantic during the long eighteenth century.

The Atlantic world was a complex and shifting constellation of overlapping empires. However, perhaps because they have been keen to eschew approaches focused on the nation-state or on specific imperial histories, Atlantic historians have tended to focus on instances of transregional exchange, connection and creativity in ways that sometimes deemphasise the imperial frameworks that channelled or controlled them.[8] They have also tended to take a curiously land-based approach to their work, studying the ocean's littoral regions without much direct reference to the sea or to seafarers, adopting what Hester Blum has described as 'a landlocked critical prospect'.[9] Atlantic histories have, as Alison Games remarks, 'rarely centred around the ocean'.[10] Historians operating within the Atlantic framework have worked extremely productively on revolutionary, counter-revolutionary, migratory and mercantile transatlantic networks, making visible a vast, variegated but integrated set of relations, which often traversed the boundaries of the European empires and other polities that spanned or bordered the ocean.[11] But few of the defining studies in Atlantic history find much to say about the navy. The most influential single volume on British Atlantic history to date, edited by David Armitage and Michael Braddick, does not contain a chapter on the military or an index reference to the Royal Navy, and subsequent overviews of Atlantic history have done little to address the lack of focus on questions of seapower and the wider roles of Britain's navy.[12] Nevertheless, Armitage and Braddick do note that 'warfare' and Atlantic histories of particular institutions offer other productive avenues into the subject.[13] Jack Greene and Philip Morgan, in their more recent critical appraisal of Atlantic history, suggest that the field could benefit from studies that place 'traditional subjects in imperial history' within the 'broader perspective' provided by a transatlantic framework.[14] These useful suggestions urge

a focus on the Royal Navy, which was far too integral an institution to the British Atlantic for more reasons than just its activities during wartime, for this subject to remain marginalised.

By contrast with the field of Atlantic history, the navy has been a significant point of focus in British imperial history. *The Oxford History of the British Empire* contains chapters devoted specifically to the themes of seapower and the navy in the period between 1500 and 1800, when the empire cohered principally around Atlantic colonies and trade. There is a historiographical chapter on the subject, along with many references to it in the other contributions to the *History*'s five volumes.[15] N. A. M. Rodger's synoptic naval history of Britain also contains an analysis of the ways in which British seapower was entwined with overseas trade, including that with the colonies, as well as a discussion of aspects of naval warfare in colonial theatres of conflict during the age of the sailing navy.[16] Naval historians have made important contributions to imperial history, therefore, but until recently the history of the navy has been written 'mainly as one of operations in wartime', with some important work on the fiscal-military connections between the Royal Navy and the transatlantic commercial empire.[17] No major study of the Royal Navy has yet taken an Atlantic perspective on the second half of the eighteenth century.[18] Moreover, naval historians have so far been generally reluctant to connect the history of the Royal Navy with the recent work on migrations, slavery, plantation agriculture, colonial rights and trans-imperial politics that has so greatly expanded our understanding of the British empire and the Atlantic world in this period.[19] In a number of ways, therefore, Barry Gough's observation that a sustained examination of the 'general linkage of navy to Empire continues to escape historians' remains valid.[20]

There is huge potential to explore the linkages between the navy and the empire, as well as the importance of seapower, in our broader understanding of Atlantic history. Thanks to the work of Atlantic historians, we now have studies of various different transatlantic connections forged by groups of traders and migrants, including some studies that trace the activities of seamen within the radical networks that spanned the Atlantic during the Age of Revolution.[21] Studies of the navy promise to shed new light on such networks as well as on the characteristics of colonial societies and their often fraught relationships with distant centres of authority in the 'mother country'. In addition, the so-called new imperial history, with its interest in the intimate links between politics, society and culture 'at home' in the metropole and the colonies of the wider empire, also offers

tantalising possibilities for new forms of naval history. The navy was an imperial institution of huge symbolic significance to Britons. Its officers and men were drawn or conscripted from communities across the British Atlantic, and it offered opportunities for careers that spanned Britain, the empire and the world beyond.[22] Some scholars have begun to explore naval history via these avenues. For example, the work of such historians as Kathleen Wilson, Stephen Conway and Sarah Kinkel has shed new light not only on the navy itself, but also on the political tensions that defined the transatlantic British empire.[23] This collection seeks to build on that work by further interrogating the navy's various roles and responsibilities around the Atlantic Ocean and investigating how its actions and activities supported, expanded and divided the British Atlantic world during the course of the eighteenth century.

The book does not claim to offer a comprehensive overview of the navy's relationships with the Atlantic world. Rather, the chapters presented here focus on specific events, people and places in ways that link Atlantic, naval and imperial approaches. They provide detailed studies of how the navy served to integrate and expand the British empire around the Atlantic, but also of how it could create tensions between various groups within this extended British polity, examining themes such as the strategic and political importance of maritime power, the defence and expansion of British control through naval force, the politics of identity and the assimilation of naval personnel into colonial societies. The boundaries of the British Atlantic world, as Armitage and Braddick note, 'are extremely difficult to draw'. One of the key objectives of this collection, therefore, is to question these boundaries—both conceptually and geographically—thereby contributing to recent research that has attempted to move beyond the traditional North Atlantic bias of Atlantic history, and to look for creative ways of understanding the linkages within and between the world's oceans.[24] Ultimately, the aim is to suggest new forms of naval history by suggesting different ways of investigating and thinking about the central role of Britain's navy in the creative and destructive processes of making, breaking and reconstructing the British Atlantic.

Key Themes in Atlantic Naval History

Beyond studying military operations and battles, historians might further explore the history of the Royal Navy in the Atlantic region in at least four broad ways, all of which are tackled, directly or tangentially, by

one or more of the chapters in this book. First, naval history is entwined with that of state involvement in processes of colonisation and commerce. Trade, overseas settlements and seapower were related areas of governmental concern, linked not only to what Daniel Baugh has termed a 'blue-water' policy that placed the navy as the first line of defence for the British Isles during wartime, but also to the repeated political clashes over the future direction of the British empire that occurred throughout the second half of the long eighteenth century.[25] Second, it is important to understand that the Royal Navy played a regulatory as well as protective role within the transatlantic empire, policing the colonies at the behest of the imperial government in London, by taking measures from suppressing rebellions by enslaved people to controlling the illicit trading activities of white colonials. Third, the navy was a social organisation whose personnel were not only witnesses to life in all quarters of the Atlantic world, but also participants—their lives and deaths helping to shape the contours of Atlantic history. Finally, the navy was a totem of Britishness, an organisation that offered a focal point for the patriotic celebrations of Britons anxious to maintain their identities, often in lands that were distant and very different from the metropole.

As successive British governments recognised, the Royal Navy performed a vital set of roles: protecting the nation from foreign invasion, at the same time as defending and consolidating its imperial and other overseas interests. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Atlantic Ocean. Britain had a high proportion of its gross national product and employment linked to overseas trade in the eighteenth century, and much of British overseas trade centred on the Atlantic.[26] Naval protection of British overseas shipping, as Baugh reminds us, 'followed rather than led its expansion', but British commerce and seapower were nevertheless closely entwined.[27] As early as 1672, one pamphleteer declared, 'The undoubted Interest of England is Trade, since it is that alone which can make us either *Rich* or *Safe*, for without a powerful Navy, we should be a prey to our Neighbours, and without Trade, we could have neither sea-men or Ships'.[28]

Historians have for a long time acknowledged that developments in the political, fiscal and administrative infrastructure of the state were intimately connected with the projection of Britain's power at sea and overseas.[29] Indeed, the development of an efficient military bureaucracy and logistics is now considered to have been as crucial as the fighting itself.[30] By the 1670s, the Navigation Acts sought to ensure that the export trade of

English colonies was channelled towards the metropole in English ships manned by English crews, a system designed not only to make certain that the fruits of colonial trade found their way back to Europe, but also to foster the ship-building and seamanship skills fundamental to a powerful national navy. These Acts did not apply to all forms of trade, were subject to evasion and not always strictly enforced, but they did provide a basic grammar of organisation to the eighteenth-century maritime empire, and, from within this commercial and defensive framework, the navy helped to create and integrate an increasingly complex British Atlantic system.[31] Transatlantic colonies also provided some direct contributions to British naval strength in the form of timber, because, whilst the Baltic provided the bulk of the navy's timber requirements, Britain's North American possessions offered an increasingly useful alternative supply of naval stores.[32]

By the late seventeenth century, small squadrons of naval vessels were stationed in the Caribbean to protect both legal trade and smuggling into the Spanish colonies. A few years later, the Admiralty established two squadrons, one in the Leeward Islands and one at Jamaica, with the key task of protecting the evolving patterns of British transatlantic trade.[33] The earliest naval establishments on the coast of mainland North America—at Savannah, Georgia, in the 1730s and at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1749—were undertaken for similar reasons.[34] Moreover, as Joshua Newton has demonstrated, the Royal Navy also played a crucial role in protecting British trading interests along the west coast of Africa, including the defence of the British slave trade. Therefore, despite the fact that the primary focus for the navy was protecting the British Isles, the protection of colonies and transoceanic trade was clearly an important consideration that could at times occupy considerable naval resources. For instance, as Newton notes, in 1751 the Royal Navy had about 30 ships stationed in the Caribbean or protecting transatlantic colonial trade, and only 28 in home waters.[35] Indeed, the strength of naval protection seems to have increased in direct proportion to the tightening of commercial regulations in the Atlantic: bolstering naval protection for their shipments was the British government's recompense for making increased fiscal demands on British merchants.[36]

Although not all ministries promoted colonial trade or the Royal Navy in equal measure, the British government recognised the importance of both to national security. One of the most significant elements of naval reform in the 1740s was the creation of a Western Squadron: a fleet to secure the western approaches of the English Channel, which guarded

against invasion threats, allowed the Royal Navy to monitor the fleets in French Atlantic ports and protected British shipping returning from long-distance trading voyages.[37] Government attention to the navy meant that by the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748, the superiority of Britain's navy over those of its European rivals was manifest in terms of greater numbers of ships, advances in firepower technology, the larger numbers of sailors potentially at its disposal and improved diets for those seamen.[38]

The Seven Years War (1756–1763) was successfully waged in Atlantic waters and in America by virtue of the mobility of the navy, as well as by the increasingly effective combination of army and navy.[39] Confidence in the dominance offered by the navy by the conclusion of the war was well expressed in an anonymous memorandum written in 1763. 'While we maintain our superiority at Sea', this author proclaimed, North America was safe from 'being invaded by a formidable enemy; & 'tis needless to erect forts to keep the trees in subjection'.[40] Of course, this ignored conflicts between British colonials and Native Americans, and failed to anticipate that internal rebellion, rather than foreign invasion, would wrench thirteen colonies of the region from the British Atlantic empire. It nevertheless articulated British confidence in naval power and empire. That confidence was sternly tested by the American Revolution, which escalated into a war between Britain and her European rivals and posed new questions about the effectiveness of the Royal Navy to protect British interests at home and across the Atlantic. This prompted another round of naval investment, which helped to provide the foundation for the overwhelming dominance of British seapower in the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.[41]

Perhaps because of its importance to national defence, the relationship between the navy and the Atlantic empire was under continual debate within and beyond government circles throughout the eighteenth century. For example, as Wilson has shown, aggressive transatlantic operations in wartime were heavily associated with the imperialistic or 'blue-water' impulses of opposition politicians during the middle decades of the century, when naval heroes like Admiral Edward Vernon offered a counterpoint to the Walpole government's apparent desire to avoid a war with Spain in the Americas.[42] Even when Britons could agree on the importance of the navy to the nation, they disagreed on how it should be supported, organised and deployed. For instance, the tussle between the Westminster and Dublin parliaments over whether or not the Irish should contribute towards the

financial upkeep of the Royal Navy provides insight into the potential tensions and fissures brought about by the navy's pan-Atlantic role.[43] Some of the same strong advocates of naval power who lionised Vernon also had misgivings about the formation of a permanent, professional navy, fearing such a standing force undercut the voluntarist principles of English liberty. And during a very different set of discussions about the navy and empire later in the century, those involved in the debate about the future of the British Atlantic slave system disagreed vehemently about whether the slave trade was a help or hindrance to seapower.[44]

As well as protecting and benefiting from the British Atlantic empire, the Royal Navy also helped to regulate it through intra-imperial operations against its inhabitants. The navy was deployed against enslaved people, transporting the troops who guarded the plantation colonies from their own enslaved populations: an 'internal enemy' with every reason to rebel against a deadly, coercive system. For example, warships carrying troops played roles in the suppression of a slave revolt in Tobago in 1770 and of insurrections on the islands of Grenada and St Vincent during the 1790s.[45] Even after the abolition of the slave trade in West Africa, the Royal Navy helped to regulate slavery in the British Caribbean colonies. During the Jamaican Baptist War of 1831, the largest slave uprising in British imperial history, warships delivered marines and regular soldiers to the affected region, helping to 'strike terror into the negroes' and restore white British authority.[46] The coercive force of the navy was also brought to bear in other sections of Britain's Atlantic empire. In 1800, a dispute between free black colonists and the governor of the British West African colony of Sierra Leone over the rights and liberties of the colonists was resolved by the arrival of HMS *Asia*. The *Asia* carried troops whom the governor used to attack his opponents, arresting their leaders, several of whom were later tried and sentenced to transportation by a military court that included an officer from the ship.[47]

Within the confines of the British Atlantic empire, subject people in open rebellion had the most to fear from the navy, but it could also pose a threat to those contemplating other forms of dissent from British imperial policies. As Kinkel has shown, throughout the crisis that preceded the American Revolution, Royal Navy vessels policed illicit trade by colonists in North American waters and trained their guns on the streets of British-American port cities when discontent flared. Inhabitants protesting against what they saw as imperial despotism were thereby confronted with a clear reminder of the potential consequences of outright rebellion.[48] Even

the colonists of the British Caribbean, heavily dependent on the British military for protection, found cause to resent the authority of the navy and its loyalty to the London government in the years after the American Revolution, when naval officers, including a young Captain Horatio Nelson, used the threat of naval force to stamp out their trade with the former British colonists of the new United States.[49] In various ways, then, the navy was a tool in the hands of the central government of the Atlantic empire, co-ordinating and policing connections between the colonies and ports of Europe, West Africa and the Americas, and supporting as well as controlling the activities of colonial Britons.

As well as being a mobile military force operating around the Atlantic Ocean, the navy was a social institution. Most of the officers and sailors serving in the navy encountered and helped shape social life in various quarters of the British Atlantic world. For example, Admiral Duckworth not only spent three years in Jamaica, but also a period as commander of the Leeward station, with its main base at English Harbour, Antigua.[50] A few naval officers served as colonial governors, and in various other ways such men became well-travelled subjects of the British Atlantic—with as much specialist and intimate knowledge of various locations within this zone as any other group, not least because, as one naval officer put it, the practicalities of command often embraced 'many subjects unconnected with the duties of a naval officer'.[51] As a young officer, Home Riggs Popham was involved in surveying the south-western coastline of Africa during the 1780s. Two decades later, he took part in a British assault on the Dutch-controlled Cape before going on to lead the ill-starred raid on the River Plate on the other side of the South Atlantic. As an admiral, he went on to command the Jamaica station between 1817 and 1820—his final posting. Edward Columbine worked as a hydrographer in the Caribbean before leading anti-slave-trade duties off the coast of West Africa and serving as the governor of the newly established Crown colony of Sierra Leone.[52] An approach to the history of empire that focuses on individual careers, as outlined by David Lambert and Alan Lester, therefore offers one way of understanding the navy in the Atlantic world that is particularly well-suited to charting the well-documented careers of high-ranking officers.[53]

Concentrating on naval officers with long careers could never, however, provide a full picture of life in the navy and the effects of naval service on coastal communities around the North Atlantic. If the officers of the Royal Navy were mostly white men from metropolitan elite circles, their

crews were more diverse and truly transatlantic in character, as epitomised by Olaudah Equiano, who spent much of his life traversing the ocean as both an enslaved and free man, spending several years on Royal Navy vessels during the period of the Seven Years War.[54] Due to impressment, thousands of ordinary seamen were coerced into naval service from ships, harbours and port towns throughout the British Atlantic.[55] Patriotism, the lure of prize money or the levelling anonymity offered by life aboard ship could help some crew members overcome their objections to this, but performing service on an eighteenth-century warship was tough, and naval discipline—including the use of the lash and other physical punishments—notoriously harsh. By definition, naval service was dangerous, and particularly so in the Atlantic's tropical theatres of warfare, where the guns of the enemy were generally less hazardous than malaria or yellow fever. In 1780, an amphibious assault on a Spanish fort up the San Juan River in Central America claimed the lives of 1420 members of the 1800-strong British force. Almost all of them died from disease. As Michael Duffy's work has helped to illustrate, many more men were to die during the Caribbean campaigns of the 1790s, when once again the lives of marines and sailors were sacrificed during wartime to defend or extend British interests in tropical America.[56]

For most of the British public, however, it appears that British naval achievements outweighed the pain of such disasters. During the eighteenth century, the navy remained an extremely popular British institution, closely tied to notions of national identity.[57] It is clear from the work of Wilson, Conway and others that signal naval successes sparked public displays of patriotic fervour. In 1782, for example, Admiral Rodney's victory at the Battle of the Saintes in the Caribbean, which saved Jamaica from a Franco-Spanish invasion, offered a frustrated British public the opportunity to release 'years of pent up emotion' that had welled up during the exasperating years of the war with revolutionary America.[58] Indeed, these naval celebrations offer one way of exploring how the idea of the nation came to command 'such profound emotional legitimacy' amongst those who proudly chose to label themselves 'Britons' during the second half of the eighteenth century.[59] By the 1790s, such celebrations received support from the government and from the King. In December 1797, an official 'naval thanksgiving' procession through London, including 250 sailors and marines, celebrated recent British naval victories, prompting additional festivities in the provinces and demonstrating how British pride in the navy and its achievements had taken on a quasi-religious quality. As Lynda Pratt

describes it, the thanksgiving entailed 'the ceremonial parading through the streets' of colours captured from Dutch, Spanish and French ships 'and the ritualised laying of these trophies next to the high altar of St Paul's', the London cathedral that would later be the venue for Lord Nelson's state funeral.[60]

This kind of event was not confined to England. In Ireland, the parliament in Dublin consistently passed votes of thanks to triumphant naval officers, such as Rodney, and public subscriptions in Belfast and Dublin raised funds for the widows and orphans of men who fought and fell at Camperdown. An Irish proposal to erect a tall Doric column in Dublin bearing an imposing statue of Lord Nelson, after his death at Trafalgar, was set in train fully 20 years before its London equivalent.[61] In 1782, news of Rodney's victory at the Battle of the Saintes was greeted with relief and public celebrations in Jamaica.[62] And when it came to celebrating and commemorating the hero of Trafalgar, the white slaveholding colonists of Barbados were not far behind the Irish. Soon after the battle, the island's press published an appeal for a monument to Nelson so that the 'people of this ancient and loyal Colony' could commemorate the 'transcendent services rendered to the BRITISH EMPIRE by the late heroic LORD NELSON, who by his indefatigable zeal, preserved this and other British West India Islands from the grasp of a powerful enemy'.[63] A Nelson statue was completed at Trafalgar Square, Bridgetown, in 1813. In the South Atlantic, at the new British possession of the Cape Colony, one prominent British inhabitant celebrated Nelson's victories because they seemed to secure ongoing British control in the fledgling colony.[64] Clearly, therefore, naval heroes and victories were important to the way that white colonials chose to express their identities and attachments within the wider British transatlantic community.

By the time of Trafalgar, the Royal Navy had protected and regulated an expanding British empire for more than a century. Its personnel had helped shape life in all parts of the empire, and their deeds shaped the imperial identities that helped bind the British subjects of this far-flung world. The early years of the nineteenth century, culminating in the defeat of Napoleonic France, and shaped by economic and political developments in Europe and America, signalled a great change in the naval Atlantic and its role in Britain's emerging global empire. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 heralded a profound change in the nature of the Atlantic world that the Royal Navy had protected, defended and integrated throughout the eighteenth century. The final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, after two

decades of global struggle, compounded this shift in emphasis. The power of the navy in producing this result was recognised at the time: in 1798, Geoffrey Mowbray remarked gleefully that 'our navy keeps every one of our enemies bound in chains upon their own coast'.[65] Victory in 1815 finally confirmed the emergence of Britain as a world superpower, and the early years of the nineteenth century witnessed the further extension of the British empire in the east. Vincent Harlow's idea of a British imperial 'swing to the East' at the end of the eighteenth century failed to recognise the ongoing importance of the Atlantic as a focus for empire and trade into the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the 'diversion of interest and enterprise from the Western World to the potentialities of Asia and Africa' certainly gathered pace during the conflict with Napoleon, as Michael Duffy has noted.[66] By this time, a British Atlantic system that had formed the heart of British imperial projects during the eighteenth century had not only been transformed, but was also increasingly integrated into the global systems of colonisation, influence and trade that would characterise nineteenth-century British imperialism.

Outline of the Book

The chapters in this volume examine key themes in British naval and Atlantic history, as sketched above, concentrating on the period between the middle of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth. The first two contributions focus on the navy's interactions with key strategic locations in the British Atlantic empire: the Caribbean and Ireland. The sugar islands of the Caribbean remained the most important colonial possessions within the British empire until after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Their transatlantic trade routes were a vital part of the British economy and, by producing seamen skilled in long-distance voyages on large ships, they acted as a nursery of sailors whom the navy could forcibly impress during mobilisations. The protection of the islands was a key priority for British statesmen, and—as Siân Williams notes in Chapter 2—warships and naval officers were an ever-present spectacle in the principal ports and towns of the region. The white colonial elite of slaveholding plantation owners were heavily reliant on the navy and therefore keen to integrate sea officers into colonial society. But although relations were generally hospitable, there were also tensions. The impressment of seafarers from merchant ships in colonial port towns irked local legislative assemblies, not only because it disrupted trade, but also because the navy

acted ashore under its own authority, without being directly answerable to local legislatures. In such situations, a protective force could come to represent an authoritarian branch of the imperial state, riding roughshod over local constitutional privileges and revealing one of the central dilemmas of transatlantic British colonials, who had continually to reconcile their loyalty to Britain (as expressed by their celebration of the navy) with their desire for a large measure of self-government.

In some ways, the navy's role in protecting Irish trade in times of both peace and war accorded closely with its activities in the Caribbean, but Ireland also offers a very different case, as Chapter 3 by Patrick Walsh shows. Its strategic location near to England, and its status as part of the imperial metropole, complicated and extended its role in the creation and integration of a naval Atlantic. The provisioning of the fleet from Irish ports played a key role in ensuring the mobility and effectiveness of the Royal Navy throughout home waters and further afield in the Atlantic. Ireland's contribution to the navy also went far beyond the provision of bread, beef and beer. Significant numbers of Irishmen from all of the island's main religious denominations served in the eighteenth-century navy. This chapter therefore illustrates the critical role played by Ireland in the maintenance of the Royal Navy and, more broadly, in the consolidation, integration and extension of the British Atlantic empire.

The next two chapters consider the political importance of the Royal Navy in two key confrontations that reconfigured the British Atlantic empire during the second half of the eighteenth century: the American Revolution and the debate over the abolition of the slave trade. In considering the dispute between the imperial government in London and the American colonies between 1765 and 1775, Stephen Conway offers a new analysis of the importance that British politicians attached to the naval aspects of the Navigation-Acts system. Chapter 4 underlines the fact that, in the eighteenth century, the Navigation Acts were chiefly valued for their role in promoting naval power. It argues that the decision by British ministers to use force to compel the American colonists to obey parliamentary authority owed a great deal to their perception that, if the colonies broke free of the Navigation Acts, then British naval power would inevitably decline. The purposes of empire and the needs of the navy were so intertwined in the minds of ministers, therefore, that the government was willing to risk open conflict with its mainland colonies rather than chance compromises that might have weakened British seapower and the nation's standing vis-à-vis rival European powers.

British considerations about colonial trade and naval power also structured debates over the future of the transatlantic slave trade during and after the 1780s, as demonstrated in Chapter 5 by Christer Petley. Slaveholding planters argued that an abolition of transatlantic human trafficking would have an adverse effect on British naval strength, because the slave trade was integral to the sugar economy of the Caribbean colonies and therefore to a vital branch of the nation's overseas trade. Until the 1790s, that argument proved an effective foil to abolitionist attacks. However, revolutions in Europe and in the Americas, as well as a prolonged period of Caribbean warfare, helped to persuade the British government that abolition, rather than slave-trading, was more likely to promote security in the sugar islands. Moreover, British naval victories in the wars with France helped to ensure that Britain could end its slave trade without the fear that this would offer an advantage to its main colonial rival. The decision to end the slave trade, which did so much to reconfigure the British Atlantic world during the early nineteenth century, was therefore possible, in part, because of ongoing concerns about the commercial and maritime value of transatlantic colonies, but also because the deployment of British maritime force was so successful during the period between 1793 and 1815 that it opened up new possibilities and horizons for those seeking to reform the empire.

As Burnard notes, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are a 'difficult period to treat within the rubric of British Atlantic history'. The upheaval wrought by revolution and warfare saw rapid expansions and contractions of the British empire in America as well as new colonies along the coast of Africa, making this a period of transformation that saw the rise of new ideas about how the British empire should be governed. This volume's final three chapters explore the navy's wider role—both geographically and ideologically—in Atlantic waters within this period of 'epochal change and crisis', situating naval activity in the Atlantic within the wider contexts of world-wide warfare and an expanding global-trading empire.[67] They focus on the role of the navy in enforcement of the abolition of the slave trade, visions of a new type of Atlantic empire in Latin America and the acquisition of a new colony, deep in the South Atlantic, at the Cape. They examine the shifting boundaries of the navy's Atlantic world, whilst exploring some of the ways in which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, long-standing empires, trading networks and systems of labour experienced radical alterations that remodelled the work of the Royal Navy and its relationships with the Atlantic world.

When Parliament outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, a force that had been deployed to defend the trade was quickly re-tasked with its suppression. By the end of 1808, there was a naval squadron off the West African coast to intercept and detain slave ships.[68] Chapter 6 by Mary Wills focuses on the first naval officers ordered to deliver abolitionist policy. Confronted with the human trauma of the slave trade, officers engaged with evolving ideas of humanitarian action and intervention—ideas that had a significant impact both on how they conceived of their identity as Britons and on the nature of their duty as naval personnel. In considering the significance of slave-trade suppression activities for naval personnel, and its impact on identity and self-perception, this chapter outlines some of the foundations of the work of the Royal Navy during the Victorian era, when anti-slavery activity in Atlantic- and Indian-Ocean waters became an important part not only of the navy's sense of mission, but of broader notions of Britain's global 'civilising mission'.[69]

Chapters 7 and 8 by James Davey and John McAleer, respectively, draw attention to the navy's role south of the equator, discussing expeditions to take the River Plate and the Cape, which, whilst very different in intent, execution and consequence, each demonstrate an attempt to project British power into the furthest reaches of the Atlantic. Davey focuses on one of the consequences of the only large imperial operation launched from Britain during the war with Napoleonic France. Shortly after helping to recapture the Cape of Good Hope in 1806, Admiral Home Popham mounted an audacious and unauthorised assault on Buenos Aires, at the mouth of the River Plate. For a few months, and at a time when it was apparent that a swift victory in Europe was impossible, people across Britain turned instead to the possibilities of empire. Even though these were never realised—with Popham's naval expedition to South America ending in defeat and retreat—British ideas about an extended British empire at the expense of Spain offer interesting comparisons with earlier British dreams of supplanting Spanish power in the Americas. They also help to demonstrate the entangled character of European empires in the Americas during a period when the old order of Spanish dominance and French threat was disappearing and being replaced by a British predominance that was eventually to be realised as much through informal imperialism and trade as through the acquisition of new territory.[70] During the early years of the nineteenth century, Britons were facing up to this new order of things and to the possibilities (and limitations) of British naval supremacy.

Chapter 8 by John McAleer focuses on the other side of the South Atlantic, where the Cape of Good Hope was a key strategic asset in defending and expanding trade with Asia. The navy was one of the principal agents charged with capitalising on this advantage and controlling adjacent seas. But it also performed other roles, linking this part of the Atlantic periphery to the rest of the British Atlantic world by helping to foster a shared sense of British identity. The navy explored and exploited the resources of the new colony, and the navy's pan-Atlantic infrastructure provided a ready-made channel for the transmission of information, ideas and ideologies around the ocean. This chapter demonstrates that, despite its relative remoteness, the 'naval Atlantic'—characterised by colonial defence, trade protection and interactions with white settlers—stretched as far as southern Africa. By investigating the navy's activities at the gateway to the commercial emporia of Asia at the southern reaches of the Atlantic Ocean, the discussion also points to the broader globalising nature of Britain's empire and to the widening possibilities this entailed by the early nineteenth century.

The Royal Navy ranged far and wide around the Atlantic Ocean during the eighteenth century, and it loomed large in the imaginations of Britons. In her epilogue (Chapter 9), Kathleen Wilson reminds us that the unique popularity of this institution amongst patriotic Britons occurred through representation, and that depictions or discussions of naval deeds did not always treat the navy or its officers with sheer adulation. Nevertheless, by the time of Nelson's stunning victories at the Nile and Trafalgar, the navy had become a symbol of virtuous self-sacrifice and an object of adoration for various groups scattered around Britain's expanding empire. And yet, if popular receptions of the navy emphasised its revered status and glory, there was another, darker side to the naval Atlantic, one that was frequently overlooked in nationalistic outpourings. Death was omnipresent and life on the ocean was often nasty, brutish and short. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the Jack Tars and officers of the Royal Navy pursued carnal pleasures, whether in London drinking dens, in the brothels of colonial port towns or, like Nelson, in pursuit of genteel romantic partners amongst the white women of plantation great houses. In those liaisons, the men of the Royal Navy came into close physical contact with people of all sorts, from enslaved and free coloured women to shopkeepers, merchants, planters and colonial governors, offering another reminder of how the navy coupled with and helped intertwine the multifarious and deeply divided people who populated Britain's vast and shifting Atlantic world.

Notes

1. The full citation can be found in *London's Roll of Fame: Being Complimentary Notes and Addresses from the City of London on Presentation of the Honorary Freedom of that City* (London, 1884), p. 107.
2. For more information on the circumstances and context of the presentation of swords to naval officers in the period, see John McAleer, '"Eminent Service": War, Slavery and the Politics of Public Recognition in the British Caribbean and the Cape of Good Hope, *c.*1782–1807', *Mariner's Mirror* 95 (2009), 33–51.
3. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, object accession number, WPN1121. The City of London was not the only metropolitan institution that recognised Duckworth's actions. The Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's, in a letter to Duckworth dated 25 March 1806, informed him that the Fund had voted him the gift of a vase valued at £400 to be 'ornamented with emblematical devices, and an appropriate inscription'. See National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Duckworth papers, DUC/12, Lloyd's Patriotic Fund to Sir John Duckworth, 25 March 1806.
4. J. Holland Rose, 'British West India Commerce as a Factor in the Napoleonic War', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3 (1929), 39.
5. On Duckworth in Jamaica, see Philip Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2002). On his gifts from the assembly and merchants, see Siân Williams, 'The Royal Navy in the Caribbean, 1756-1815', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2014, pp. 156–8.
6. Trevor Burnard, 'The British Atlantic', in Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford, 2009), p. 127.
7. Samuel Willard Crompton, 'Navies and Naval Arming', in Joseph C. Miller, ed., *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), p. 362.
8. On this impetus in Atlantic history, see Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities', *The American Historical Review* 111 (2006), 753–7; David Hancock, 'The British Atlantic World: Co-ordination, Complexity, and the Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651–1815', *Itinerario* 23 (1999), 107–26. For a critique, see Burnard, 'British Atlantic', p. 129.
9. Hester Blum, 'Introduction: Oceanic Studies', *Atlantic Studies* 10 (2013), 151.
10. Games, 'Atlantic History', 745.
11. See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000); Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and*

Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas (Basingstoke, 2009); David Lambert, 'The Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian Petitions and Proslavery Networks', *Social & Cultural Geography* 6 (2010), 405–20; Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, eds., *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era* (Toronto, 2012); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge, 1997).

12. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World: 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 2009). Recent overviews include Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and their Shared History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2009); Greene and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History*. The more recent *Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*, edited by Joseph Miller, contains naval references within the entries on military strategies and war.
13. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, 'Introduction', in Armitage and Braddick, *British Atlantic World*, p. 5. Studies that have helped define this area include: Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford, 1986); D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Volume 1: Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (Yale, CT, 1986); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).
14. Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene, 'Introduction: The Present State of Atlantic History', in Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History*, p. 16.
15. The chapters in question are G. E. Aylmer, 'Navy, State, Trade and Empire', in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume 1: The Origins of Empire* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 467–81; N. A. M. Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire, 1688–1793', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume 2: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 169–83; Barry M. Gough, 'The Royal Navy and Empire', in Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume 5: Historiography* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 327–41. Historians of the navy had, of course, drawn connections between sea power, control of the oceans and the creation and maintenance of the British empire before this. The work of Alfred Thayer Mahan at the end of the nineteenth century was a notable early landmark, and Gerald Graham was explicit about the connection, arguing that without 'command of the sea there would have been no British empire'. See Gerald S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime Ascendancy* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 3.
16. N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004).
17. Gough, 'Royal Navy and Empire', p. 339. On the fiscal-military state and the Royal Navy see, in particular, John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War,*

Money and the English State, 1688–1783 (London, 1989); Daniel A. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce: The Uses of "A Grand Marine Empire"', in Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994), pp. 185–223; Roger Knight and Martin Wilcox, *Sustaining the Fleet, 1793–1815: War, the British Navy and the Contractor State* (Woodbridge, 2010). For recent work on the fiscal-military state, more generally, see Aaron Graham and Patrick Walsh, eds., *The British Fiscal-Military States, 1660–1815* (London, 2016); Richard Harding and Sergio Solbes Ferri, eds., *The Contractor State and Its Implications, 1659–1815* (Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, 2012); Christopher Storrs, ed., *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham, 2009).

18. For studies of earlier periods, see Ian R. Mather, 'The Role of the Royal Navy in the English Atlantic Empire, 1660–1720', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995. More recently, see Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower and the Atlantic* (Woodbridge, 2013).
19. There have, however, been several book-length studies of the navy in relation to specific regions in the Atlantic. See, for example, Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699–1832* (Toronto, 2003); Julian Gwyn, *Ashore and Afloat: The British Navy and the Halifax Naval Yard before 1820* (Ottawa, 2004); Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987).
20. Gough, 'Royal Navy and Empire', p. 340.
21. See Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987).
22. For examples of work in this vein, see Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002); David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006).
23. For examples of this work, see Kathleen Wilson, 'Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon', *Past and Present* 121 (1988), 74–109; Stephen Conway, '"A Joy Unknown for Years Past": The American War, Britishness and the Celebration of Rodney's Victory at the Saintes', *History* 86 (2001), 180–99; Sarah Kinkel,

'Saving Admiral Byng: Imperial Debates, Military Governance and Popular Politics at the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War', *Journal for Maritime Research* 13 (2011), 3–19; Sarah Kinkel, 'The King's Pirates? Naval Enforcement of Imperial Authority, 1740–76', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71 (2014), 3–34.

24. Armitage and Braddick, 'Introduction', p. 3. For recent work examining links between oceans, see H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2012); Alan Frost, *The Global Reach of Empire: Britain's Maritime Expansion in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, 1764–1815* (Carlton, 2003); John McAleer, *Britain's Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763–1820* (Cambridge, 2016).
25. Daniel A. Baugh, 'Great Britain's "Blue-Water" Policy, 1689–1815', *The International History Review* 10 (1988), 33–58.
26. See Jeremy Black, 'Introduction', in Jeremy Black and Philip Woodfine, eds., *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century* (Leicester, 1998), p. 7.
27. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', p. 193.
28. Quoted in Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire', p. 172.
29. See Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, NJ, 1965); N. A. M. Rodger, *The Admiralty* (Lavenham, 1979); Richard Middleton, 'Naval Administration in the Age of Pitt and Anson, 1755–1763', in Black and Woodfine, eds., *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power*, pp. 109–27; Clive Wilkinson, *The British Navy and the State in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2004); Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793–1815* (London, 2013).
30. On this, see Roger Morriss, *The Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources, Logistics and the State, 1755–1815* (Cambridge, 2011); Roger Knight and Martin Wilcox, *Sustaining the Fleet, 1793–1815: War, the British Navy and the Contractor State* (Woodbridge, 2010).
31. On the Navigation Acts and Atlantic commerce, see Baugh, 'Maritime Strength' and Jacob M. Price, 'The Imperial Economy, 1770–1776', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 78.
32. Early-twentieth-century naval scholars studied this connection between navy and empire, focusing on the impact of North American lumber. See Robert C. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652–1862* (Cambridge, MA, 1926); Ruth M. Bourne, *Queen Anne's Navy in the West Indies* (New Haven, CT, 1939). For more recent work, see Arthur R. M. Lower, *Great Britain's Woodyard: British America and the Timber Trade, 1763–1867* (Montreal, 1973); P. K. Crimmin,

'Searching for British Naval Stores: Sources and Strategy, *c.*1802–1860', *The Great Circle* 18 (1996), 113–24.

33. Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, pp. 347–50; Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire', p. 178.
34. Julian Gwyn, 'The Royal Navy in North America, 1712–1776', in Black and Woodfine, eds., *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power*, pp. 133–7.
35. Joshua D. Newton, 'Slavery, Sea Power and the State: The Royal Navy and the British West African Settlements, 1748–1756', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41 (2013), 172.
36. On this point, see Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', pp. 195–6.
37. Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire', pp. 174–5.
38. Richard Harding, *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy: The War of 1739–1748* (Woodbridge, 2013).
39. David Syrett, 'The Methodology of British Amphibious Operations during the Seven Years and American Wars', *Mariner's Mirror* 58 (1972), 269–80; Daniel A. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754–1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (Harlow, 2011).
40. Quoted in Baugh, 'Maritime Strength', p. 205.
41. On British naval investment during the 1780s, see Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, pp. 21–60.
42. Wilson, 'Empire, Trade and Popular Politics'.
43. See James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), pp. 100–6.
44. On worries about a standing navy, see Kinkel, 'Saving Admiral Byng'. On the navy and the slave trade, see the chapter by Christer Petley in this volume.
45. Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), pp. 153–5, 180–94.
46. Theodore Foulks, *Eighteen Months in Jamaica, with Recollections of the Late Rebellion* (London, 1833), p. 78; British Parliamentary Papers, 1831–32 (721), Report from Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, pp. 291–2.
47. See Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA, 2006), pp. 199–201. The two principal leaders of the rebellion were tried after the sailing of the *Asia* from Sierra Leone and sentenced to death.
48. Kinkel, 'The King's Pirates', p. 28.
49. Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833* (New York, 1963), pp. 182–4.
50. See A. B. Sainsbury, 'Duckworth, Sir John Thomas, First Baronet (1748–1817)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

51. National Museum of the Royal Navy (hereafter NMRN), MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report on the Coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820', ff. 1–2. On the involvement of naval officers in colonial government, see Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals*, *passim*.
52. Hugh Popham, 'Popham, Sir Home Riggs (1762–1820)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); Christopher Terrell, 'Columbine, Edward Henry (1763–1811)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
53. See Lambert and Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives*.
54. See Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (London, 2006), pp. 39–70. For further examples, see Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent in British Ships* (Liverpool, 2012), pp. 32–69.
55. On impressment, see Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750–1850* (New York, 2009), pp. 2–7, 19–20. The issue of impressment in the eighteenth-century Royal Navy has generated a number of important recent studies. See, for example, Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, VA, 2013); J. Ross Dancy, *The Myth of the Press Gang: Volunteers, Impressment and the Naval Manpower Problem in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2015); Keith Mercer, 'Northern Exposure: Resistance to Naval Impressment in British North America, 1775–1815', *The Canadian Historical Review* 91 (2010), 199–232.
56. On the San Juan River expedition and tropical disease in Caribbean warfare, see J. R. McNeil, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 189–91 and *passim*. On the campaigns of the 1790s, see Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*.
57. See Quintin Colville and James Davey, eds., *Nelson, Navy & Nation: The Royal Navy and the British People, 1688–1815* (London, 2013); Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2006). For a study of the relationship between the common sailor and national identity, see Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor*.
58. Conway, 'Joy Unknown for Years Past', 199.
59. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), p. 4.
60. Lynda Pratt, 'Naval Contemplation', *Journal for Maritime Research* 2 (2000), 85; Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760–1820', *Past and Present* 102 (1984), 113.
61. R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760–1801* (Oxford, 1979), p. 496.
62. See the chapter by Siân Williams in this volume.

63. Quoted in Patricia Mohammed, 'Taking Possession: Symbols of Empire and Nationhood', *Small Axe* 11 (2002), 46.
64. This was Lady Anne Barnard, whose responses to Nelson's victories are discussed in the chapter by John McAleer in this volume.
65. Quoted in Black, 'Introduction', p. 25.
66. Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793*, 2 vols. (London, 1952–64), vol. 1, p. 62; Michael Duffy, 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*. For recent scholarship that is suggestive of the need to regard British imperial activities in the Atlantic and in Asia in a single analytical frame, see P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c.1750–1783* (Oxford, 2007), and P. J. Marshall, *Remaking the British Atlantic: The United States and the British Empire after Independence* (Oxford, 2012).
67. Burnard, 'British Atlantic', p. 120. On the global turn in Atlantic history, see Lauren Benton, 'The British Atlantic in Global Context', in Armitage and Braddick, eds., *British Atlantic World*, pp. 271–89.
68. The work of Joshua Newton offers an important corrective to the historiographical neglect of the navy's involvement in West Africa during the eighteenth century. See Newton, 'Slavery, Sea Power and the State'. See also Joshua D. Newton, 'Naval Power and the Province of Senegambia, 1758–1779', *Journal for Maritime Research* 15 (2013), 129–47.
69. For further details on this aspect of naval activity in the nineteenth century, see Robert Burroughs and Richard Huzzey, eds., *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade: British Policies, Practices and Representations of Naval Coercion* (Manchester, 2015). For a parallel in the Indian Ocean, see Lindsay Doulton, '"The Flag That Sets Us Free": Antislavery, Africans and the Royal Navy in the Western Indian Ocean', in David Harms, David Blight, and Bernard Freamon, eds., *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven, CT, 2013), pp. 101–19. On Britain's nineteenth-century maritime world more generally, see Miles Taylor, ed., *The Victorian Empire and Britain's Maritime World, 1837–1901: The Sea and Global History* (Basingstoke, 2013) and Barry Gough, *Pax Britannica: Ruling the Waves and Keeping the Peace before Armageddon* (Basingstoke, 2014).
70. On connections and comparisons between British and Spanish-American imperial projects, see Eliga H. Gould, 'Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery', *American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 764–86; Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore, MD, 1983); John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT, 2006); Joselyn M. Almeida, *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780–1890* (Farnham, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society during the Eighteenth Century

Siân Williams

At the central square in Spanish Town, Jamaica, stands a landmark to a British naval hero. Housed under a temple-like structure, an eight-foot marble statue by the renowned eighteenth-century British sculptor John Bacon depicts Admiral George Bridges Rodney, presented in Roman attire, evoking the warrior god Mars. On the sides of the pedestal beneath his feet are marble bas-reliefs, including two of a triumphant Britannia, along with an inscription to Rodney: 'Jamaicæ salutem Britann. pacem rest'. These words celebrate Rodney's actions in commanding the main British fleet against a large French force at the Battle of the Saintes on 12 April 1782, which resulted in a signal British victory that secured Jamaica from a Franco-Spanish attack during the final years of the American Revolutionary War. The inscription presents Rodney as a hero who restored well-being to Jamaica and peace to Britain. It is a potent reminder of the connections between the British empire, the Royal Navy and the wider British nation, and it remains symbolic of the prominent place of the Caribbean slave colonies in the British-Atlantic naval system of the eighteenth century (Fig. 2.1).

The local legislature of Jamaica, the largest of Britain's Caribbean sugar-producing colonies, commissioned the memorial at great expense. One thousand pounds was voted for the commission in February 1783, but by the time the statue was completed in 1789 and arrived on the island in 1790, costs had more than doubled.[1] Although these were considerable sums, they were affordable for a legislature made up primarily of

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_2

Fig. 2.1 Statue of Admiral Rodney, by John Bacon, in Spanish Town, Jamaica (photograph by Christer Petley)

slaveholding sugar planters, the leading residents of what was, at the time, the wealthiest and most prized colony in the British empire. By marking Rodney's victory, these men were celebrating their salvation from foreign invasion, expressing gratitude to Rodney and the Royal Navy, and emphasising their patriotic loyalty to the mother country across the Atlantic. Upon its unveiling in 1792, nearly a decade after the original commission, the temple and statue became the centrepiece of the administrative capital of Jamaica, occupying the north side of the square in Spanish Town, the east and west sides being home to the imposing Georgian façades of the governor's residence and of the assembly building. Rodney, standing in marble effigy between the two, embodied the manifold connections between the island's inhabitants and the Royal Navy. But the magnificent statue inside its ornate shrine also served as an awkward reminder to the wealthy and proud sugar planters. Whilst they celebrated Rodney, they also knew that they depended on men like him for their daily survival (Fig. 2.2).

This chapter explores this relationship between the navy and West Indian colonial society, focusing largely on Jamaica, whilst also exploring connections between the navy and the wider British-colonised Caribbean of the eighteenth century. Exploring the journals and correspondence of naval personnel who served in the Caribbean has uncovered a rich resource of reflections on and responses to colonial society, offering an important new perspective on the colonial viewpoint and travel literature

Fig. 2.2 Thomas Sutherland after James Hakewill, 'The King's Square, St Jago de la Vega [Spanish Town]', hand-coloured aquatint, in James Hakewill, *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1825), plate 3 (Courtesy of the Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven, T683 (Folio A))

from the period. Strong collections pertaining to naval officers, including Hugh Seymour, Francis Reynolds and William Parker, are highlighted in this chapter, alongside re-evaluated published memoirs of naval seamen, including Frederick Hoffman, Thomas Byam Martin and John Harvey Boteler.

Unlike previous accounts of the navy in the region, which have tended to focus mainly on its military operations, including engagements like the Battle of the Saintes, this work takes a social and cultural approach, aiming to understand the navy in the context of its interactions with local society, particularly with the most powerful and influential white slaveholding colonists. It builds on the work of those naval historians who have begun to demonstrate how our understanding of the navy is improved when we see it as a 'socio-cultural force'—as an institution whose activities, priorities and internal conflicts were shaped by the world in which it operated.[2] This approach allows us to study the neglected 'naval dimension' of colonial societies, examining, for example, how naval personnel interacted with local colonists, often providing them with a vital connection to the imperial metropole.[3] Such an approach is congruent with the efforts of several historians, including Kathleen Wilson and Catherine Hall, whose work over the past two decades has sought to integrate British history and imperial history.[4] The Royal Navy was a quintessentially British institution. It was also a pan-imperial arm of the British state, heavily integrated in the daily life of far-flung transatlantic colonies, playing an integrative role within the wider social and political fabric of the British Atlantic empire.

The Naval Caribbean

The Caribbean colonies received extensive protection from the Royal Navy because of their economic and strategic importance to the British Isles. By the middle of the eighteenth century, sugar had transformed the Caribbean region and was Britain's largest and most valuable single import. Millions of enslaved Africans were imported to sugar colonies in the West Indies, forced to work as captive labour on plantations and other properties controlled by a small, powerful and wealthy white minority.[5] The increase in national wealth provided by the import and export market of the Caribbean colonies was important not only to Britain, but also to a central component of other European economies, including that of Britain's main European rival, France. The potential to gain economic power and to damage that of rival nations shaped European attitudes

towards the Caribbean throughout the eighteenth century, particularly during wartime.[6] The wealth and strategic value of lucrative island colonies, vulnerable to attack, meant that the Caribbean became a significant theatre in most eighteenth-century wars. This was one component of the volatility that characterised this prized but unstable zone of European colonisation. The institution of slavery was another. Slavery depended on the violent intimidation of its victims, and violent opposition to the system on the part of enslaved people was an ever-present possibility, which meant that the small white minority waged a sort of continual internal war with their slaves. British colonists who invested in land and slaveholding in the West Indian colonies were therefore reliant on the mother country to provide the protection necessary not only to secure British sovereignty of their islands, but also to protect them against the inevitable consequences of the labour system that made them some of the richest subjects of the empire.[7]

From the perspective of London, the Caribbean colonies and their slave-run plantation system were worth protecting. They therefore became a primary point of strategic focus for successive ministries, and the Royal Navy played a crucial part in the protection, and at times in the expansion, of this centrepiece of the British empire in the American tropics. Although the majority of the Royal Navy's resources were placed in defence of Britain, the Caribbean was an important secondary consideration in naval deployment. Using the abstracts of captains' logs received by the Admiralty between 1757 and 1762, Rodger estimated that 54% of the navy's 'ship-days' were spent in home waters. However, second in overall percentage was the Caribbean, accounting for 17% of 'ship-days', with only 10% in the Mediterranean, 14% in North America and 4% in the East Indies.[8] In 1759, during the Seven Years War, the navy list-books record an average of 37 ships and over 10,000 men involved in sea service at the naval stations of Jamaica and the Leeward Islands, more than 12% of the Royal Navy's total force. In 1763, over 10,000 men and 39 ships were still recorded as deployed in the West Indies.[9] Therefore, when there was a high risk of attack on British Caribbean islands during the Seven Years War, particularly when the Spanish entered the conflict in 1762, the Royal Navy was strong enough to prevent any foreign invasion of the British colonies. The visible presence in Caribbean waters of these ships, and the social presence of their crews during their occasional shore visits, demonstrated to local colonists Britain's significant investment in their protection. Even in peacetime, the navy had a significant and visible presence in the Caribbean. In 1769, for instance, there were over 2100

seamen stationed in the Caribbean at any one time. Even in 1775, the year with the lowest average number of seamen in the region, there were still over 1500 seamen stationed in the Caribbean at any one time. This represented a considerable drop from the wartime complement 12 years earlier, but given that the number of white inhabitants in the region was only about 50,000 (outnumbered by an enslaved population of over 420,000), the navy clearly remained an important presence.[10]

Since Royal Navy squadrons were permanently established in the Caribbean in the 1740s, the navy continued to invest vast resources in the region, enabling it to expand its protection of trade routes and merchant vessels, and providing an ever-present shield of security to white slaveholding colonists. The masts of Royal Navy vessels loomed prominently in the many harbours of colonial Caribbean towns, particularly in important strategic locations like Bridgetown in Barbados or at the two main British naval bases in the Caribbean, Port Royal, at the entrance to Kingston harbour in Jamaica, and English Harbour in Antigua, the main seat of British seapower in the eastern Caribbean. At locations such as these, many naval seamen came ashore to mix with local inhabitants. Even though many naval personnel remained confined on board ship for much of their tropical sojourns, seamen and officers were common sights in colonial port towns and occasional guests on rural properties.

The Navy and White Colonial Society

Unsurprisingly, white colonists were keen to curry favour with officers of the Royal Navy. Famous for their generosity, at least towards other, selected whites, most slaveholding colonists in the British Caribbean took pride in colonial hospitality, which was also part of the extensive armoury of techniques they used to subjugate enslaved people. Trevor Burnard, one of the leading historians of white colonial society in the eighteenth-century Caribbean, has described whites in Jamaica as the 'strongest and certainly the most unified' group on the island, able to forge social bonds with one another, in part, because they so often ate and drank together.[11] Moreover, acts of collective drinking, dining and entertainment contributed to what Kathleen Wilson describes as the staged 'performance of social power' on the islands, public acts that demonstrated the unity, privilege and sense of purpose of the white minority.[12] Eating, drinking and dancing were therefore parts of a power struggle that helped whites maintain their domination over an enslaved majority that outnumbered

them by a ratio of more than ten-to-one on most islands and by up to a hundred-to-one on some rural plantations.[13] Part of this 'performance' included large social events, such as dinners and balls, held by and for the white inhabitants in the Caribbean islands.[14]

The 'all-embracing cult of hospitality' included not only planters and other white colonials, but was also a way of embracing new arrivals, including naval officers, into the white community, binding them into the common endeavour of maintaining white security and privilege.[15] Offers of hospitality and invitations to social events were made without hesitation to naval officers and, on occasion, to their families. When one long-serving admiral was asked before a House of Commons select committee whether 'persons of military or naval rank' were 'generally received with great hospitality in the Colonies', his answer was short: 'Always'.[16] The journal of Vice-Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour notes that when he arrived at the island of Saint Vincent, he was immediately deluged with invitations to public dinners, taverns, plantations and balls from the leading white inhabitants of the small island. His journal records his attendance at large social dinners and balls with prominent members of the white community, including colonial governors, assembly presidents, merchants and assembly members, as he made his way amongst the Leeward Islands before taking up his post as the commander-in-chief at Jamaica.[17]

Invitations were also extended to officers' families. Letters from Jane Cochrane, the daughter of Vice-Admiral Alexander Inglis Cochrane, describe her family's arrival in the Caribbean in 1810, during her father's governorship of Guadeloupe. Jane's letters detail the immediate welcome and hospitality her family received from the white inhabitants. Upon her arrival in Carlisle Bay, Barbados, she was greeted by a naval reception, a governor's aide-de-camp and an 'invitation from the principal inhabitants to reside with them' during her stay on the island.[18] Such invitations were an extension of a culture of hospitality that worked to integrate the navy into colonial society, building a strong social network between elite whites and naval officers, which could offer an outward expression of white solidarity and imperial power.

The navy's presence in the Caribbean offered colonists the opportunity to show outwardly their loyalty to Britain via hospitality. Not only did colonists need the protection of the Royal Navy, but also, because foreign sugar was cheaper than theirs, they depended heavily on their monopoly in the home market. Showing loyalty to Britain was therefore important, but offering hospitality to the navy was also an opportunity

for colonists to show that their cultural identity remained aligned with notions of Britishness. The 'climatic force' of the tropical environment, which was being discussed at the end of eighteenth century by scientists, philosophers and Pacific explorers, was thought to have a constitutive impact on man's 'physical, moral and social condition' and there were therefore concerns about degenerating effects on the national character of British settlers in the Caribbean.[19] The navy represented a strong cultural link to Britain, and colonists could help to dispel myths of cultural degeneration by outwardly displaying their Britishness. The colonists chose to uphold British social customs like balls and dinners, as well as features of British social etiquette, including offering patronage in response to letters of introduction, all of which demonstrated to naval officers that they remained culturally British.

The white colonial desire to demonstrate their Britishness to naval officers—who were respected in Britain and the representatives of a British institution steeped in notions of patriotism and loyalty—was shown through the commodities that planters had at their disposal: food, drink and slaves. Events were organised in honour of naval officers, such as during the 1786 visit of Prince William Henry (the future William IV), serving in the Caribbean as a young naval officer. The lieutenant-governor of Jamaica, Alured Clarke, organised a 'splendid dinner and ball' at Spanish Town during his visit, which several naval officers and midshipmen also attended.[20] Hospitality was also offered to naval officers on plantations. A letter of introduction offered the opportunity for Jeffrey Raigersfeld, serving at the time as a midshipman in Antigua, to stay at the residence of Rowland Burton, the speaker of the House of Assembly and therefore a prominent member of the white elite.[21] Raigersfeld remained on Burton's plantation, which was 'a little out of town, until the ship's tender came round to St John's'.[22] Naval surgeon James Ker also stayed on numerous occasions on a plantation at St. Christopher managed by his acquaintance, Jack Dalgleish. After offers of cool punch and land crabs for supper and the promise of a cold bath, a dish of coffee and cream, and an excursion to the shore in the morning, Dalgleish offered Ker one of his slaves, Maria, to be his companion for the night, 'a la mode des Iles de Vent' ('in the fashion of the Windward Islands').[23] This phrase implies that planters' prostituting their slaves was common and, to some extent, expected as part of the hospitality provided to new arrivals. This practice was also experienced by army physician Jonathon Troup, who, although critical of those who took creole mistresses, did not forbid himself from

taking advantage of the enslaved women he was offered by his hosts.[24] Planters therefore expressed their hospitality by sharing their provisions and property, and this extended to their property in the form of slaves, directly implicating their guests in the exploitative regime that underpinned their wealth.

Reciprocated Hospitality

To repay the hospitality the navy received on shore from white inhabitants, naval commanders-in-chief organised social events. In Jamaica, these often took place at the admiral's residence ashore, Admiral's Pen: a large and comfortable rural retreat in the countryside near Kingston and with easy access, across the harbour, to the naval base and dockyard at Port Royal.[25] As depicted in William Berryman's sketch at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the admiral's residence was a large plot surrounded by lush vegetation, which provided an escape from the hustle and bustle of the harbour. When Sir William Parker visited the residence as a young lieutenant in 1799, he described it as a 'nice Penn', where the commander-in-chief, Vice-Admiral Hyde Parker, 'gave one of the most superb balls ever known in Jamaica on the Queens *Birthnight* to the English & French Ladies at Jamaica'.[26] Governor Nugent and his wife, Maria, frequently visited Admiral's Pen during the naval command of Vice-Admiral John Thomas Duckworth and Admiral Richard Dacres. In her journal, Maria recorded numerous parties, dinners, breakfasts and balls attended by officers of the navy and army, sometimes including Spanish and French naval officers, prominent officials such as Charles Cameron, Governor of the Bahamas and members of the white elite.[27] Admiral's Pen was one of the social spaces, alongside buildings such as the governor's main residence in Spanish Town, where those from the upper echelons of local white society could meet to mark British national celebrations and display their social status. On the island of Barbados, naval commander Frederick Hoffman was invited to attend a dinner held by the admiral, Sir Alexander Cochrane, where he also dined with the governor and those he described as 'some more bigwigs'.[28] This term not only suggests the prominent status of the inhabitants of colonial society invited to the admiral's table, but also has an undertone of sarcasm concerning the colonists' own self-importance and arrogance. In reality, their influence in colonial society was constantly undermined by their increasing dependence on Britain and her navy (Fig. 2.3).

Fig. 2.3 'Lindos, ent[ra]nc[e] to Admirals pen from Greenwich, Jamaica' by William Berryman, *c.* 1808_15 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-136763)

Naval officers also reciprocated the hospitality they received at the homes of local planters by inviting select white inhabitants of the colonies to dine aboard naval ships. Whilst visiting the island of Saint Vincent, Vice-Admiral Seymour hosted a breakfast on board HMS *Sans Pareil* for 12 ladies and the president and members of the council. The breakfast was in response to the abundant offers of hospitality Seymour had received from white residents.[29] Vice-Admiral Duckworth invited prominent members of the white elite of Jamaica, including the governor, his wife and members of the assembly and family, to 'a grand breakfast' with all the captains of the navy aboard HMS *Hercule* whilst harboured at Port Royal.[30] At Antigua, the welcome John Harvey Boteler and his fellow officers received from the inhabitants meant they 'owed a return' of hospitality. Therefore a breakfast with 'a long table laid out on the poop-deck' and a dance were hosted on board.[31] Similarly, to repay the hospitality of the inhabitants of the town of Donna Maria, during the British occupation of Saint Domingue, a dance

was hosted on board, attended by members of the white elite, including the governor and his family.[32] These events, organised by naval officers, provided an intimate and familiar venue to meet and socialise with prominent islanders, which was often more difficult at larger social events.

Social events held by the white inhabitants and the reciprocated hospitality of the navy allowed naval officers to integrate into colonial society and form lasting bonds with white inhabitants. Naval officers formed friendships with the most influential members of the white elite, which often continued after their departure from the Caribbean. The relationship between Nelson and Simon Taylor, discussed elsewhere in this volume, appears to have been sustained via an exchange of letters over several years.[33] Nelson also maintained a more intimate friendship with another inhabitant, Hercules Ross, whom he met for the first time in Jamaica, carrying on a sustained correspondence with Ross for the whole of his life. Grenadian planter and owner of the Paraclete estate Ninian Home is an example of a planter on a peripheral island who was keen to remain friends with naval officers. After Captain Francis Reynolds left Grenada, Home wrote to update him on island news and wrote fondly of Reynolds's anticipated return to the island: 'believe me your friends at Paraclete will count the tedious Hours, and when the time arrives will rejoice most sincerely to receive you'. Home also remarked in his letter that Reynolds's naval friends, including Captain Garnier, had stayed at Paraclete for several weeks, suggesting that Home frequently hosted naval officers—events that evidently lifted the banality of plantation life.[34]

Naval officers were also keen to stay connected to the planters who had offered them hospitality during their posting. For instance, upon Captain Francis Reynolds's return posting to the region in the 1780s, he received requests from fellow officers to pass their compliments to 'our friend Mitchell' at Jamaica, most likely the prominent planter William Mitchell.[35] In his letter to Reynolds, Rear Admiral Samuel Hood asked him, 'remember me to Mr Mitchell, Lewis, the Ladies, and all enquiring friends', and a few months later he wrote to Reynolds again to pass his thanks to Mr Mitchell for the porter he had received.[36] Sir Thomas Byam Martin, at the time a captain's young servant, also met William Mitchell whilst at Jamaica, and explains in his journal that Mitchell earned the title 'King Mitchell' because of the 'profuseness of hospitality' he showed to his guests.[37] The culture of hospitality therefore allowed for close relationships to form between officers in the navy and leading white slaveholders in the Caribbean colonies. It was a mutually beneficial exchange. Colonists

could demonstrate their patriotic loyalty by hosting their guests from the Royal Navy, treating them to lavish entertainments. They also knew that the security of their islands and of their slave-run properties was largely in the hands of the navy—another good reason to forge friendly relations with naval commanders. But those commanders also benefited from their cordial liaisons with planters, who offered them a home away from home in the tropics and precious opportunities to leave their commands on board ship and to experience the lavish comforts of white life in the peri-urban or rural homes of some of the richest subjects in the British empire.

White slaveholders and naval commanders generally enjoyed good relations, and when, in the course of their patriotic duty, naval officers also acted in the colonists' interests, as Rodney did at the Battle of the Saintes, they were richly rewarded.[38] Even before Rodney's victory at the Battle of the Saintes, he was awarded one thousand guineas, for a service of plate, by the Assembly of Jamaica for appointing a reinforcement squadron to protect Jamaica whilst serving as the commander-in-chief at the Leeward Islands.[39] Similarly, Rear Admiral Philip Affleck, who was the commander-in-chief at Jamaica from 1790 to 1792, was awarded 300 guineas for the purchase of a piece of plate by the Assembly for his service to Jamaica. The inhabitants held Affleck in 'high respect and regard', as he was seen to have offered his 'great services … to the country on every occasion'.[40] Vice-Admiral Duckworth was also highly praised for his role as the commander-in-chief at Jamaica and received various gifts of thanks for this eminent service. The Assembly 'voted him thanks for his effectual preservation of the commerce and coasts of the island, and a thousand guineas for a ceremonial sword'. The merchant community of Kingston also presented Duckworth with a gift of 500 pounds sterling for the purchase of a piece of plate for prioritising the protection of Caribbean trade. A silver tea kettle was purchased, and Duckworth wrote to the mayor of Kingston to express his thanks to the merchants. He regarded the gift highly and wrote, 'it shall be handed down to my children's children'.[41] Another example of this outpouring of thanks was shown to Captain Francis Reynolds for his arrival in Tobago following a slave insurrection on the island in November 1770. Reynolds's ship arrived in the harbour just days after the insurrection and, although his presence had a minimal impact in preventing or suppressing the slave rebellion, he was rewarded with a letter of thanks from the principal inhabitants of Tobago for coming to the island's aid.[42] In this instance, the mere presence of a naval vessel in harbour provided the reassurance the white inhabitants desired, presum-

ably because it demonstrated to rebellious enslaved people that the power of the Royal Navy was on the side of the planters and could be brought to bear against them.

Differing Priorities

The navy's main priority in the Caribbean was to prevent other European powers from attacking or seizing the British islands during periods of war, and since there were more years of war than of peace between 1756 and 1815, the presence of the navy in the region was cherished by white British colonists. Maria Nugent was an inhabitant of Jamaica during a particularly tense period of the Napoleonic Wars, when a French attack was thought to be imminent. Although Nugent felt the inhabitants were as 'well prepared' as they could be for a French attack, she recognised the security of Jamaica depended on the navy's 'superiority at sea, and the vigilance of our squadrons'.[43] With heightened tension and news of an imminent attack on Trinidad expected, Nugent looked to the navy to alleviate her anxieties and wrote, 'Soon, I trust, our fleet will arrive, to put an end to … our alarms'.[44] The navy was the only force that could prevent a foreign invasion of the islands, fending off an attack at sea before it could make landfall, as Rodney managed to do in 1782. In the event of fighting on the islands, the navy remained important as a means of transporting ground troops, supplying armies and bombarding enemy forces from the sea. Colonists understood that island defence was the navy's priority, but their other everyday anxieties, about threats such as slave insurrections and privateering raids, often clashed with the concerns of naval officers.

In wartime, naval resources were deployed for the protection of the islands against invasion. Capturing foreign vessels was also part of providing island and trade-route protection, whilst taking the war to the enemy by attacking its maritime trade. Prize-hunting was also important to naval officers, mainly, because it could make them wealthy, and the distribution of prize money amongst a ship's crew did much to maintain morale. Maintaining harmony on board naval vessels so far from home and in a dangerous climate was a serious consideration for officers. When William McLeod wrote to his father from Bermuda in 1796, he was delighted to hear reports of war declared against the Spanish. He wrote in January, 'I am very happy, as it certainly will be a lucrative one for us seamen, more especially our Squadron as we lay exactly in the tract of them'. McLeod's promotion to second lieutenant due to the death of his predecessor increased

the share of prize money he received from captured foreign vessels and therefore his 'hopes of a Spanish war' were merited.[45] Prize money was also the only form of receiving money on overseas commissions, as wages were not paid until seamen returned home, making its morale-boosting function even more significant in distant waters.[46] Tensions could easily rise if prize money was not distributed promptly. In William Spavens's diary, he recalls going ashore at Antigua with the rest of the crew, without permission of the captain, to find the prize agent who owed them money. Instead of punishing the crew for disobedience, the captain assisted the men in claiming their prize money, avoiding a violent disturbance ashore and keeping harmony amongst the crew.[47]

The pursuit of enemy warships and merchant vessels as prizes created tensions between naval officers and colonists. There were complaints that some officers gave greater attention to the claiming and protection of prizes than to the colonists' needs. Complaints were often aimed at those of the most senior rank: the commanders-in-chief of the naval stations. For example, during the Seven Years War, Malcolm Laing, a manager for Jamaican properties belonging to the absentee plantation-owner William Perrin, complained of the naval commander-in-chief at Jamaica, Rear Admiral Charles Holmes, and blamed him for the lack of naval presence that led to losses at the hands of enemy privateers. In his letters to the Perrin family, Laing complained that their supply ships and 15 other vessels were captured in four weeks by French privateers. Meanwhile, according to Perrin, the only two naval vessels appointed to the protection of Jamaica were apparently 'employed looking for prizes at Hispaniola'. Laing exclaimed, 'We never had accident [*sic*] of this kind happen while Adm[ira]l Cotes had the Command'.[48]

During the American Revolutionary War, the British islands in the Caribbean were exposed to far greater danger from enemy attacks than they had faced during the earlier Seven Years War. The French seizure of Saint Kitts and the planned invasion of Jamaica were two dramatic examples. But planters also worried about coastal raids by enemy privateers. Simon Taylor, one of the wealthiest and most influential colonists in Jamaica, complained that the commander-in-chief, Peter Parker, failed to protect the Jamaican coastlines from enemy molestation. Taylor accused Parker of doing 'little', other than spend his time at the Admiral's Pen 'digging potatoes & planting cabbages'. He complained that the navy's protection of Jamaica was 'very poor', with only one ship posted for the protection of the island, leaving his plantations as easy prey to raids by

Spanish privateers.[49] Taylor took this view of Parker, despite the admiral's decision to keep the squadron at Jamaica rather than sending it to North America to support Cornwallis's army there, demonstrating that even admirals who dutifully protected the Caribbean colonies and made tactical decisions for the security of the islands were subject to criticism by disgruntled colonists.[50]

At the end of the eighteenth century, forty years after Laing's disappointment with Commander-in-Chief Holmes and during a new round of warfare with France, similar letters complained about the new commander-in-chief at Jamaica, Vice-Admiral Hyde Parker. In 1800, another manager of a sugar estate belonging to William Perrin wrote about the inhabitants' dissatisfaction with Parker, who had been commander-in-chief since 1796. Parker, like Holmes, appeared to be providing little day-to-day protection for colonial property and trade. The coasts of Jamaica were molested by enemy privateers, whilst Royal Navy vessels cruised on the Spanish coast instead, pursuing prizes. William Sutherland believed Parker 'paid no kind of regard to the just Complaints of the Inhabitants of Jamaica'.[51] Parker also became embroiled in a scandal over the fact that he kept a French mistress, who was apparently an émigrée from the neighbouring colony of Saint Domingue and the wife of a notorious French privateer. Details of the affair are scant, but it is apparent that it added fuel to colonial suspicions of Parker's command at a time when Britain and its empire were embroiled in a complicated war with Revolutionary France.[52] According to Sutherland, when he handed over his command to Vice-Admiral Seymour, it was 'to the great joy' of all white colonists, who hoped that his successor would be more responsive to their immediate needs.[53]

There was much expectation put on Seymour for greater protection of Jamaica's coastlines, following the unpopularity of Parker. However, Maria Nugent recorded in 1801 that the inhabitants, particularly the merchants, felt little had improved during Seymour's short command of the Jamaica station. She wrote, 'the trade of this island has been for a long time much injured, and several merchants almost ruined, by the constant depredations of small privateers and feluccas, which infest the coast; whilst the Navy are engaged in distant pursuits'. Furthermore, Seymour was publicly criticised in the colonial newspapers, 'on account of the cruisers not doing their duty in guarding the trade'.[54] Such complaints suggest ongoing tensions between colonists and the navy over the issue of local defence and the pursuit of prize money.

There were tensions between white colonists and naval officers over matters other than island defence. For example, following the American Revolutionary War, Nelson was heavily criticised by the inhabitants of the Leeward Islands for his strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts. The policy of the British government now defined the new United States as a foreign nation, which put a formal end to the trade that had once thrived between the Leewards and the thirteen colonies. Nevertheless, colonists in the islands argued that their American trade remained a lifeline for the local economy, providing the food and supplies necessary to maintain the plantation regime. The commander-in-chief at the Leeward Islands, Rear Admiral Sir Richard Hughes, relaxed restraint on trade with American vessels upon the request of the colonists. On his arrival, however, Nelson was outraged at the leniency of Hughes, and set about policing the illicit trade. He wrote to his brother, 'I fancy the King's Servants and the Officers of my little Squadron will not be sorry to part with me. They think I make them do their duty too strictly'.[55] In defence of the Navigation Laws, Nelson turned away and seized American trade vessels.[56] In 1785, he wrote, 'I am not very popular with the people. They have never visited me, and I have not had a foot in any house since I have been on the Station, and all for doing my duty by being *true to the interests of Great Britain*'.[57] Nelson was so unpopular in the Leewards that he found he was denied the sort of hospitality enjoyed by naval officers on Caribbean postings, and for a time was compelled to stay on board the *Boreas* due to lawsuits brought against him.[58] Shortly before his departure in 1787, he wrote that 'the West Indians will give a Balle Champetre upon my departure. They hate me; and they will every officer who does his duty.'[59] Even so, Nelson was not universally loathed. He found hospitality at the home of one colonial resident, the uncle of Frances Nisbet, whom he married in Nevis in March of 1787. Moreover, as we have seen, he maintained long friendships with at least two Jamaican planters. His unpopularity in the Leeward Islands during the 1780s demonstrates, nevertheless, that the different loyalties and priorities of the navy and planters could complicate relations between them.

Nelson's experiences show that tensions between British colonists and the Royal Navy stemmed not only from the differing economic and operational priorities of the two groups, but also from questions of patriotism and British identity. Nelson maintained that he was doing his duty to his country by enforcing the Navigation Acts—a duty that he might well have associated with the maintenance of British seapower, since metropolitan

restrictions on shipping were designed to ensure a large and strong navy by ensuring that colonial trade was carried on by British ships with British crews.[60] Colonists, on the other hand, perceived the enforcement of the Navigation Laws after 1783 as an act of betrayal inimical to the wider national interest. They argued that it would harm the sugar economies of the British islands by denying them the North American supplies they needed to run the plantations. This would have a wider effect on Britain itself by damaging all the economic advantages that the nation enjoyed from its trade with the islands, not least through exchequer returns from the (rapidly rising) duty on sugar.[61]

Impressment provided another point of contention between the navy and British Caribbean colonists. Press gangs were a necessary tool to keep naval vessels manned, but they caused much disturbance prior to the Seven Years War, with riots across the Caribbean in the 1740s caused by the impressment of seamen from local privateers. These riots forced the introduction of a parliamentary act, which meant naval officers could only impress at times of emergency and had first to seek permission from the colonial governor and council. Terms had to be negotiated, often including strict time scales and the number of sailors who could be impressed.[62] Therefore, impressment required co-operation between colonial authorities and naval officers in order to avoid repeat riots and to try to assuage planters' concerns that the homeward-bound merchant vessels that carried their crops to market might be left shorthanded. In June 1782, during a period of impressment allowed at Morant Bay and Cow Bay, Jamaica, Rear Admiral Samuel Hood notified his naval captains that 'Mr Taylor a Gentleman of great property in that part of the Island' would assist and take care of the press-gang party.[63]

Taylor's anxiety about coastal raids and the vulnerable situation of the island, even after Rodney's victory, explain his motives for co-operation. Despite there being reasons to resent impressment, it was undeniably a necessary component of the Royal Navy protection that white inhabitants so vehemently demanded. In order for colonial authorities to continue to support impressment, naval officers had to ensure their press gangs followed the warrant of impressment and did not cause violent disturbances ashore. As previously mentioned, Vice-Admiral Hyde Parker was particularly unpopular amongst inhabitants, yet he was keen to co-operate with colonial authorities with regard to impressment. Parker sought strictly to enforce the impressment warrant set out by the colonial council, to alleviate any tension that might arise from press gangs ashore. Upon

being allowed to impress in June 1799, Parker requested 'the several persons employed to impress men *on shore* be attended by a Constable or Constables, and that such men as they take up on shore to impress be carried before a Magistrate, in order that such Magistrate may see that none but Mariners or Seamen be impressed'.[64] With the possibility of extending impressment for a further three months, Parker ensured his press gangs were monitored by colonial authorities in order to prevent any disturbances ashore.[65] Co-operation with impressment was almost compulsory for colonists due to their reliance on naval protection, and, as for naval officers, they were forced to comply with colonial restrictions due to imperial policy. Impressment remained a delicate issue, nonetheless, demonstrating that whilst naval officers and colonial elites frequently co-operated towards common goals, their priorities were never identical and necessitated careful negotiation.

Conclusions

After his victory at the Battle of the Saintes, Rodney sailed into the naval base at Port Royal, Jamaica, to a hero's welcome.[66] Merchants in Kingston raised over £1500 from subscriptions to put on a 'grand entertainment' and dinner for 300 people. This was one of several similar events on the island, which included a ball at the governor's Spanish-Town mansion, as white society revelled in relief.[67] When news of the battle reached the British Isles over a month later, celebrations continued on the opposite side of the Atlantic, with bonfires, gunfire and public gatherings. The Battle of the Saintes coincided with other British military successes, notably in Asia, and, whilst these also excited patriotic celebrations, Britons gave clear priority of importance to their Caribbean victory. As Stephen Conway has demonstrated, festivities in the British Isles provided an outlet for pent-up patriotic sentiment following five years of British military setbacks. They also underlined the importance of the Caribbean colonies to Britons, as well as the bond between various British communities around the Atlantic littoral.[68] There can be few better examples of the centrality of the navy to the connections that bound white colonial settlers to metropolitan Britons. But, as this chapter has demonstrated, such revelry also had the effect of painting over significant fissures in the British imperial façade.

In his journal, Frederick Hoffman recalled the elation he felt upon hearing news of the order to return to England after nearly eight years in the Caribbean, a post during which he had contracted the common and

often deadly yellow fever on more than one occasion. Hoffman wrote that he was finally to return home to 'the land of freedom and genuine hospitality'.[69] Although Hoffman's posting had been made much more comfortable by the hospitality he received from the inhabitants, it is possible he perceived their hospitality as different to the 'genuine' hospitality he believed he would receive in England. It was certainly the case that the sort of hospitality that white slaveholding planters in the Caribbean offered to naval officers was charged with expectations. Colonists hoped that by entertaining Royal Navy officers as their guests, they could draw them into island society, making them part of the structure of white male solidarity that helped to preserve white privilege and guard against slave uprisings. They also sought to enact their own Britishness, in an environment where such cultural identities appeared to be at risk, by dining with men recently arrived from the metropole as officers in the branch of the British military establishment most readily associated with the aggressive blue-water patriotism of the eighteenth century. Naval officers also gained a great deal from these relationships: a warm welcome, the company of a transplanted British community and—if they performed feats of heroics in the defence of the plantations or islands—considerable rewards of cash or silver. Nevertheless, and as this chapter has shown, the relationship between planters and officers was complex, with tensions easily inflamed due to conflicting colonial and imperial interests.

Therefore, whilst metropolitan Britons and colonial slaveholders could share in celebrating the acts of men like Rodney, the role of the navy in the Caribbean also reveals some of the tensions of empire that separated white colonists from metropolitan Britons. These included disagreements about where naval ships should be stationed in times of conflict, as well as disputes over the navy's role in the enforcement of the Navigation Acts and the operation of impressment in colonial port towns. Even before the rise of the abolition movement and the subsequent role of the Royal Navy in the suppression of the slave trade (discussed in the chapter by Mary Wills in this volume), the navy was therefore an important feature of contested visions of empire that differentiated colonial and metropolitan factions. Naval officers had to navigate around these tensions in their multiple roles. Whilst on duty in Caribbean waters, they were representatives of the arm of the British state that protected and facilitated British settlements and trade in the region. But their many formal and informal contacts with local inhabitants on land ensured that they were also an important part of the social and cultural fabric of the British-colonised Caribbean.

Acknowledgements
This chapter is based on research carried out between 2010 and 2014 as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, based at the University of Southampton and the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (Ref: AH/I506586/1). The author thanks Christer Petley for his valuable suggestions, advice and time given to help edit this chapter.

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CHAPTER 3

Ireland and the Royal Navy in the Eighteenth Century

Patrick Walsh

Ireland occupied an anomalous position in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world. It was both the first of England's Atlantic colonies and an integral part of the metropolitan core of the expanding empire.[1] Historians of political thought, parliamentary politics and Ireland's transatlantic commerce have long sought to elucidate this complex situation within the context of addressing the intractable question of whether eighteenth-century Ireland was a kingdom or a colony.[2] In many ways, it was both kingdom and colony: its long-standing parliamentary traditions and geographical proximity to Britain made it different to the American colonies, a point emphasised by Irish political and economic writers from the late seventeenth century onwards.[3] Of course, such vociferous articulation of Ireland's particular, even unique, identity betrayed a certain level of anxiety amongst the ruling Protestant elite.[4] This was only accentuated by the circumscription of the Irish parliament's legislative power, first through the operation of Poyning's Law, and then the 1720 Declaratory Act. Furthermore, Ireland's foreign trade was limited by the Navigation Acts, which imposed greater restrictions on Irish commerce with England/Britain's North American colonies than those imposed on any other part of Britain, especially after the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Union.[5] While modern historians have challenged more traditional assumptions about the impact of this unfavourable legislative framework, it did still serve to emphasise Ireland's dependent role within the British Atlantic system.

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_3

The inevitable tensions that arose from these dual identities—kingdom and colony—are immediately evident when we consider Irish interactions with the Royal Navy in this period. The multi-faceted role of the navy within Irish waters is the subject of this chapter, which seeks to investigate, for the first time, what role naval affairs played in Ireland's complex relationship with the eighteenth-century British imperial state. Furthermore, this analysis investigates the Irish experience within the context of her natural geo-strategic situation on the western approaches to the British Isles, and demonstrates how Ireland's relationship with the eighteenth-century navy can be best appreciated within an Atlantic-World perspective. This chapter examines the diverse activities of the ships stationed in Irish coastal waters in both peacetime and wartime. These activities ranged from recruitment and impressment, to anti-smuggling, and the defence of British and Irish trading interests through the enforcement of the Navigation Acts and harassment of enemy fleets. These were, of course, not specifically Irish issues, but were instead transoceanic ones common to British, and indeed non-British, territories on both sides of the Atlantic, which have been given particular emphasis in recent work on both smuggling and the maritime labour market, but which could also be applied to the themes of impressment and trade protection.[6]

This chapter, with its focus on Ireland, integrates an analysis of the navy's protection and policing role with what historians have begun to understand as Ireland's distinctive contribution to the imperial British fiscal-military state. This contribution was largely financial, and relied on the development of an efficient and professional revenue bureaucracy able to raise sufficient funds to maintain a significant portion of the British standing army on the separate Irish military establishment, at the expense of Irish taxpayers.[7] Importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the greatest proportion of these revenues was levied—in the form of customs duties—on seaborne foreign trade, marking out Ireland as different to Britain, where excise dominated. This necessitated greater co-operation between the increasingly efficient and effective institutions of the Irish state, notably the Dublin Castle administration and the Irish Revenue Board, and the centralised naval command and bureaucracy in Whitehall.[8] Examining these relationships allows us to consider further both the multi-layered nature of governance that existed between these elements of the Hanoverian composite state, and to see the Irish case as an instructive example of how the Royal Navy negotiated with local state and civic interests throughout the British Atlantic world, themes raised elsewhere in this volume in Chapters 2 and 4 by Siân Williams and Stephen Conway.[9]

Crucially, the adoption of a non-insular approach allows us to understand better the often tedious and routine activities of the naval vessels stationed along Ireland's coasts. Doing so also challenges the assumption in the existing historiography that Ireland's supposed lack of a maritime tradition means, in the words of John DeCourcy Ireland, that 'its naval history is therefore limited'. Other scholars have largely concurred with this assessment, with neither the Cambridge *Military History of Ireland* nor Nicholas Rodger's seminal works on the Georgian navy making more than a passing reference to Irish naval affairs.[10] Impressive recent work by Paul Kerrigan, Jon Meredith and particularly Elaine Murphy has begun to challenge this perspective with respect to the seventeenth century, while both Timothy Watt and Kayoko Yukimura have shone new light on the impact of the navy on early eighteenth-century Ireland.[11] However, for most naval historians of the period after 1660, when Ireland has entered their consciousness at all, it is either in relation to the maritime dimensions of the war of 1689–1691, Thurot's raid on Carrickfergus in 1760 or the French landings in 1796 and 1798.[12] Over-concentration on these 'spectaculars', however, provides a misleading and episodic picture that does little to explain the regular and everyday engagement of the Royal Navy with the eighteenth-century Irish state and its subjects.

Ireland and the Navy in the Early Eighteenth Century

The Royal Navy's primary function in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world was to defend the coastal waters of Britain and her overseas possessions from foreign invasion. Its second strategic imperative was linked to the first, and focused on the protection of English/British trading interests through the enforcement of the Navigation Acts. During the course of the seventeenth century, the navy had become a steadily more significant sinew of the power of the English state. Indeed, it is arguable that the navy became the key instrument of English/British foreign and military policy during the Restoration period, something that was further accentuated by the greater continental and colonial military commitments that followed the 1688 Revolution. But where did Ireland fit into this increasingly naval-dominated strategy?

Ireland's geographical location and the proximity of the main Atlantic shipping routes to its southern and western coasts meant that its coastal defences became even more geopolitically important as Anglo-American

and Irish-American trade increased both in volume and significance during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[13] The growing East India fleet also used these shipping lanes off the western and southern coasts on their homeward voyages, adding to their geopolitical and fiscal importance. Ireland's increasing importance could be seen during the War of Two Kings, when the conflict between James II and William III was not just confined to the valley of the River Boyne, but spread to Irish coastal waters, where Sir George Rooke's naval victories over French/Jacobite forces in Bantry Bay made a significant contribution to onshore Williamite military successes.[14] Rooke's victories were, however, to remain largely untypical of the eighteenth-century Irish experience of the navy during wartime. Instead, vessels stationed off the Irish coast were more likely to be engaged in chasing privateers, convoying merchant ships, transporting troops or recruiting sailors for the fleet, than actively engaging enemy shipping.

This was at least the pattern of activity that developed during the Nine Years War with France in the 1690s. Following the final Jacobite defeat at Limerick in 1691, and the subsequent departure of Franco-Irish forces to the continent, the active naval presence in Irish waters was reduced, with an average of four ships, mostly frigates or sloops, operating there between 1693 and the conclusion of the European war in 1697.[15] Their primary focus was on protecting trade, both in the long-distance sea lanes off the south coast and in the Irish Sea. Traditionally, historians have focused on the navy's role in protecting English trading interests and the influence of leading London merchant interests on the deployment of warships in Irish waters, but recent research has stressed the impact of privateering on domestic Irish trading interests, notably in the Irish Sea, as well as the lobbying skills of the local Anglo-Irish gentry in securing a more visible naval presence.[16] These different priorities led to conflicts of jurisdiction between the Admiralty in London and the Irish administration in Dublin, both of which claimed authority over the warships operating off the Irish coast.[17]

Such concerns about the diverging priorities of Irish government officials and the central naval authorities led Irish revenue commissioners to take a pro-active approach at the outset of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701. Writing to the Admiralty, they expressed hope that sufficient men-of-war would be employed to prevent raids by French privateers off Ireland's south coast. Particular concern was raised that these vessels would be under the command of the Irish chief governors, whether the lord lieutenant or the lords justices, 'for it was found by experience in the

late war that our trade suffered extremely by their being taken frequently off their stations by orders from England'.[18] This last element draws attention to an important point regarding the ships cruising the Irish coast: although sometimes referred to as the 'Irish station', they were part of the home fleet and received their orders from Plymouth rather than from Dublin.[19] This situation, which continued into the 1790s, when 'stations' were established first at Cork and then Dublin, meant that, unlike the army in Ireland, the navy had no formal local command structure.[20] The Irish parliament's fiscal responsibility for maintaining the army also gave the Dublin administration some leverage in terms of its deployment within the kingdom.[21] The navy, on the other hand, unlike that in pre-Union Scotland, was entirely funded from London, reducing further the potential influence of the Dublin administration over its movements or strategic priorities. Nevertheless, successive Irish chief governors retained some influence over the deployment of the warships cruising the Irish coast during the War of Spanish Succession, including the nomination of individual captains to specific commands, indicating that there was still some ambiguity during this period regarding who could direct the movements of naval vessels in Irish waters. Indeed, such was the level of control exercised by the Dublin administration that one historian has recently wondered (perhaps with some overstatement) whether we might speak of an 'Irish Navy' in this period, while also acknowledging its subservience to English/British strategic interests.[22]

This ambiguous situation came to an end in 1715, with the lord lieutenant of Ireland thereafter only commanding the movements of the Dublin yacht, which, despite being an official naval vessel, was very much an anomaly within the service.[23] Its commander, though a naval officer, tended to be either a political appointee or more often a captain who was nearing the end of his active naval service, and it was primarily employed to convey messages, distinguished passengers and bullion across the Irish Sea.[24] On occasion, especially during wartime, it was used to raise men for the fleet or enforce trade embargoes, but its regular duties meant that command of its movements could be safely delegated to the viceroy or his representatives.[25] Nevertheless, despite control of the yacht's status being a clear extension of vice-regal privilege rather than anything else, successive lords lieutenant and lords justices continued to seek some input into the deployment of other vessels in Irish waters, stressing their greater knowledge of local conditions.[26]

These jurisdictional conflicts are important, as they demonstrate the desire of the Irish administration to protect domestic trading and security interests, which they believed they understood better than the members of the Admiralty Board in London, a tension between local and imperial authority that was replicated across the British Atlantic empire. Despite these occasional conflicts of interest, a constant naval presence was maintained off the Irish coast, although it increasingly served metropolitan or imperial interests, despite the best efforts of local governing elites. The number of ships employed varied over time, with an average of six ships employed on the Irish station at any one time in the six decades before 1760, and a complement of ten vessels deployed in the 1760s and 1770s.[27] Most of these were quite small, being either 6th-rate men-of-war carrying a crew of up to 160 men, or sloops or coastal cruisers carrying between 18 and 40 men. In wartime, these numbers could increase, as French and Spanish naval vessels, as well as enemy privateers, appeared on the Irish coast, temporarily increasing Ireland's naval significance. Geographically, these ships were concentrated off the eastern and southern coasts, with the key ports being Carrickfergus, Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Kinsale, Limerick and Galway. This reflected not only their strategic significance, but also the dominant role played by these ports in Ireland's international trade.

The regular presence of naval warships on the Irish coast did not lead, however, to the establishment of a permanent naval yard capable of servicing the ships employed on the 'Irish station'. Instead, these vessels had to return regularly to Plymouth to be cleaned and resupplied with victuals and crew. This meant that there was rarely a full naval complement actually cruising off the Irish coast, especially as ships returning to Plymouth could also be, and were, diverted to other duties, much to the chagrin of the Irish authorities.[28] The only exceptions to this practice came during the 1690s, and again during the War of the Spanish Succession, when Kinsale was established as a functioning royal yard with its own resident commissioner answerable to the Navy Board. Its establishment was part of a wider strategy focused on the western approaches, and coincided with the expansion of Plymouth as a significant naval base. The Kinsale yard, while capable of servicing 4th-, 5th- and 6th-rate ships, was very much regarded as an auxiliary station. This secondary status was confirmed by the difficulties in sourcing suitably qualified workmen, supplies and sufficient credit to carry out its duties, difficulties that, together with a naturally unfavourable seaward entrance to the harbour, contributed to its demise upon the return to peace in 1713.[29]

Naval Activities in Eighteenth-Century Irish Waters

Having established the average numerical strength and command structure of the naval vessels stationed off the Irish coast, it is necessary to consider in more detail their multi-faceted role, and how they contributed to the maintenance and defence of Britain's Atlantic empire. Cruising the Irish coast was not one of the most glamorous postings in the eighteenth-century navy. Indeed, one historian has described it with some justification as a 'monotonous posting'.[30] A great deal of this monotony can be explained by the relatively routine nature of much of the naval business in Irish waters. This becomes immediately apparent from even a cursory reading of the correspondence of officers employed there, nearly all of whom saw such service as a stepping stone to a more lucrative command elsewhere in the fleet.[31] What follows draws on an extensive survey of the letters written to the Admiralty over a 90-year period by officers stationed in Irish waters.

While there, officers' postings followed a reasonably regular rhythm. During wartime their efforts were largely focused on preventing the disruption of trade by enemy privateers, and upon discouraging contact between native Jacobite interests and enemy shipping.[32] These activities initially focused on the south Munster coast and spread into the Irish Sea during the first decade of the eighteenth century, where the anti-privateering activities of Captain George Camocke of the *Speedwell* were regarded as being particularly effective. Monitoring the movements of enemy privateers and engaging, where necessary, in preventive action was important. Equally so, however, was the essential task of escorting convoys of merchant ships returning from Atlantic voyages from the entry into Irish waters beyond Cape Clear, or on occasion from Galway, back to Plymouth or Sheerness.[33] These included East India Company ships carrying very valuable cargoes back to England, with one captain calculating in 1707 that his convoy alone was worth £300,000 to the Queen's revenue.[34] Such escort voyages often had a dual purpose, either coinciding with the regular refitting and cleaning of the ship at Plymouth dockyard, or with the transportation of new recruits raised in Irish ports for service elsewhere in the fleet, which is dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter. Finally, during wartime, the ships stationed on the Irish coast were liable to become involved, in conjunction with the transport service, in the transfer of soldiers garrisoned in Ireland to European or North American and Caribbean theatres of war,

a logistical task that frequently fully stretched the capacity of the naval representatives at Cork and Kinsale, as well as their networks of local contractors. On occasion, they even colluded with military authorities to ship out regiments destined for the West Indies quietly, before the soldiers realised they were heading for this least popular of early eighteenth-century postings. Thus, the navy played an essential role in facilitating the emergence of the Irish military establishment as 'an army for empire', which could be deployed across the Atlantic world as and when required, and integrating Ireland further into the structures of the imperial fiscal-military state.[35]

In peacetime, the primary functions of the ships stationed on the Irish coast were to continue to raise recruits for the fleet and to take preventive action against smugglers operating there. Both of these activities involved close co-operation with the institutions of the Irish fiscal-military state, and the remainder of this chapter focuses on how the navy and these local institutions worked together as part of Ireland's contribution to the eighteenth-century Atlantic empire. The importance of customs revenues to the Irish exchequer has already been highlighted. Buoyant customs receipts allowed the Irish fiscal state to become a net contributor to the British imperial state through its maintenance of the standing army in Ireland, housed in the countrywide network of purpose-built barracks. Maintaining these customs revenues depended firstly upon the efficient collection of duties in Irish ports, and secondly upon the reduction of the illicit trade in smuggled goods with foreign powers, notably France. Louis Cullen, in a series of publications, highlighted the extent of the clandestine trade in wool, wine, brandy and tobacco along the Irish coast, drawing attention to its ebbs and flows, as well as to its regional variations.[36] He noted how the navy played an increasingly important role in detecting smuggling along the Irish coast. The extent of this role becomes clearer when the evidence of the revenue commissioners' voluminous records is taken into account. It is clear from reading their minute books that they increasingly came to see the navy as performing an integral role in assisting their efforts to combat offshore smuggling, in much the same way that they relied on the army.[37]

From the very beginning of the century, the Irish authorities put pressure on the Admiralty to deploy a sufficient number of vessels to combat smugglers, alongside the navy's other activities. In late 1712, for instance, the Admiralty agreed that three ships—*Folkestone*, *Gibraltar* and *Sharke*—were to be exclusively deployed to prevent 'the exportation of wool into foreign ports' and went so far as to inform the Irish lords justices that even

they were not to 'divert them from this service'.[38] The delegation of control of the movements of these vessels to the Irish lords justices was originally intended to allow greater flexibility in terms of combating smuggling, but, as we have seen, full authority had reverted back to the Admiralty by 1715.[39] While warships were employed in this role in the 1710s and 1720s, the 1730s saw much more significant efforts to combat illegal trade, particularly the trade in woollens to France.

Enforcing the English monopoly on the importation of Irish wool was a key element of the state's mercantilist policy, and one that required naval support. To further this aim, six purpose-built vessels were explicitly commanded in 1732 to cruise the Irish coast in support of this revenue. Ship's captains, and occasionally their officers, were also given commissions as revenue officers, first by special request, and then as a matter of course.[40] Indeed it became routine for captains newly arrived on duty off Irish ports to report to the Custom House in Dublin to present their credentials to the Revenue Board. Their details were also passed on to local customs collectors, emphasising the level of co-operation expected between the navy and the local revenue institutions.[41] This system was attractive to the naval officers, as they stood to benefit from the King's bounty in the event of successful seizures, while the revenue commissioners were happy to have extra assistance alongside their own relatively small, though expanding, fleet of revenue barges and sloops.[42] The increased naval presence specifically dedicated to anti-smuggling duties did not, however, bring about immediate results, despite some reports that the arrival of these ships precipitated the dismantling of 'several of their looms' in the east Cork region.[43] In 1735, a speaker in the British House of Commons complained that 'the garde de coast ships lately ordered to prevent running from Ireland have made no prizes, neither can they be answerable to the great expense they put the nation to because of the multitude of creeks in that Kingdom, which are so many that the whole fleet of England if employed that way could do nothing'.[44] Preventing smuggling on the west coast of Ireland was, in his view, a hopeless cause.

Unsurprisingly, the commitment and tenacity of individual captains was an important factor in determining the value of the navy's contribution. Edward Smith of the *Spy*, one of those disciplined by the Admiralty in 1738, was regarded by Irish officials who cruised alongside him off the Cork coast as 'a gentleman the board have a great regard for on account of his diligence and activity on the coast'.[45] His successor as commander of the *Spy*, Thomas Jolley, was prepared to protect his local crew, including

one John Flaherty, 'a papist', who was threatened by an armed gang of smugglers following an altercation off the Aran Islands.[46] Meanwhile, others, such as Captains Arthur Gardiner of the *Amazon* and William Fielding of the *Fly*, both of whom were active in the Irish Sea combating smugglers operating out of the Isle of Man, purchased wherries from their own personal resources to assist them in detecting smuggling activity along the north-eastern Irish coast.[47] Gardiner's two wherries were later sold to his successor at Carrickfergus, Joshua Rowley, who armed them to make them more effective against smugglers operating in 'the several creeks and harbours within the limits of my station'. This led to the successful seizure of illegal shipments of tobacco, tea and spirits, many of which had their origins in transoceanic shipments from North America or even Asia, emphasising the place of the Irish Sea and its islands as part of the Atlantic trading world.[48] The volume of goods being run from the Isle of Man through the north Dublin port of Rush, described by one captain as 'a small dangerous harbour', also meant that the navy occasionally faced significant violent opposition, necessitating military support on land.[49]

Dedication to duty was not always rewarded. In 1733, George Sclater's pursuit of a suspected tobacco smuggler off the Waterford coast was regarded as over-zealous by the city's mayor and recorder, as well as by a local MP who treated him 'insolently'.[50] Others, however, were luckier in their relations with local political interests, with several port corporations granting the freedom of the borough and other honours to the naval officers stationed off their harbours in gratitude for services rendered to the port's trading fortunes.[51] Not all naval officers or sailors deployed on the Irish coast acted in ways so beneficial to the revenue service. Some, indeed, did the opposite. Captain John Armiger of the *Baltimore*, for instance, was alleged in 1745 to have imprisoned a tide surveyor, Cornelius O'Driscoll, and two inferior officers, who were trying to 'rummage' another ship in the West Cork port of Crookhaven suspected of carrying goods smuggled from Barbados.[52] Meanwhile, 16 years later, in 1761, the Admiralty punished Lieutenant Taylor of the *Barrington* for smuggling East India goods at Kinsale, while only a month later the sailors manning cutters employed on the impress service in Dublin Bay were suspected of running goods from the Isle of Man.[53] These incidents are not surprising and suggest that, just as naval, revenue and political institutions might formally co-operate, ordinary sailors and tide officers in Ireland were just as liable to collude with local smuggling interests as their counterparts in Sussex, New England and the Caribbean might.[54]

Ireland, the Navy and the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic Marine Labour Market

The Royal Navy's policing role extended beyond the detection and pursuit of smugglers to include disrupting the communication lines established between disgruntled Irish Catholics and their émigré-Jacobite Continental brethren. Smugglers frequently carried not only contraband goods, but also messages from the Continent, as well as recruits for the Irish regiments in French and Spanish service.[55] Successive Irish administrations endeavoured to restrict the recruitment of Irishmen for service in foreign forces, both through draconian punishment of suspected French agents and through the military pursuit of suspected recruits.[56] While much of the burden of this duty fell on the army, the navy also played a significant role. In 1736, for instance, following reports that an Irish-owned sloop, *Greyhound*, was 'intended to carry off wool and a parcel of people commonly called Wild Geese from some port between Dungarvan and Youghal', the King's ship 'stationed on that coast', together with the revenue boats from both ports, were instructed to act in concert to prevent the departure of the suspicious ship.[57] Naval vessels cruising at sea also intercepted foreign ships engaged in the transport of Irish recruits to the Continent. In 1720, Captain Thomas Lawrence of the *Aldborough* reported to the Admiralty that he had pursued a Spanish ship recruiting men from Dursey Island off West Cork to Valentia Island, where it got away from him. However, the Spanish vessel was unsuccessful in its mission on Valentia, as the locals had abandoned the shore 'lest they should be seized by a party of men that were lurking there for that purpose, and to carry them to Spain', indicating that Irish opposition to impressment was not limited to the forced recruiting activities of the Royal Navy, but to the compulsive nature of the international market for maritime labour.[58]

Lawrence and his fellow-officer Joseph Lingen, who was employed on a similar mission in the Irish Sea, were not only vigorous agents in the navy's attempts to prevent the recruitment of Irish military labour for Continental forces; they also actively recruited Irish seamen for service in the British fleet.[59] Lingen spent over 20 years cruising the Irish coast, and his voluminous letters to the Admiralty, as commander of first the *Drake* and then *Cruizer*, provide excellent insight into the duties of a ship employed in the Irish Sea. These included preventing the traffic of Jacobite recruits to Scotland and France, capturing suspected Virginia pirates, supporting revenue officers against smugglers and recruiting seamen for

the Royal Navy.[60] His experience of the Irish coast, together with his detailed knowledge of local trade patterns, led him to be nominated as the commander of one of the six vessels specifically deployed to combat the illegal wool trade in 1732.[61] Judging by his letters from the 1720s and 1730s, it seems, however, that his primary focus was on soliciting seamen for service in the navy, either as volunteers or as pressed men.

Lingen's correspondence illustrates how vessels employed on the Irish coast not only sought to fill up their complement by enlisting qualified seamen in Irish ports, but that they were also used to maintain a steady flow of recruits to Portsmouth, Plymouth and the wider Atlantic fleet. In February 1726, for instance, Lingen sailed to Belfast, where he immediately found '32 seamen volunteers between the ages of 20 and 40', noting how 'the people seem very ready to enter here'. This local enthusiasm meant that Lingen was not required to use the press warrant that he had in his possession and, like many officers in this period, he was reluctant to use the 'press' unless entirely necessary, describing how it would induce the local populace to flee into the mountains out of fear of the possibility of indiscriminate impressment.[62] Having secured volunteers at Belfast and Larne, Lingen moved on to Dublin, where he entered further seamen, bringing up his total to 87, upon which occasion he sailed for England, where they were distributed amongst the wider fleet. A year later, he was back on the same coast, but this time he found fewer 'ready volunteers', and he was required to use both a press warrant at Larne and to 'deceive' some of his new recruits that they were going to serve aboard the *Drake* in Irish waters, when in reality they were destined for Portsmouth.[63] Having crossed the Irish Sea with these newly minted able seamen, he returned to the south coast, raising a further 108 men at Cork, who were transferred to ships heading for Spithead, before continuing his cruise.[64]

Joseph Lingen's letters from the 1720s and 1730s demonstrate how Irish coastal communities proved to be fertile recruiting grounds for the navy, whether the recruits came in the form of volunteers or pressed men.[65] Several hundred men were raised for the fleet, either in Irish ports or on Irish waters, on an annual basis in peacetime, while these numbers, unsurprisingly, increased when Britain (and Ireland) went to war. Despite this compelling numerical evidence, little scholarly attention has been paid to this Irish contribution to the fiscal-military state and its ever-expanding need for skilled labour. Interestingly, French military planners used Irish recruitment to the navy and the possibility of disrupting the supply of Irish sailors (even if they over-estimated the numbers involved) as a potential

justification for invading Ireland in 1759 and 1778.[66] It is hard to know how seriously these plans were taken. Nevertheless, the scholarly neglect of Irish naval recruitment is surprising, not just in terms of its importance for naval history, but also in establishing the context and contours of a recruitment pattern that led to Dublin's becoming the second-largest single source of naval manpower, after London, by the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.[67] Roger Morriss has shown how the Impress Service recruited 8824 men in Dublin between 1775 and 1783, while Liverpool was the only English city outside London to provide more men than Cork. Belfast, Newry and Waterford also supplied substantial naval manpower. Overall, Irish ports provided 17% of the total number raised by the Impress Service during the war. The impact of this on employment patterns and social conditions in Dublin and other Irish port towns is as yet little understood, but, even allowing for the high proportion of non-locally domiciled sailors entering the navy by the press gang, these were significant numbers. The impressionistic evidence regarding earlier conflicts suggests that this was not a new phenomenon in 1776, but was instead part of an established pattern.

Irish service in the navy was exceptional when viewed in the context of restricted recruitment into other branches of the armed services. Irish Catholics were legally barred from serving in the army until 1778, while Irish Protestant recruitment into the ranks was restricted until the Seven Years War, because of fears it would lead to a diminution of the 'Protestant interest'. Recent research has, however, demonstrated that, contrary to the law, Catholics continued to serve in the army, particularly in regiments dispatched for overseas service.[68] Britt Zerbe has argued, in relation to the Royal Marines, that recruitment was conducted on a 'don't ask, don't tell' basis, an interpretation that could plausibly be adopted when considering other branches of the military, especially for the period from the 1750s onwards.[69]

The navy, however, was different. As early as 1697, James Waller, governor of Charles Fort in Kinsale, highlighted the difficulties of manning a 4th-rate ship there 'especially with those who are protestant'.[70] His patron Edward Southwell, whose offices included two stints as chief secretary of Ireland as well as the vice-admiralty of Munster, suggested to the Admiralty in 1704 that they might lobby for the recruitment of Catholics into the navy, arguing that they are 'generally very hardy and well made and I believe would prove very serviceable and will sooner be converted on board than by staying on shore', adding that 'the ships of our coast who have any of

them make no complaint at all, but find they do their duty like other men'.[71] A few weeks later, Southwell reported that a proclamation calling for volunteers to enter the navy as seamen had been circulated, but he did not expect a great response to it without changes in the policy towards recruiting Catholics.[72] Furthermore, he described how the six ships then stationed on the Irish coast 'generally pick up all they can and very often do not ask questions about their religion', and he suggested that further connivance of this sort would allow him to recruit '3 or 400 lusty able Irishmen which being distributed in several ships would make as good men as any'.[73] Others were more circumspect about such a prospect, with another Cork-based Irish political grandee, Lord Chancellor Richard Cox, arguing that it would be of less 'dangerous consequence' for the navy to employ 'land soldiers' aboard their ships.[74]

Legally, the situation continued to be ambiguous, but all the available evidence points towards continuing, even increasing, recruitment in Ireland, and indicates that 'connivance' was the policy option preferred by captains operating on the Irish coast. It seems implausible that press gangs operating on the quays of Dublin, Cork or Belfast were likely to enquire too closely about religion, while a crude surname analysis of surviving lists of newly enlisted men strongly suggests a significant Catholic presence.[75] Southwell's hope that the navy might serve as a means of religious as well as civic conversion was not wholly abandoned, either. In 1768, Lucius O'Brien, the Irish-born captain of the *Solebay*, then operating off the Cork coast, sought Admiralty permission for the appointment of a Protestant chaplain 'as the major part of the seamen belonging to His Majesty's ship under my command are Irish and I imagine Papists'. A clergyman on board, he argued, would prevent his men attending the popish chapels that 'lay handy to the shore', from which his men did not return on the same day, and would also 'prevent the whole ship's company becoming papists'.[76] O'Brien had actually recruited many of these sailors in his home county of Cork and in neighbouring County Kerry, pointing towards one of the ways in which Irish seamen were encouraged to enlist in the navy.

It was common practice across the Royal Navy for commanders to return to their home districts to raise new crewmen, and O'Brien, together with others like Thomas Baillie of the *Tartar*, who replenished his crew in Dublin in 1757, were conforming to this norm.[77] The Southwell family, lords of the soil at Kinsale, similarly encouraged naval service amongst their tenants and connections, offering routes to promotion for their gentry neighbours, as well as soliciting volunteers for the fleet.[78] The

relative paucity of Irish officers in the eighteenth-century navy, at least as compared to their per-capita over-representation in the army, meant that such recruitment was limited in scope.[79]

The distribution of naval patronage by senior officers contributed to rising enlistment in the navy, but the great majority of Irish seamen entered either as volunteers or impressed men raised by the warships cruising off the Irish coast. It is clear that in Ireland, as elsewhere in the British Atlantic world, volunteers were the preferred option. Proclamations were issued during wartime, either by the Irish Privy Council or by the monarch in London, seeking recruits.[80] These often offered financial inducements to speed up the recruitment process, although such bounties could prove problematic, with disputes arising over which authority—the Admiralty, the Irish parliament or local corporations—should pay their costs.[81] Such minor complications notwithstanding, the bounty system helped to maintain a steady stream of Irish sailors flowing into the navy. It was, however, not always enough. In 1755, on the eve of the Seven Years War, William Fielding of the *Fly* found, for instance, that Cork merchants were 'secreting off' their men to prevent them from volunteering, because they were busy 'shipping off all their beef, butter and tallow for France' in (correct) anticipation of a wartime embargo on trade.[82] These were understandable preoccupations when viewed within the context of the role played by the provision trade in Cork's economic life. For the navy, however, the only alternative, when faced with what they saw as such uncooperative behaviour, was to deploy the press gang.

The press gang has enjoyed an often deservedly bad reputation, but it was a regular part of the rhythm of life in British, Irish and American port towns in the eighteenth century. Although ostensibly governed by regulations that restricted impressment to wartime, the correspondence of captains operating on the Irish coast and in Irish ports suggests that these regulations were observed only in their breach, with the merest rumour of war allowing for the issuing of a press warrant.[83] This is particularly true for the 1720s and 1730s, when impressment into the fleet did not subside during a long period of peace with France, leading to disruptions in Anglo-Irish trade. The zeal with which Captains Rowley and Lingen pursued their orders in the late 1720s led to the interruption of the essential Dublin-Whitehaven coal trade at a time when the capital's citizens could ill afford rising fuel prices. The colliers' fears were only finally allayed following the intervention of the lord lieutenant, Lord Carteret, with the Admiralty.[84] Elsewhere, fishermen at Kinsale were on occasion subjected to the press,

contrary to existing custom and to the wishes of the local garrison, drawing complaints from local officials. Conflict between local corporations and press gangs was also not unknown, and accommodations were frequently reached between opposing positions, with quotas occasionally introduced, as in parts of Britain.[85]

Despite these difficulties, it is clear that substantial numbers of Irishmen were pressed into service and transported to Plymouth or Sheerness for distribution within the fleet. For instance, between March and May 1726, William Rowley of the *Lively* delivered almost 500 pressed men to Plymouth from Dublin in three separate voyages, while other vessels stationed at Waterford, Cork and Kinsale raised similar numbers in the same period. This was not exceptional, with similar numbers raised in the three succeeding years and again during the mid-1730s. During wartime, officers from the Impress Service were specifically stationed in Cork and Dublin to raise men for the fleet, with Captain James O'Hara of HMS *George* proving especially productive in the southern port during the Seven Years War. His success was commended in the British House of Commons upon the conclusion of the war, leading O'Hara to declare in a letter to the Admiralty, 'as to my genius I hope I have sufficiently proved it by my management of a county of papists where I was destined and by the number of men with which I supplied for His Majesty's fleet'.[86] This declaration was aimed at securing a command at sea, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Instead, O'Hara found himself commanding the Impress Service in Hull during the next war.[87] O'Hara's success in Cork during the Seven Years War was repeated across the kingdom, leading to ever-increasing numbers of Irishmen serving in the fleet in the decades before the American Revolutionary War, despite increasing reports of violent opposition to press gangs.[88]

The numbers raised not only force us to revise further the Irish contribution to the eighteenth-century fiscal-military state, but also to reconsider whether Catholic Ireland really remained a 'weapon of war yet untried' in the period before 1778. This might have been broadly true with regard to the recruitment of Irish Catholics into the British army, but the evidence presented here suggests the navy regularly drew upon Catholic manpower in the decades before the relaxation of the penal measures prohibiting military enlistment.[89] Meanwhile, Ireland's role as a source of naval manpower assumes greater importance when viewed within an Atlantic context. The evidence presented here demonstrates that impressment of Irish and foreign mariners entering and leaving Irish ports was a matter of naval

routine during the eighteenth century. This was not the case in either British North America or the Caribbean, where a combination of powerful local interest groups, legislation and a more limited labour market meant that 'the navy failed to tap the thousands of seamen who sailed forth from North American ports after 1740'.[90] The success of the interests vested in the transatlantic sugar trade in protecting their fleets and commercial profits from the 'press' might be contrasted with the targeted pressing of sailors at Cork to prevent the maintenance of Continental trading links in the 1750s.[91] Irish ports could, it seemed, provide some of the manpower necessary to keep the Atlantic shipping routes open, even if this had an impact on local trading revenues. The interests of Irish merchants, sailors and port communities were, after all, expected to be subservient to the greater imperial project.

Conclusions

The American Revolutionary War marked a watershed in Ireland's relationship with the navy. In 1782, immediately upon the granting of its legislative independence, the Dublin parliament voted for a grant of £100,000 to raise 20,000 new volunteers for the navy to support the on-going war effort.[92] Until this point, the expense of defending Irish trading interests was entirely borne by the British Treasury, reflecting the wider strategic interest in keeping Irish coastal waters and the western approaches to the Atlantic archipelago free from enemy privateers and smugglers. The expenditure on warships deployed on these duties was, however, partly offset by the increased tax yield from Irish customs duties, allowing in turn for Ireland's most significant imperial contribution, the maintenance of troops on the Irish military establishment. The growing demands of wartime naval expenditure, together with the visible economic benefits brought about by the wartime provisioning trade, encouraged Irish 'patriots', many of whom were already ideologically predisposed to an interventionist naval policy, to vote to materially support the navy.[93]

In line with the increasingly 'patriot' agenda, there were also calls from some quarters for a separate Irish navy, as well as proposals for the building of naval dockyards in Ireland, neither of which came to anything.[94] Instead, the Irish contribution to the navy continued to be supplied in the form of men and provisions. Patriot MPs like Sir Edward Newenham became the public face of the government-sponsored campaign to enlist 20,000 volunteers into the navy. Companies of the Irish Volunteers, hitherto so

useful in winning parliamentary concessions on free trade and legislative independence, and members of other patriotic association like the Dublin Keppel Club (named after the popular Whig sailor), turned their attention to 'beating up' for naval recruits with some success, particularly in Dublin and the Ulster ports. Their efforts were formally assisted both by the granting of generous bounties from the parliamentary fund, and by the arrival of an experienced Belfast-born naval captain, John McBride, in Dublin with specific orders to co-ordinate the recruiting campaign. Recruitment posters still extant in his papers indicate the double nature of his approach. The featured slogans include references to Louis d'Ors and Spanish dollars, as well as images of an Irish harp, alongside patriotic exhortations in the Irish and English languages.[95] These considerable recruitment efforts seem to have raised less than half the promised 20,000 men, but the conclusion of the war in 1783 meant that no more sailors were needed for immediate service in the fleet, preventing any embarrassment accruing to the Irish legislators for their failure to meet what were ambitious targets in the seventh year of a global conflict.[96]

The events of 1782–1783—together with the impressive number of men entering the sea service, either as pressed men or volunteers, during the course of the war—suggest that by this date the navy had permeated deep into Irish society and that it could even be used as a means of expressing Irish 'patriot' identity within the context of defending the commercial and trading interests of the British (and Irish) Atlantic empire. It would, however, be misleading to push this interpretation too far. Rising numbers of Irishmen serving in the fleet were as much, if not more, a product of the navy's increasingly efficient and effective recruitment and impressment techniques than of patriotic fervour. This ambivalent attitude to the navy would become strikingly apparent during the next international conflict, when Irish sailors served in record numbers in Nelson's navy, while also playing leading roles in the Nore mutinies.[97]

Notwithstanding the rising numbers of Irish sailors entering the navy, the American Revolutionary War contributed to a realignment of Ireland's position within the Atlantic World. Central to this was the reorientation of Irish trade to focus ever more on the Anglo-Irish nexus, a process that had begun by the early 1770s, if not before.[98] This shift towards a more insular trading pattern affected Ireland's transatlantic connections and had an impact on the role of the navy, something that was accentuated by the renewal of Anglo-French hostilities in the 1790s. That decade saw the establishment of permanent naval stations at Cork and Dublin as part of

a wider process of naval infrastructural development. Their focus was defensive and inward-looking and, together with significant efforts to improve Irish coastal defences in this period, marked a new era in Irish naval history, one that was less expansive and Atlantic and more insular than what had gone before. This trend was not confined just to naval affairs, but was part of a wider consolidation of the British and Irish state, exemplified by, but predating, the Anglo-Irish union of 1800.

Acknowledgements
The research for this chapter was generously funded by an Irish Research Council/Marie Curie Sklodowska Cofund research fellowship held at University College London and University College Dublin from 2011 to 2015. I am grateful to Stephen Conway for his invaluable advice at an early stage of this research, and to Louis Cullen and Timothy Watt for sharing unpublished research materials with me.

Notes

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47. TNA, CUST 1/47, ff. 24 and 93, and TNA, CUST1/53, ff. 9 and 55, Rev. commrs min. bk, 23 June, 25 August 1749, 19 March and 19 April 1753. On the Isle of Man, see Cullen, 'Smugglers in the Irish Sea', esp. pp. 118–21.
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49. TNA, ADM 1/2052, Charles Leslie to Philip Stephens, 10 July 1769, and Charles Leslie to William Lockhart, 25 June 1769. See also TNA, ADM 1/2051, Charles Leslie to William Leaver, 14 October 1763; TNA, ADM 1/2116, Charles Leslie to William McLeverty, 23 December 1764, 28 February 1765; TNA, ADM 1/2300, Thomas Pasley to Philip Stephens, 23 June 1764.
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58. TNA, ADM 1/2037, Thomas Lawrence to Burchett, 30 August 1720.
59. TNA, ADM 1/2037, Lawrence to Burchett, 19 November 1720; TNA, ADM 1/2038, Joseph Lingen to Burchett, 16 April and 27 April 1722.
60. TNA, ADM 1/2038, Joseph Lingen to Burchett, 12 March, 16 March 1722, 17 May and 20 May 1725.
61. Lingen described his expertise in this area to Burchett in a letter dated 1 January 1733. See TNA, ADM 1/2039.
62. TNA, ADM 1/2039, Lingen to Burchett, 8 February and 15 February 1726.
63. TNA, ADM 1/2038, Lingen to Burchett, 24 February 1727.
64. TNA, ADM 1/2038, Lingen to Burchett, 1 April and 2 June 1727.
65. See the letters and enclosed lists of recruits not only of Lingen, but also of William Rowley of *Lively* (TNA, ADM 1/2379), Isaac Townshend of *Success* (TNA, ADM 1/2577), Christopher Pocklington of *Port Mahon* (TNA, ADM 1/2283), Thomas Whitney of *Flamborough* (TNA, ADM 1/2651) and Ambrose Saunders of *Seahorse* (TNA, ADM 1/2455), all of whom were active on the Irish coast between 1726 and 1729.
66. Beresford, 'Ireland in French Strategy', pp. 215, 302.
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84. TNA, ADM 1/3990, John, Lord Carteret, to Lords of the Admiralty, 26 February 1726 and 28 April 1729; TNA, ADM 1/2038, Lingen to Burchett, 22 February 1726.
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see TNA, ADM 1/3989, Dawson to Burchett, 3 February 1707; TNA, ADM 1/3989, Joseph Franklyn to Lords Justices of Ireland, 7 February 1707; TNA, ADM 1/2652, John Wynell to Burchett, 12 August 1739. On the introduction of quotas as a means of resolving disputes with local corporations, see Rodger, *The Wooden World*, pp. 162–3; Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, 2000), p. 152.

86. TNA, ADM 1/2247, James O'Hara to Philip Stephens, 12 February and 20 May 1763.
87. Conway, *The British Isles*, p. 279.
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89. See Bartlett, 'A Weapon of War Yet Untried', *passim*.
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95. These posters can be found in McBride's letters to the Admiralty (TNA, ADM1/2123). See also Morley, *Irish Opinion*, p. 302.
96. The Impress Service also recorded its highest number of Irish recruits in 1782–83. Morriss, *Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy*, p. 236.
97. Rodger, 'Mutiny or Subversion?', *passim*.
98. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade*, pp. 17–20.

CHAPTER 4

Another Look at the Navigation Acts and the Coming of the American Revolution

Stephen Conway

For many decades, a scholarly consensus prevailed on the connection between the American Revolution and the seventeenth-century English Navigation Acts, which regulated the colonies' overseas trade. The old claim that the Americans rebelled because they became restless under the restraints of parliamentary restrictions and sought commercial freedom, while still present in some popular accounts, fell out of favour with professional scholars many years ago.[1] Whatever else it was, the American Revolution, most historians since the 1930s have believed, was not a reaction against long-standing parliamentary regulation of the colonies' external commerce.[2] The issue, according to two leading experts on the early American economy, writing in the mid-1980s, was 'largely settled'.[3]

And so it remained until recently. An attempt in the 1990s to reopen the matter failed to gain traction at a time when historical scholarship—on the American Revolution and more generally—was turning away from economic explanations and embracing cultural studies.[4] But as materialist interpretations of the past have made a come-back in the last few years, interest has revived in mercantilism, the early modern European body of thought or doctrine based on the belief that states should accumulate and preserve resources so as better to compete with other states.[5] Renewed focus on mercantilism was bound to lead to a re-evaluation of the Navigation Acts, which embodied mercantilist logic. The work of two American historians with long experience of studying the Revolutionary period stands out in this regard: Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_4

have revived the idea that behind the American resistance to British authority lay a colonial desire to escape from economic restrictions, including the Navigation Acts.[6]

Lynd and Waldstreicher are right to bring our attention back to the Navigation Acts as an ingredient in the coming of the American Revolution, though for the wrong reason. Their emphasis on American hostility to British trade regulation is misplaced. My first ambition in this chapter is to demonstrate that abundant contemporary commentary suggests that the colonists were *not* motivated to rebel by a desire to break out of the commercial system created by the Acts. They may have resented the tougher enforcement of British trade regulations after the end of the Seven Years War—Sarah Kinkel's work shows how the Royal Navy's anti-smuggling activities made it increasingly unpopular in the colonies—but the Navigation Acts themselves seem not to have been a significant American grievance.[7]

Yet the Navigation Acts did play a key role in the breakdown in relations between the colonies and Britain. That role becomes clear only when we focus on British rather than American attitudes—something that many historians of the American Revolution, preoccupied with searching for its American roots, have been noticeably reluctant to do.[8] My second objective is to show that the determination of British politicians to assert parliamentary authority over America, and even to fight to keep the colonies in the British orbit, owed much to a desperate desire to defend the Navigation Acts. Even though Americans were not struggling to break out of a restrictive British system, ministers, MPs, and peers in London seem to have been haunted by a nightmare that the Navigation Acts were at grave risk. The nightmare led some British politicians to conclude that the Americans must be conciliated to keep them in the British fold, but it persuaded many more that any concessions to the colonists would ultimately undermine the Navigation system, and therefore had to be resisted.

While both conciliators and hard-liners conceived of the Navigation Acts as bringing many benefits to Britain, one of their main concerns seems to have been for British naval strength. Maritime historians appreciate the naval functions of the Navigation Acts.[9] They recognise that the acts were intended to promote English shipping and to build up a great reserve of trained seamen, schooled on long-distance trading voyages, who could be conscripted on to the crown's ships in time of war. Daniel Baugh, a leading historian of the eighteenth-century Royal Navy, has memorably depicted the Navigation Acts as a central feature of a regulatory system designed to

generate resources in Britain's Atlantic 'back-yard' for deployment in its European 'front-yard'.[10] But scholarly debates about the relationship between the Navigation Acts and the American Revolution tend to ignore the work of naval historians, and naval historians, for their part, are not much interested in the views of British politicians on American resistance to parliamentary authority. My third aim, then, after having provided evidence that the colonists were not rebelling against British trade regulation, but that parliamentarians were little short of obsessive about the need to defend the Navigation Acts, is to bring together separate scholarly narratives on British trade regulation and suggest that Lord North's government went to war with the colonies at least partly to save the navy.

To demonstrate that Americans were not rebelling against the Navigation Acts, but that British politicians worried incessantly about a threat to those Acts is relatively straightforward: contemporary testimony makes the colonial and British positions clear. But to establish the third point in the argument pursued here—that British politicians' concerns about the Navigation Acts owed much to their belief that the acts underpinned naval power—is more difficult. Unfortunately, as we will see, MPs and peers were almost always maddeningly imprecise about what exactly they thought was at stake when they spoke or wrote about the danger of the Americans' breaking out of the system created by the Navigation Acts. The reasons for their failure to elaborate are ultimately unknowable, but it seems likely that they simply felt no need to spell out what they thought was generally assumed. Assumptions, of course, are impossible to prove, as they are, by definition, unstated. But a possible way to excavate the unarticulated reasoning behind defences of the Navigation Acts is to explore wider public discourse. If we know the general view, we might be in a better position to understand the parliamentary perspective. To this end, the last part of this paper looks at discussions of the British Atlantic commercial system in contemporary publications, such as pamphlets, treatises, and newspapers.

The Navigation Acts and American Opinion

Before we consider American attitudes, we need to be clear about what the Navigation Acts involved. Some historians regard British regulation of American overseas trade as part of a bigger picture of legislative interference in colonial economic affairs. They discuss not just the Navigation Acts, but also quite separate mercantilist interventions by the Westminster

parliament.[11] These other interventions came in two broad categories: legislative encouragements to the production in the colonies of goods useful to the British economy, and legislative prohibitions on certain types of colonial manufacturing. A good example of the first type is the parliamentary bounty on indigo cultivation introduced in 1748 (indigo produced a blue dye used in the British textile industry). For the second, the Hat Act of 1732 can stand as representative: it limited the production and export of colonial hats in order to protect the interests of British hat-makers. The Iron Act of 1750 brought encouragement and prohibition together in one mercantilist package: it removed British import duties on colonial pig and bar iron, promoting their export to the mother country, while at the same time outlawing the manufacture in America of finished iron and steel. But these direct interventions in colonial production are not our concern here, which is exclusively with the Navigation Acts and the principle of parliamentary control of colonial external commerce.

The first efforts to regulate colonial overseas trade were made under the prerogative powers of the crown, through an order in council of 1621 that sought to ensure that all tobacco exported from Virginia came to England.[12] Only with the Civil War and Interregnum did Parliament start to play a role. In 1650 and 1651, statutes passed by Westminster insisted that the seaborne carriage of goods between English possessions should be on English ships. Parliament continued to flex its muscles after the Stuarts were restored in 1660. That year, MPs approved the first of a series of Navigation Acts designed to create a legislative framework for the overseas trade of the colonies; more followed in 1663, 1673, and 1696.[13] This body of laws expanded upon earlier precedents, but introduced many new elements: It limited the carriage of goods to English ships, three-quarters of whose crews had to be the crown's subjects; it stipulated that the products of other European countries had to pass through an English port (and pay English customs duties) before they could be shipped to the colonies; and it listed, or 'enumerated' in the language of the legislation, certain lucrative colonial products, such as sugar and tobacco, that must come to an English port (and pay English customs duties), even if their eventual destination was elsewhere in Europe. We can identify three principal aims behind the Navigation Acts: to squeeze the Dutch out of the Atlantic carrying trade and build up English shipping and the English maritime labour force; to encourage the colonies to buy English rather than continental European manufactures; and to give the English economy (and English public finances) first call on important colonial products, and enable it to profit by the re-export of goods that could be shipped to continental Europe.[14]

From a modern free-trade perspective, it seems entirely reasonable that such a restrictive system would have provoked colonial resistance. And so it did. Soon after the Navigation Acts were introduced, Massachusetts assemblymen denied the right of the Westminster parliament to regulate the overseas trade of their colony, an act of defiance that cost them their charter in 1684. But during the eighteenth century, when they began to appreciate more fully the benefits as well as the costs of British trade regulation, the colonies appear to have acquiesced in the system created by the Navigation Acts. New England, the epicentre of the original resistance, saw its maritime economy boom under the protectionist umbrella provided by Parliament, which broke Dutch dominance of the carrying trade and provided room for the fledgling local shipbuilding and maritime service industries to grow and flourish. As two leading economic historians of colonial America put it, 'The New Englanders became the Dutch of England's Empire'.[15]

By the time of the Stamp Act crisis of 1765–1766, the Navigation Acts had become part of the accepted architecture of empire, and the colonists had learned to live with them.[16] When colonial legislatures referred to the Navigation Acts in their resolutions against the Stamp Act, it was not to deny that Parliament had any right to restrict their trade, but to demonstrate that Americans already contributed to the empire, and therefore should not be subjected to parliamentary taxation as well.[17] Some of the colonial assemblies even argued that in British constitutional theory there was a fundamental difference between taxation and other forms of law-making: the first was a product of representation, the second of sovereign authority. Parliament, the colonial assemblies maintained, could not tax the Americans, because they were not represented at Westminster, but by making such a distinction the assemblies implied that Parliament could legislate for the colonies, a power that would of course have included regulating their overseas trade.[18] Other colonial spokesmen went further. Daniel Dulany, a Maryland lawyer, wrote that Parliament's 'right to impose an internal tax on the colonies without their consent … is denied, a right to regulate their trade without their consent is admitted.'[19] Benjamin Franklin, in his examination before the House of Commons in February 1766, spoke fulsomely on why Americans opposed the Stamp duties, but stated that parliamentary control of the colonies' overseas commerce was another matter: 'the Sea is yours', he told MPs.[20]

These colonial arguments were admittedly designed to further the cause of Stamp Act repeal, the Americans' over-riding objective at the

time. In order to persuade Parliament to back down, some degree of tactical flattery of Westminster was perhaps inevitable. How seriously we should take apparent concessions to parliamentary authority is therefore not clear. But when the next imperial crisis disturbed relations between the colonies and Britain, John Dickinson provided another helpful summary of what he saw as the American position. The duties introduced by the chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Townshend, in 1767, on selected manufactured goods and East India Company tea imported into the colonies, provoked American resistance, even if it was less extensive, and less violent, than in response to the Stamp Act. Dickinson, who encouraged the colonies to defy Townshend's duties, was emphatic that 'The Parliament unquestionably possesses legal authority to regulate the trade of Great Britain and all her colonies'.[21] Franklin was more circumspect than he had been in 1766, but still revealing about the boundaries of parliamentary power. In November 1769, he explained to a British correspondent that, so far as Americans were concerned, parliamentary taxation of any kind was unacceptable. But, though 'a Submission to Acts of Parliament was no part of their original Constitution', under which they accepted royal command and had been freed from interference by the Westminster legislature, Americans now 'consent and Submit' to parliamentary authority 'for the regulation of General Commerce'.[22] Franklin's formulation carefully avoided giving the impression that the colonists accepted that Parliament had a 'right' to control their overseas trade, but he seems to have conceded that, for practical purposes, Parliament was the only body that could pass laws concerning the trade of the empire as a whole. As long as those laws were intended for the benefit of all, the colonies would accept them and, by doing so, 'consent' to their operation.

This remained the American position right through to the final rejection of all British authority in the Declaration of Independence. In the autumn of 1772, the Boston Town Meeting drew up a 'list of Infringements and Violations of Rights'. The aim was evidently to be as comprehensive as possible. The townsmen objected, predictably, to parliamentary taxation and to the use to which the Townshend duties were to be put—paying the salaries of the governor and other civil officials, thereby freeing them from the control of the local legislature. They also protested the new American Board of Customs Commissioners, the presence of British troops in Boston, the threat of the appointment of an Anglican bishop for the colonies, and even the limitations imposed by Parliament on colonial manufacturing. Yet they said nothing about the Navigation Acts.[23] By

1774, Thomas Jefferson, whom Lynd and Waldstreicher cite in support of their argument, did indeed deny Parliament's right to interfere with colonial commerce.[24] But in October of that year, the First Continental Congress, called to co-ordinate resistance to the British government's coercive response to the Boston Tea Party of December 1773, 'cheerfully' accepted parliamentary regulation of American external trade, if it was carried out for mutual benefit and without the aim of raising revenue.[25] Subsequently, in 1775, both Alexander Hamilton and John Adams expressed, in separate publications, their belief that the colonists had by their acquiescence over many decades given their 'implied consent' to British trade regulation.[26]

Even in July 1776, when the final break with Britain was ratified by Congress, the Navigation system does not seem to have been prominent in the minds of most delegates. The Declaration of Independence, drafted by Jefferson and listing every conceivable American grievance to justify throwing off the authority of George III, was noticeably silent on the Navigation Acts. Its claim that the king had 'combined with others' (i.e., Parliament) for the purpose of 'cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world' is almost certainly not (as Lynd and Waldstreicher suggest it is) a reference to long-standing parliamentary commercial regulation. The legislation Congress had in mind might have been the 1766 Plantation Duties (or Revenue) Act, which for the first time prohibited *all* direct American trade with northern Europe to prevent continental European manufactures from being taken back to the colonies illegally.[27] More likely, the Declaration was referring to the American Prohibitory Act of December 1775, which, with the war already underway, had authorised the navy to seize colonial vessels attempting to engage in overseas commerce, and may well have helped to propel the Americans towards independence.[28] In short, colonial resentment at the Navigation Acts does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the American revolt.

The Navigation Acts and British Opinion

We can now turn to the situation on the other side of the Atlantic. The Navigation Acts made their first appearance in post-Seven Years War British politics as a result of George Grenville's attempts to tighten and enforce the existing legislation. Grenville, first minister from 1763 to 1765, was convinced that the purposes of the Navigation Acts were routinely undermined by illegal trade between the colonies and continental European

states and their empires. As Thomas Whately, Grenville's secretary to the treasury, wrote in a pamphlet justifying the ministry's measures, the aim of the Navigation Acts was to 'confine the *European* Commerce of the Colonies to the Mother Country'. When the colonists disobeyed these acts, the American provinces became 'no longer *British* Colonies, but Colonies of the Countries they trade to'.[29] Grenville and his colleagues sought to reduce this illicit commerce. The government collected information from its consuls and ambassadors about direct shipments from European ports, tried to make customs officers in the colonies do their duty more conscientiously, and ordered naval vessels in North America to intercept ships carrying smuggled goods.[30]

But even when, in 1764 and 1765, Parliament attempted to tax the colonies to help pay for a permanent British military garrison in North America, the Navigation Acts lurked in the background. Once Americans began to object in principle to parliamentary taxation, claiming that it was unconstitutional, British politicians—in all factions and parties—began to fear a wider challenge to Parliament's right to legislate for the colonies. The resolutions of some of the colonial legislatures that objected to Grenville's American Stamp duties attempted to head off this concern by arguing, as we have seen, that, in British constitutional theory, taxation and law-making were separate and distinct activities. A few British MPs accepted this logic, most notably William Pitt, the leading minister for much of the Seven Years War. Pitt sketched out his own position when Parliament debated the repeal of the Stamp Act early in 1766, a legislative retreat promoted on pragmatic grounds by Grenville's successor, the Marquis of Rockingham. Parliament, Pitt maintained, had no right to tax the colonies, as they were not represented on its benches, but it was supreme and sovereign for the purposes of legislating for the colonies. To make his point abundantly clear, he stressed that the Americans should be compelled, if necessary, to obey laws passed by Westminster, particularly the Navigation Acts.[31]

The vast majority of MPs and peers disagreed with Pitt's distinction between taxation and legislation. To them, parliamentary sovereignty was indivisible: taxation and law-making were both part of the same legislative process. In response to Pitt's argument, Grenville voiced the widely held opinion that taxation was merely 'one branch' of legislation.[32] It followed that if the Americans successfully denied Parliament's right to tax, then they would go on to deny Parliament's right to pass laws that bound them. Sometimes this anxiety was couched in general and unspecific terms. Lord

Dartmouth, first lord of trade in the Rockingham government, was emphatic that, even if the Stamp duties were repealed, it would be 'extremely dangerous to give way' on the question of Parliament's right to tax, 'because the ground upon which they build their claims of exemption from taxation, will equally support a denial of the authority of the British Legislature in any other instance'.[33] More often, the Navigation Acts were explicitly invoked. Richard Hussey, who agreed with the Rockingham government that the Stamp duties were unenforceable and had to be abandoned, was adamant that repeal should not be taken as an acknowledgement that Parliament had no right to tax the colonies. 'If the Stamp Act is illegal', Hussey told the Commons on 3 February 1766, 'the Act of Navigation is illegal. The obligation to obey must be entire or it cannot exist at all.'[34] Charles Yorke, attorney-general in the Rockingham administration, similarly argued that 'After this repeal, the right of this country will be supported by the immediate execution of all the laws, the Act of Navigation particularly'.[35]

Opponents of repeal were even more worried that a concession on taxation, even if the government intended it to be limited to the Stamp duties, would open the door to American defiance of Parliament in other areas. Hans Stanley, a supporter of Grenville's administration, voiced this concern in the broadest possible terms. After arguing that he could see 'no difference between the raising of taxes and imposing laws of any other kind', Stanley went on, according to a fellow MP, to say that 'The Repeal of the Stamp Act will not content the Americans. A few years, or rather a few months will bring them again before you with the same decent and respectful opposition to your whole system of laws or American legislation.' But many opponents of repeal were very clear that their main worry was about the implications for the Navigation Acts. In December 1765, according to a contemporary report, the Earl of Mansfield told the House of Lords that 'the next attempt of the colonies would be for ridding themselves of the Navigation Act'. The following February, Lord Lyttleton made much the same point. Repeal would not satisfy the colonists, but merely whet their appetite: they 'will find themselves crampt by the Act of Navigation, and oppose that too'. In March 1766, with Stamp Act repeal secured, the Earl of Sandwich ruminated that 'The Stamp Act [is] not the object of their sedition but to try their ground whether by resistance they can get themselves loose from other Acts more disagreeable and detrimental to them'. 'The Americans', he claimed, 'want to get loose from the Act of Navigation.'[36]

The next period of tension between a British government and the colonies produced the same arguments. The Townshend duties may have provoked a less violent response in America than the Stamp Act, but the colonial reaction still seems to have convinced British politicians that the Americans were determined to do more than resist parliamentary taxation. In May 1769, the government decided to repeal most of the duties, retaining only that on tea.[37] Even so, William Samuel Johnson, the Connecticut assembly's agent in London, reported the following September that British ministers believed that concessions ran the risk of merely giving encouragement to further American demands. Johnson characterised ministerial attitudes in a series of questions aimed at the colonists, starting with 'Will you be content if the late revenue acts are totally repealed?' and culminating in 'will you not insist upon the repeal of the Act of Navigation?'[38]

Very similar points were advanced when the imperial crisis was coming to the boil. In January 1775, Pitt, now the Earl of Chatham, tried again to heal the rift between Britain and its colonies. As in 1766, he argued that Parliament should not tax America, but that Parliament's right to pass laws controlling colonial overseas commerce was sacrosanct: 'I shall oppose America whenever I see her aiming at throwing off the Navigation Act and other regulatory acts of trade.'[39] Lord North, the prime minister, was certainly not inclined to surrender the right to tax. We can surmise that he opposed such a concession not just for the sake of revenue or as a matter of mere symbolism. In the debate on leave to introduce the Boston Port Bill in March 1774, he stated that 'They deny our legislative authority … If they deny authority in one instance it goes to all.'[40] What he had in mind can easily be imagined from other contributions to the same debate. John Rushout, an MP who supported the government's coercive American policy, was more explicit: 'I think you can never give up the right of taxing. Where will it end? Will not the Americans likewise be desirous of rescinding the Act of Navigation?'[41] The following month, Alexander Wedderburn, the solicitor-general, was equally certain that the system of trade regulation was at stake and that concessions to the colonists' protests at parliamentary taxation had only encouraged them to increase their demands. After charting the stages of American resistance, Wedderburn argued that the whole amounted to 'the denial of the right [of Parliament] upon the tenderest point, the principle of the Navigation Act'.[42]

The main parliamentary opposition group, led by Rockingham, was no less committed to defending the Navigation system, which it also saw as vital for British interests. But Edmund Burke, one of Rockingham's chief

speakers in the Commons, emphatically denied that the Americans were seeking to escape from the restrictions of the Navigation Acts. In his own speech on reconciliation with America, in March 1775, he maintained that 'these commercial regulations are not the true ground of the quarrel'. The central issue, he argued, was Parliament's attempts to tax the colonies. To give way to the Americans on taxation would not, in Burke's view, jeopardise parliamentary authority in other areas. The Americans objected to parliamentary taxes, not to the trade laws. Yet North and his supporters persisted in the belief that the colonists wanted to be free of the Navigation Acts and that any concessions on tax would only encourage them to press on to that ultimate goal. Burke told North that 'I would, Sir, recommend to your serious consideration, whether it be prudent to form a rule for punishing people, not on their own acts, but on your conjectures'. But, as is well known, Burke and the Rockinghamite opposition failed to win the day. North and his supporters rejected Burke's conciliatory proposals and continued with their coercive policy, led by their 'panic fears', as Burke put it, to believe that coercion represented the only way to keep the Americans in the system created by the Navigation Acts.[43] Less than a month later, open fighting began between the British army and Massachusetts militiamen.

The Navigation Acts and the Royal Navy

Why did British politicians attach so much importance to the Navigation Acts? Unfortunately, most of their statements are not very illuminating, as they take the form of general expressions of anxiety about the Americans' seeking to break out of the Navigation system, or of determination to avoid such a catastrophe. The main exception to this lack of clarity is the commentary of Grenville, and particularly of his treasury secretary, Whately, on the importance of preventing the colonies from engaging in illegal direct trade with mainland Europe. Whately bemoaned the 'Diminution of the Revenue' caused by smuggling, which suggests that, for both him and his chief, part of the value of the Navigation Acts lay in their ability to help the public purse.[44] But Whately and Grenville seemed most concerned to preserve the colonies as a market for British manufactures. As Whately explained in a contemporary pamphlet, increased protectionism in continental Europe made the colonists the only reliable overseas consumers of British goods. It followed that they should be forced to comply with the Navigation Acts.[45] Pitt, who opposed Grenville and Whately over the Stamp duties, shared their view that America should

purchase British products rather than foreign commodities: 'My great Object', an MP noted Pitt's saying in the debates on repeal of the Stamp Act, 'always her taking y^e^ manufactures.'[46] This kind of testimony gives substance to the assumptions of those economic historians who have attempted to measure the impact of British commercial regulations on the colonies. In their calculations, the Navigation Acts unsurprisingly appear simply as economic instruments, designed to secure national prosperity.[47]

Eighteenth-century British politicians undoubtedly understood the economic value of the Navigation Acts, but it would be a mistake to assume that they defended parliamentary regulation of colonial trade for no other reason, or even that they prized the Navigation Acts largely for their supposed economic benefits. We have reasonable grounds for believing that, for MPs and peers debating American problems between 1763 and 1775, the Navigation Acts were no less important as a vital prop to British naval power, on which the security of the home territories and their national standing in Europe depended. While no British politician appears to have explicitly spelled out the naval functions of the acts, this was almost certainly because they took it for granted that their listeners understood them. A small clue is perhaps the persistent—indeed almost invariable—use of the singular 'Navigation Act' or 'Act of Navigation', rather than the plural Navigation Acts or Acts of Navigation. Again, MPs and peers were frustratingly elusive about which Navigation Act they had in mind, but we can surmise that it was the 1660 legislation, which Burke explained was 'commonly called the act of navigation'.[48]

Perhaps MPs and peers regarded this Act as the most important simply because it was the first of the Restoration period, and therefore the foundation on which subsequent legislation in the 1660s and 1670s was built. It seems distinctly possible, however, that they referred to the 1660 Act for a more specific reason: it was the first to 'enumerate' lucrative colonial exports. But more importantly, its provisions insisted that all goods carried by sea between the king's dominions had to be carried in English ships, on which at least three-quarters of the crew were the crown's subjects. While contemporary politicians did not explicitly make the connection between what they termed the 'Act of Navigation' or the 'Navigation Act' and the maintenance of British naval power, we can infer that the connection was deeply embedded in their minds. Because MPs and peers were so unhelpfully general in their comments in Parliament, we have to rely for illumination on contemporary understandings of the importance of the Navigation Acts, and the 1660 Act in particular, drawn from wider public discourse.

Extra-parliamentary sources may not, of course, reflect the views of parliamentarians, but the opinions expressed in such sources tell us a good deal about public perceptions, and they therefore give us some important clues about what British politicians worried about when they defended 'the Navigation Act' and described it as 'of the greatest consequence' to the nation.[49]

Contemporary publications did not, it should be said, uniformly praise the Navigation Acts. Adam Smith launched his well-known criticisms of trade regulation in the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, and in the same year Josiah Tucker maintained that parliamentary legislation was unnecessary, as Americans consumed British manufactures because of their high quality and relative cheapness.[50] Earlier commentators had more limited disagreements with the Navigation Acts. William Burke, in his *Account of the European Settlements in America*, implicitly criticised the original legislation as too restrictive when he referred to the relaxation in 1731 of the requirement that all South Carolinian rice be exported to Britain before it went to continental Europe. The concession, which allowed direct shipment to any port south of Cape Finisterre, Burke regarded as a 'prudent indulgence', which had 'revived the rice trade'.[51] For his part, Sir Matthew Decker, a merchant and political economist whose work of the 1740s was frequently reprinted in subsequent decades, complained that, by favouring the crown's subjects as mariners, the Navigation Act artificially inflated wage rates.[52]

Unfavourable points were usually balanced, however, by positive ones. Decker, despite his concerns about commercial regulation's role in pushing up maritime labour costs, described the Navigation Act as 'the most glorious Bulwark of our Trade'.[53] Likewise, Sir Josiah Child, another writer on economic themes, who continued to be published long after his death, while far from slavishly uncritical of the Navigation Act, still referred to it as 'one of the choicest and most prudent acts that was ever made in England'.[54] Even Adam Smith, for all his hostility to trade regulation by Parliament, acknowledged that 'The defence of Great Britain … depends very much upon the number of its sailors and shipping. The act of navigation, therefore, very properly endeavours to give the sailors and shipping of Great Britain the monopoly of the trade of their own country.'[55]

Praise was in fact the norm, and it frequently took the form of emphasising Smith's point about the maritime aspects of the Navigation Act. The anonymous author of *A New History of England* argued in 1757 that, amongst the advantages that Britain derived from the 'Act of Navigation',

was that it 'increases her Shipping, and breeds up her Seamen'.[56] Another historian, Hugh Clarendon, writing a few years later, was equally sure that the Navigation Act 'threw a great weight of naval force into the hands of the mother country'.[57] The unnamed writer of *An Essay on Trade and Commerce* of 1770 was of the same view: 'The famous act of navigation produced great employment for our shipping, and our naval power soon became the terror of the world.'[58] Sir William Mildmay, in the course of his study of the recent history of southern France, published in 1764, told his readers that the superiority of British naval power over French was due in part to 'the principles enforced by our act of navigation'.[59]

This view was a commonplace in the middle of the eighteenth century, as we can see from yet more contemporary comments. To Charles Lloyd, Grenville's private secretary, 'the great act of navigation' had given 'the deepest wound to the trade and power of Holland, and acquired to England the maritime empire of Europe'.[60] A letter-writer in a London newspaper, probably also supportive of Grenville's politics, decried the Rockingham government's attempt to establish free ports in the West Indies, which he saw as 'subversive of the Navigation Act, and directly opposite to the principles and spirit of it, by permitting and encouraging *foreigners* to become the carriers of our productions in the new world, to the diminution of the naval power of this island'.[61] But perhaps the clearest statement of the orthodoxy of the time came from an earlier, but much republished, author on trade. Joshua Gee's work first appeared in 1729, but in the 1767 edition we can still find the following: the 'principal object of the Navigation Act' is the creation of 'a perpetual army of Seamen kept in constant pay … ready to be diverted to public service, when wanted'.[62]

Conclusion

Americans were not driven to rebel by their hostility to the Navigation Acts, but British politicians' anxieties about a threat to the Acts led them to resist concessions to the colonists and insist on American submission to parliamentary authority. It was that insistence, at least as much as colonial resistance, which led to war. British commitment to the Navigation Acts was understandable: they were perceived as the bases of national prosperity and national power. Economic historians and historians looking for economic explanations for the American Revolution, with a few honourable exceptions, tend to emphasise prosperity rather than power.[63] But that is to impose an anachronistic perspective. In the eighteenth century,

as in the seventeenth, politicians saw the Navigation Acts as vital both for trade and for naval strength. In the period 1763–1775, when to nervous MPs and peers at Westminster the Americans appeared to be trying to break out of the system created by the Acts, British politicians no doubt feared for the nation's economic well-being. But we can be confident that they worried equally about the Royal Navy, the country's safeguard against invasion and one of the foundations of Britain's standing amongst the European powers.

British anxieties were over-stated, or even groundless, as the subsequent history of the navy demonstrates. But those fears mean that we need to give the navy more prominence in the story of the coming of the American Revolution, and not just because it antagonised the colonists through its anti-smuggling activities. The British army has always had a starring role in the revolutionary drama.[64] The standard narrative of the breakdown in relations between Britain and the colonies starts at the end of the Seven Years War, with the London government's decision to base a permanent military garrison across the Atlantic, to be paid for partly by parliamentary taxation of the Americans. The army is nearly always seen as the root cause of the problem: no army in the colonies, no parliamentary taxes; no parliamentary taxes, no Stamp Act crisis; no Stamp Act crisis, no American Revolution. But, on the British side, at least, the navy was an equally important, if less conspicuous, player. It was an institution that anxious politicians in London prized as the guarantee of national security and power, and were determined to protect, even at the cost of going to war with the Americans.[65]

Notes

1. For a classic statement of the importance of the Navigation Acts, see George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1842–74), V, pp. 284–5. For a modern popular view, see the response in http://wiki.answers.com [accessed 28 May 2014] to the question 'How did the navigation acts lead to American revolution?'
2. The orthodoxy's origins lie in Lawrence Harper, 'The Effects of the Navigation Acts on the Thirteen Colonies', in Richard Morris, ed., *The Era of the American Revolution* (New York, 1939), pp. 3–39. For another key text, see Oliver Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1951).

3. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), p. 354.
4. See Larry Sawers, 'The Navigation Acts Revisited', *Economic History Review* 45 (1992), 262–84.
5. See Perry Gauci, ed., *Regulating the British Economy, 1660–1850* (Farnham, 2011); forum on 'Rethinking Mercantilism', in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 69 (2012), 3–70; Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, eds., *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2013).
6. Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, 'Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 68 (2011), 597–630.
7. For the navy's role in antagonising Americans, see Sarah Kinkel, 'The King's Pirates? Naval Enforcement of Imperial Authority, 1740–1776', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 71 (2014), 3–34.
8. Lynd and Waldstreicher mention British attitudes, but only (oddly) as a way of trying to illustrate American views: 'Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery', pp. 601–4.
9. See, for example, Michael Duffy, 'The Foundations of British Naval Power', in Michael Duffy, ed., *The Military Revolution and the State, 1500–1800* (Exeter, 1980), esp. p. 57; and the work of N. A. M. Rodger: 'Sea-Power and Empire, 1688–1793', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume 2. The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 169–83; 'Seapower and Empire: Cause and Effect?', in Bob Moore and Henk van Nierop, eds., *Colonial Empires Compared: Britain and the Netherlands, 1750–1850* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 97–111; and *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), esp. p. 180.
10. See, especially, Daniel A. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce: The Uses of "A Grand Maritime Empire"', in Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994), pp. 185–223.
11. See, for example, Gary M. Walton and James F. Shepherd, *The Economic Rise of Early America* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 64–9; Edwin J. Perkins, *The Economy of Colonial America* (New York, 1980), Chap. 2; Kenneth Morgan, 'Mercantilism and the British Empire, 1688–1815', in Donald Winch and Patrick O'Brien, eds., *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 168–9.
12. W. Noël Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574–1660* (London, 1860), p. 26.
13. For these laws, see Merrill Jensen, ed., *English Historical Documents: Volume 9. American Colonial Documents to 1776* (London, 1969), pp. 354–64.

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63. See, for example, Jacob M. Price, 'The Imperial Economy, 1700–1776', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 79; William J. Ashworth, *Customs and Excise: Trade, Production, and Consumption in England, 1640–1845* (Oxford, 2003), p. 35.
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Peace: Lord Bute, the Plan for the Army, and the Origins of the American Revolution', in Karl W. Schweizer, ed., *Lord Bute: Essays in Re-interpretation* (Leicester, 1988), pp. 17–39.

65. The logic of armed conflict to defend naval strength was apparent even to opponents of coercion. Erasmus Darwin, the Lichfield scientist and physician, wrote some years later: 'I hate war!—yet if we lose our colonies we lose our power at sea, for as Seamen cannot be *made*, but must be *educated* … I suppose the strength of any nation is exactly as the number of seamen they can employ in time of peace.' Erasmus Darwin to Charles Greville, 12 December 1778, in Desmond King-Hele, ed., *The Letters of Erasmus Darwin* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 94.

CHAPTER 5

The Royal Navy, the British Atlantic Empire and the Abolition of the Slave Trade

Christer Petley

In June 1805, Horatio Nelson was pursuing a French fleet in the Caribbean. He had been drawn across the Atlantic from the Mediterranean by his opponents as part of the complex naval campaign that concluded, some four months later, with his famous victory off Cape Trafalgar. Learning that the French Admiral Villeneuve had sailed with his fleet for the West Indies, Nelson 'was in a thousand fears for Jamaica', Britain's most productive and valuable colony in the region, knowing that a successful attack on the island was 'a blow which Bonaparte would be happy to give us'. His main concern was to locate Villeneuve's fleet and engage it in battle, but, while sailing in Caribbean waters, he also found time to reflect on the relationship between the British Isles and the British colonies of the region. Writing to a long-standing friend from his flagship, *Victory*, Nelson proclaimed, 'I have ever been and shall die a firm friend to our present colonial system', and went on:

> I was bred, as you know, in the good old school, and taught to appreciate the value of our West India possessions; and neither in the field or in the senate shall their interests be infringed whilst I have an arm to fight in their defence, or a tongue to launch in my voice against the damnable and cursed doctrine of Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies.

His correspondent was a sugar planter named Simon Taylor—a lynchpin in the transatlantic anti-abolitionist lobby that stood staunchly opposed to William Wilberforce's efforts to end the slave trade. Nelson confided to this

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_5

wealthy and influential colonial slaveholder his hope that 'kind Providence may some happy day bless my endeavours to serve the public, of which the West India colonies form so prominent and interesting a part'.[1] For a man who 'was often guarded' about what he wrote in his letters, this was a very open expression of views. To Nelson, the white British colonists of the Caribbean were part of the wider British public, the colonies themselves of intrinsic value to the British nation and abolitionism, personified by Wilberforce, 'cursed' and 'hypocritical'. But while they were forcefully put, such ideas were unexceptional, particularly among naval officers like Nelson, who had spent several years on one of the West Indian stations, forming strong affiliations with the white slaveholding colonists of the region.[2]

This chapter explores the sort of support for the British West Indian planters and opposition to abolitionism that Nelson expressed. It pays particular attention to the intersection between naval matters and the debate over the British slave system during the period between the 1780s and the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, arguing that apologia for the slave trade had a strong influence on debates about the future of the empire. These drew on deep-rooted principles about the value to the nation of the British colonies in the Caribbean and of the trade with the West Indies carried on by British merchant ships, part of a merchant marine that provided the expertise and manpower essential to the rapid and successful mobilisation of the Royal Navy. Such arguments in defence of the existing British slave system were articulated by a much broader constituency than just those with a direct material stake in colonial plantation slavery, and they served for a long time to rebut calls for reform. However, the Haitian Revolution, the British victory at Trafalgar and revisions to the abolitionists' arguments had all helped to neutralise the influence of such 'old school' naval arguments in defence of the slave trade by the time that Parliament finally abolished it in 1807.

To understand how the navy featured in the trans-imperial dispute about the slave trade, it is necessary to examine how statesmen and other commentators perceived the interwoven questions of British sea-power, national security and colonial affairs. We must therefore seek to draw connections among scholarship on naval history, imperial history and the history of abolition. Naval historians, including N. A. M. Rodger and Daniel Baugh, have studied how the British maritime system of overseas trade shaped naval policy and resulted in what Baugh calls a 'blue-water policy', in which the Royal Navy became Britain's first line of defence against foreign attack.[3] Kathleen Wilson, David Armitage and other histo-

rians interested in the relationship between Britain and its empire have written about the escalation of a British blue-water patriotism by the middle of the eighteenth century: a view of the empire that celebrated overseas commerce, maritime power and an extended British Atlantic community that included the inhabitants of the British Isles as well as transatlantic colonists.[4] There is also a rich scholarship on the ways in which that community tore itself apart in the era of the American Revolution and on the formation of new British patriotic imperial ideas and identities towards the end of the eighteenth century.[5] Such work provides valuable context for our understanding of the debate over the future of the British slave system, including the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and of slavery itself during the 1830s.

The abolition debates convulsed the British Atlantic world in the late 1780s and during the turbulent period that followed. These debates were informed by the blue-water ideals examined by Baugh, Wilson and Armitage, but while contemporaries were acutely aware that the navy was instrumental to the empire, and that naval affairs were of central importance to discussions about colonial slavery, few historians have studied this theme. Abolition has, of course, attracted a great deal of attention, but until fairly recently scholars have tended to concentrate on abolitionist organisations and arguments.[6] New studies by David Lambert, David Beck Ryden and Srividhya Swaminathan, among others, have focused instead on pro-slavery networks and rhetoric.[7] Such work has started to demonstrate how slaveholding planters, slave merchants and their allies had a profound influence on the debate through targeted lobbying and sophisticated arguments about the value and purpose of the West Indian colonies to the British empire. Other recent work has highlighted the ways in which the ideas and actions of enslaved people, not least during the period of the Haitian Revolution, shaped the British debate about slavery.[8] This chapter seeks to take this further by focusing on how anti-abolitionists mobilised potent ideas about the navy and national security in defence of the slave trade, and on how abolitionists adapted those arguments to their own purposes as the circumstances of the colonies changed during a period of war and revolution.

The Maritime Empire

The eighteenth-century British 'empire of the sea' was varied and changing—consisting principally of the British Isles themselves, West African and Asian trading posts and various American colonies, each context

undergoing alterations (and sometimes sudden transformations) in economic value, political arrangements and territorial extent. There was no single imperial project. Even though they conceived of the British Isles and transatlantic colonies as part of one large and complex system of commerce, governance and military power, British ministers and commentators disagreed over the relative importance of sections of the empire and over relations among them. As Chapter 4 by Stephen Conway in this volume demonstrates, conflicting ideas about the British Atlantic empire informed debates about the future of this broad transatlantic polity in the period of imperial crisis that preceded the American Revolution. That crisis and the conflict it produced were a major episode of what Steve Pincus identifies as an ongoing series of eighteenth-century debates 'over how best to organize and run the empire', which took place in the British Isles as well as across the Atlantic in the colonies.[9] And the struggle over the future of the British slave system was another important episode in this series of transatlantic British clashes about the character and trajectory of an empire that was, as Wilson puts it, a focus for a 'multiplicity of visions, aspirations and experience'.[10]

Despite this, there were legal frameworks and associated structures of thinking that gave shape and meaning to something that was otherwise continually changing and subject to debate. One thing that eighteenth-century Britons tended to agree about was that the success of their empire and the security of their nation were profoundly connected. Baugh notes that 'financial, maritime and naval capabilities were thoroughly interdependent', to the point that the empire served the navy just as much as the navy served the empire. The overseas empire was, for most of the eighteenth century, made up of trading posts and colonies that contemporaries tended to see as 'maritime', in the sense that their primary purpose was their contribution to British overseas commerce. Based around the seventeenth-century Acts of Navigation, this empire, despite undergoing rapid territorial expansion, remained—at least in the minds British government ministers—a commercial and maritime empire linked to the navy.[11]

The seventeenth-century Navigation Acts were an explicit and largely successful effort to institutionalise the relationship between empire and navy. The most important parts sought to ensure that commerce between British possessions was carried on in British ships manned by British crews. In return for trading in this exclusive way, colonial planters were given preferential treatment in home markets, where a system of protective duties gave their produce a virtual monopoly. Edmund Burke described

the Navigation Acts as 'the cornerstone of the policy of this country with regard to its colonies'.[12] Baugh has called them 'the backbone of policy in the Atlantic empire'.[13] Jacob Price argues that, in legal terms, the empire 'as an effective jurisdiction' was in fact the creation of the Navigation Acts. They established a legal framework controlling British transoceanic trade into what contemporaries often called the 'navigation system', which remained firmly in place until the nineteenth century.[14] This system was the product of concerns about keeping a strong navy and training sailors who could be called on to defend the nation, and it ensured that the value to Britain of its transatlantic colonies went far beyond profits for merchants and prospects for migrants. Rodger puts it like this:

> To a greater and greater extent, Britain's real wealth was generated, and seen to be generated, from a maritime system in which overseas trade created the income which paid for the Navy, merchant shipping trained the seamen which manned it, so that the Navy in turn could protect trade and the country.[15]

One of the fundamental assumptions of naval planning during the eighteenth century was that the expanding merchant marine acted as a nursery for British sailors, who could be pressed into national service when the country went to war. Rodger argues that 'few informed observers' would have disagreed with Lord Haversham on this question when he stated, in 1714, that 'Your trade is the mother and nurse of your seamen; your seamen are the life of your fleet; and your fleet is the security and protection of your trade: and both together are the wealth, strength and glory of Britain.'[16] In this formulation, 'the Atlantic empire was', as Baugh puts it, like 'a "back yard" in which the sinews of war were generated for use in the "front yard", that is to say, in Europe and European seas'.[17]

Desire for security and protection was heightened by the fact that Britain was a potentially vulnerable Protestant nation with powerful Catholic European neighbours. After 1688, British politicians were anxious to protect their Revolution Settlement of a constitutional Protestant monarchy, which seemed to ensure the much-vaunted liberties of British subjects: property rights, a powerful elected legislature and freedom before the law. For most of the eighteenth century, Britain was vulnerable to the wealth and military might of Catholic France, particularly when the French formed an alliance with Spain. The British army was only a medium-sized force by European standards, and no real match for

the large conscript armies of continental Europe. Debate raged over how much of her military resources Britain should commit to theatres of warfare on the European continent, particularly given the commitments there of Hanoverian monarchs. But despite such tensions, from the time of the Restoration, successive British governments recognised the Royal Navy as the nation's main line of defence—a point of pride for many Englishmen, who tended to associate large standing armies with Continental and Catholic despotism.[18]

Proud of their liberty, but fearful that it was insecure, Protestant Britons understood that the main purpose of their navy was to defend the nation. The primary role of the Royal Navy was therefore not as a tool for overseas expansion, but defence of the kingdom and the security of its commerce were nevertheless synonymous. The government invested heavily in defence of its maritime trade on the western side of the Atlantic, particularly in the Caribbean, sending fleets and troops to protect its West Indian colonies and their trade, as well as establishing naval bases and dockyards at Port Royal, Jamaica, and English Harbour, Antigua. After 1740, a Western Squadron patrolling the windward approaches to the English Channel became a key to English protection that also offered defence in wartime for merchant convoys returning from the colonies. During the eighteenth century, the Royal Navy grew larger with each successive war and impressed a rising share of seamen from a merchant marine, which was also experiencing rapid expansion due to the increasing volume of overseas trade, focused primarily on Britain's own colonies.[19] British naval strength was ultimately the product of economic strength, and duties on colonial exports entering Britain, along with excise levies on goods manufactured from colonial staples, boosted the coffers of a treasury whose primary concern was expenditure on the armed forces, especially the navy. The revenue accrued from colonial trade was therefore an important 'sinew' of British military might, helping to underpin the growth of the largest navy of any European power, which required continual and heavy reinvestment in order to remain seaworthy and ready for duty.[20] In these ways, colonies, trade and naval strength came to form a mutually reinforcing holy trinity to members of successive governments, intent on stimulating economic expansion and securing Protestant British freedoms at home and overseas.

Caribbean colonies were especially important within this system. North America directly provided some supplies for the Royal Navy, including pitch and tar, as well as trees used for masts, but the navy was more reliant on Baltic supplies for those items. Tobacco, rice, indigo, fur, flax, hides

and corn from North America, along with the North Atlantic fisheries, were all important branches of British Atlantic trade. But slave-grown Caribbean sugar was far more important than any of these. Between the 1750s and the 1820s, sugar was Britain's most valuable import, growing from 25,000 tons in 1710 to nearly 100,000 tons by the time of the American Revolution.[21] The West Indies accounted for about a fifth of all British imports and around 7% of the nation's exports. Caribbean trades, principally in exports of sugar, also helped to sustain important markets and industries in the metropole.[22] The sugar colonies of the West Indies were therefore at the centre of the eighteenth-century British empire and, as such, of calculations about colonial wealth and naval strength.

British commercial wealth and financial stability rested so heavily on the Caribbean sugar islands—especially Jamaica—that their defence in wartime took precedence over everything but protecting Britain itself.[23] French colonies in the region were just as important, if not more so, to France, which meant, as one contemporary put it, that 'whenever the nations of Europe are engaged … in war with each other' the colonies of the West Indies 'are constantly made the theatre of its operations'.[24] The great British fear was that France and Spain would seek to conquer Jamaica—a fear that might have become a reality in 1782, had Admiral Rodney not intercepted a French fleet intended for the island and defeated it at the Battle of the Saintes. Nelson's pursuit of Villeneuve's force to the Caribbean during the summer of 1805 offers another instance of this anxiety. Nelson suggested to the Admiralty that his decision to sail to the region in search of the French fleet had 'saved these Colonies, and two hundred and upwards of sugar-loaded Ships' from French attack.[25] He had followed Villeneuve without orders, but in the firm, and correct, belief that 'the Ministry cannot be displeased', knowing the value that the British government placed on protecting its interests in the Caribbean.[26]

Blue-Water Anti-Abolition

By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, over three million enslaved men, women and children had been taken across the Atlantic from Africa in British ships, most of them destined for British sugar colonies in the West Indies. About one in every ten of the people forced to endure the Middle Passage died before reaching the Americas, and many more died during the three-year 'seasoning' period that followed their arrival in the New World.[27] Most of the survivors went on to labour on colonial plantations.

Those vast properties were made up of hundreds of acres of sugar cane, along with the works buildings in which cane juice was turned into semi-refined muscovado sugar, ready for export to Europe. In Jamaica, even relatively small sugar plantations required a slave workforce of about 100 people, and on the largest estates there were over 500 enslaved workers. These properties relied on the transatlantic slave trade because their appalling living and working conditions ensured that deaths outnumbered births. Despite the forced arrival of over two-and-a-half-million enslaved people in the British colonies in the West Indies by the early nineteenth century, the overall slave population of these islands was only 750,000.[28] Demographic conditions on most of the islands were such that, without the supply from Africa to replenish or increase the captive workforce, the enslaved population would go into decline. The staggering wealth of the sugar islands in the Caribbean and their value to Britain therefore rested on the labours and sufferings of hundreds of thousands of enslaved people, and on a well-developed system of institutionalised manslaughter.

These colonies were also acutely unequal and unstable societies. They produced huge wealth for a small number of white colonials fortunate and skilful enough to become successful sugar planters, but they were sites of miserable and arduous labour for the majority of the population.[29] In most of the British island colonies, enslaved people outnumbered white colonials by a ratio of around ten to one, which meant that the wealthy or aspiring white inhabitants were a privileged but vulnerable minority, ever fearful of slave uprisings. Before the Haitian Revolution, local whites, assisted by imperial troops and naval support, succeeded in suppressing these uprisings, but large-scale revolts, such as the one that took place in Jamaica during 1760, had the potential to become threats as profound to the British imperial system as invasions by foreign powers.[30] For these reasons, Michael Duffy's description of the plantation colonies of the British Caribbean as a 'precarious money box' neatly summarises the status of these islands in the minds of British statesmen and administrators: sources of considerable commercial wealth, but acutely vulnerable to external attack or internal revolt.[31]

Supporters of the slaveholders took a view of the empire in which the slave system was essential to British prosperity and security, maintaining that the plantation colonies should receive every available means of support and defence from the mother country. In 1787, when a newly formed abolition society proposed an immediate end to the slave trade, they responded in robust fashion.[32] They claimed that slaves were content on

the plantations and better off there than in Africa. Planters presented themselves as humane managers who used punishments no worse than those regularly meted out within the British Army or Royal Navy. However, this defence enjoyed little success. Metropolitan British audiences had long been suspicious of slavery—seeing it as likely to inculcate the vices of despotism and luxury in masters—and they were easily persuaded by the moral case against the British slave system, particularly by the arguments against what most perceived to be its foulest element: the transatlantic slave trade.[33] Even planters, such as the pro-colonial polemicist and Jamaican slaveholder Bryan Edwards, admitted that 'the Slave Trade may be very wicked'.[34] Since a man so deeply invested in the slave system as Edwards found himself unable to defend slave trading in abstract moral terms, it is unsurprising that statesmen who sympathised with the planters also conceded the justice of abolitionist reasoning on this point. Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies and an opponent of abolition in Parliament, emphasised that 'the general principle of the slave trade' was 'incompatible with the justice and humanity of the British constitution'.[35] If morals alone had been at stake in the debate about the slave trade, the slaveholders would have swiftly lost it.

The slaveholders were on much stronger ground when they made pragmatic arguments about the importance of their maritime commerce, including the slave trade, to British wealth and to national security—in other words, when they made a blue-water defence of their system. As Michael Taylor comments, 'the argument that colonial trade fostered British navigation was a natural harbour for pro-slavery rhetoric', allowing polemicists to play on public and ministerial concerns about navigation, the navy and the defence of the realm.[36] The argument went that the commerce of the West Indian colonies needed the slave trade; Britain needed West Indian commerce; and so, therefore, Britain needed the slave trade. Or, as the author of an anti-abolitionist tract summarised things: 'the immediate abolition of the Slave Trade would be a measure ruinous to the Colonies, and of the greatest detriment ultimately to this country'.[37] It was an argument that spelled out the rationale behind the existing navigation system by pointing out that the protection of British liberties at home rested in part on the deracination of countless enslaved Africans.

'The peculiar protection of Great Britain is in her naval strength', claimed Simon Taylor, the Jamaican planter to whom Nelson wrote in 1805. In a memorandum for the Governor of Jamaica, Taylor explained that this strength depended 'on her commerce'. He argued that 'to maintain &

encrease her naval strength it is highly important to encourage the species of commerce, which while it produces a beneficial application of British manufactures, at the same time creates employment for the greater number of ships & seamen'. British trade with the West Indies therefore combined 'the means of benefitting at once the wealth & the naval strength of the mother country'.[38] Elsewhere, he presented a more sensational picture, arguing that abolition would destroy Caribbean export markets, without which, 'manufacturers and artisans should be thrown out of employ and when they are frantic with hunger and their wives and children are starving rise against government': a prediction that rested on a conviction that colonial maritime trade was the baseline for an interdependent, transatlantic British nation—a nation that faced defeat and anarchy if wrong-headed metropolitan reformers were allowed to attack the rudiments of its strength and independence.[39]

Planters rehearsed these arguments as part of the public debate about the future of the empire. For instance, in his *Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica* of 1790, the planter and travel writer William Beckford wrote:

> If abolition … shall take place, our interest in the West-India islands must be at an end, seventy millions of property will wear away with time, and be sunk at last: the revenue will suffer an annual diminution of three millions at least; the price of sugar, which is now become a necessary article of life, must be immediately enhanced; discontentment and dissatisfaction may dismember the empire.[40]

Edwards described his influential two-volume *History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, published three years later, as a 'political and commercial survey of his majesty's dominions in the West Indies; which … are become the principal source of the national opulence and maritime power'. He pointed out the 'vast dependance [*sic*] of the British West Indian colonies on their parent country, for almost every thing that is useful and ornamental to civilized life' and argued that 'every article of their products and returns' were 'in fact as truly British property, as the tin which is found in the mines of Cornwall'. He speculated:

> To what extent the naval power of Great Britain is dependant on her colonial commerce, it is difficult to ascertain. If this trade be considered in all its channels, collateral and direct, connected as it is with our fisheries, &c.

> perhaps it is not too much to affirm, that it maintains a merchant navy on which the maritime strength of the kingdom so greatly depends, that we should cease to be a nation without it.[41]

One of the most vocal friends of the planter class during the slave-trade debates, William Cobbett, described the British colonies in the West Indies as 'out-works to the kingdom'. These transatlantic bulwarks were 'ancient possessions' that had become 'so naturally and so firmly attached to the mother-country as to be, by foreign nations as well as by ourselves, regarded as part of England'. Cobbett encouraged his readers to look upon Caribbean slave islands as '*insular* colonies', situated at a convenient distance from the mother country, so that ships and men were always within easy reach of the Royal Navy, and without which 'England could not long maintain her naval power'.[42]

These arguments defended the slave trade, which made up no more than 3% of all British trade, by presenting it as a key to the much larger West Indian trade, which accounted for about a fifth of all imports and exports into the mother country.[43] The great strength of this patriotic argument against abolition lay in its congruity with the blue-water policies and ideologies of British politicians and large sections of the public, emphasising the connection between colonial trade, naval strength and the preservation of national sovereignty. By the start of the 1790s, despite the rapid rise of abolitionism, slave-traders and slaveholders had good reason to hope that this patriotic pragmatism would trump the abolitionists' sentimental rhetoric.

Abolition and Security

The blue-water defence of the transatlantic slave system made abolitionism appear dangerous. Flag officers from the Royal Navy who spoke against abolition at the 1790 House of Commons inquiry into the slave trade answered questions about whether they considered 'the ships employed in the French West India trade as one of the principal sources of the naval power of France', whether those French ships were large 'fine vessels' and 'well manned', and whether West Indian trade provided a 'nursery for seamen'. The seven officers responded that commercial navigation served the navies of each nation. Asked whether the slave trade should continue, they each responded in the same manner: by 'all means', 'unquestionably', 'without a doubt', 'certainly'.[44] The colonial agent for Jamaica, Stephen

Fuller, liaised with these men about their appearance at the enquiry and helped organise their testimony, calculating that such respected members of the British establishment, who had no obvious direct investment in the colonies, enhanced not only the arguments, but also the reputation of the campaign against abolition. In an encouraging letter to the elderly Admiral Barrington, Fuller estimated their contributions 'as of more consequence to the West India Islands, than all the rest of the Evidence put together'.[45] He well understood the power of friendly expert testimony from the Royal Navy at a time when Britain was locked in a naval arms race.

During the early 1790s, as the possibility of war with France loomed, the Admiralty and ministers were acutely nervous about naval strategy. The size and capabilities of the French navy, which had posed a serious challenge to the Royal Navy in every theatre of the recent American War of Independence, was a particular point of concern. The pro-planter lobby presented flourishing French commerce with the West Indies, particularly with the large and productive colony of Saint Domingue, as the main source of French marine capability, pointing out that, while the British parliament discussed abolition, the French government offered financial rewards to merchants who imported enslaved Africans into its colonies.[46] During the ensuing military struggle with Revolutionary France, the fear of revolution and of revolutionaries held back all types of reform in Britain, including the abolitionist cause, as several scholars have noted, but naval concerns were a serious impediment to abolition even before events in Paris took a radical turn, and the way the war was fought ensured that they remained a significant part of the debate.[47]

In 1793, when war broke out, the British government immediately focused on protecting its colonies and trade, while attacking those of the enemy. The main design of the British government, beyond the European theatre, was to the west, in the Caribbean, where Britain fought a decisive war of attrition against France at a heavy cost in money and lives. Between December 1795 and March 1796, the largest single overseas expeditionary force ever to leave Britain (comprising over 30,000 men) was dispatched to the region. One-third of that army perished during the deadly summer of 1796, mainly from yellow fever, in an effort that protected the British colonies as part of what Dundas, the government minister responsible for its planning, called a 'war for security'.[48] In 1799, Dundas reflected that 'Great Britain can at no time propose to maintain an extensive and complicated war but by destroying the colonial resources of our enemies and adding proportionately to our own commercial resources,

which are, and must ever be, the sole basis of our maritime strength'.[49] The principle that naval might and West Indian colonial commerce were intertwined was therefore as influential as ever in the calculations of the British ministry as the eighteenth century drew to a close and war with France raged on.

In 1796, Dundas urged Parliament not to vote for the abolition of the slave trade. He argued that such a significant imperial reform was not worth risking at a critical moment in the war. The Caribbean was affected by revolutionary ideas and uprisings, and Dundas argued that abolition could destabilise the British islands by encouraging enslaved people to expect further change and to seek self-emancipation through revolution. As such, although he claimed to be sympathetic to the abstract principles behind calls for an end to the slave trade, he thought abolition too dangerous to risk in practice.[50] His primary concerns appear to have been widely shared by Parliament. Despite the popularity of abolition in the House of Commons before the outbreak of hostilities in 1793, both Houses of Parliament rejected Wilberforce's motions during the war with Revolutionary France.

There were, nonetheless, rhetorical methods of squaring the abolition of the slave trade with the interests of British security and counter-revolution. In the Commons debates of 1792, Prime Minister Pitt—a firm and constant ally to his friend Wilberforce—rebutted planter claims about the incendiary threat of abolitionist campaigning. He mentioned 'the danger to which the islands are exposed from those negroes who are newly imported' and told the house that he was satisfied that, 'among the many arguments for prohibiting the Slave Trade', the fact that abolition would best preserve 'the security of our West India possessions against internal commotions, as well as foreign enemies, is among the most prominent and most forcible'. The reckless importation of many potentially rebellious enslaved Africans, he maintained, 'may annihilate in a single day the industry of a hundred years', and he did not want to expose the 'important interests' of the plantation economy in the sugar islands to further danger. War did not steer Pitt away from this view. At the height of the Caribbean campaign, he continued to advocate 'speedy and immediate abolition', believing that this was best 'with regard to the safety of the islands' as well as 'with a view to the cause of humanity and justice'.[51]

Pitt offered a prescient critique of the slave trade that sought to answer concerns harboured by conservatives like Dundas about the safety of the empire. He accepted that the security of British-Caribbean sugar plantations

was of fundamental importance to the nation at home. The loss of the Caribbean colonies would create an existential threat to Britain, and the revolution in Saint Domingue drove home the point that such loss could be inflicted not only through external attacks on British islands, but also by enslaved people within the colonies. Faith in the tried-and-tested system of navigation as a bulwark of British naval security therefore helped deter Parliament from meddling with the British slave trade at the height of the French Revolution, and while Britain was pitted against her bitterest international rival in a precarious Caribbean struggle. Pitt's arguments, however, showed that the blue-water patriotic defence of the Atlantic slave system was not quite watertight, offering a way to reconcile the interests of national security with the reform of a colonial system that had begun to look more vulnerable to internal revolts, and more in need than ever of far-reaching improvement.

Abolitionists understood that they had to remodel the ingrained assumptions of the imperial parliament in order to achieve change. On initiating the Commons debate over the slave trade, Wilberforce maintained that he wanted to appeal not to the 'passions' of his fellow MPs, but asked instead 'for their cool and impartial reason'. He argued that abolition was 'reconcilable with our truest political interest' and that an end to the slave trade need not spell disaster for the plantations or for Britain. Rather it would encourage West Indian planters to improve conditions on their properties so as to promote an increase in the slave population. Turning to the naval dimension of the problem, Wilberforce used evidence collected by his colleague Thomas Clarkson to demonstrate that the slave trade was not a nursery for British seamen, but 'their grave'. Defenders of the slave trade contended that the Royal Navy had to be prepared to sail in all latitudes with seasoned crews, but it was undeniable that slaving voyages were especially deadly. The white crews of the ships were heavily susceptible to disease during circumnavigation of the Atlantic. Arguments spun from such evidence were tightly woven with religious and moral concerns. Wilberforce presented slave trading as a cause of depravity among sailors 'taught to play the tyrant': a drain therefore on not only the physical strength but also the moral fibre of Britain's first line of national defence.[52] When he first offered these critiques, they were undermined by the size of the French colonial system and the threat of its navy, but as revolution tore down slavery and sugar production in the French islands of the Caribbean, and as Britain obtained a position of naval mastery over her old adversary, the situation changed to favour the

abolitionists. Between 1805 and 1806, the obvious impolicy of facilitating the colonial trade of enemy powers in wartime helped bring about the end of British slave trading to foreigners and to possessions conquered by Britain, but the new circumstances of a revolutionary Caribbean and British naval success also proved propitious to the campaign against the entire British slave trade.[53]

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, abolitionists were developing pragmatic arguments about the value of a reform to slavery for the defence of the British West Indies. These built on earlier anti-slavery arguments, including the suggestions of James Ramsay, a former naval surgeon, who, in an influential essay of 1784, had argued that it was possible to augment British strength and wealth by turning enslaved people in the Caribbean into 'useful fellow-citizens'. A reformed system of slavery would limit the powers of slaveholders and provide rights to enslaved labourers, turning them from discontented drudges into a loyal and productive workforce, labouring for the benefit of Britain and able to contribute to the defence of the colonies.[54] In 1802, the abolitionist James Stephen reprised those arguments in an influential essay in response to Napoleon's Caribbean armada of the same year. The huge French expedition aimed to reinstate slavery in the French empire and reverse the revolution in Saint Domingue.[55] It had sailed unopposed by the British during the fragile Peace of Amiens, but Stephen knew that when war resumed between Britain and France (as it did in May 1803), so too would another round of Caribbean conflict, and he wrote about the threat that this French force would then present to the British colonies. He suggested that the best way to prepare was to improve the conditions of enslaved people, in order to encourage them to remain loyal if conscripted to fight an invasion force. It was a solution that promised to avoid the huge costs of sending white British soldiers and seamen to the Caribbean, while continuing to 'attain the end' for which the lives of such men had 'been hitherto sacrificed so freely', namely propping up 'those rich colonies' of the Caribbean colonial empire and, with it, the British war effort.[56]

Stephen's work played upon longstanding concerns about the importance to Britain of the Caribbean colonies. It also drew on new assumptions about the future of the British empire in the Caribbean. The agency of enslaved people, as rebels or potential rebels, made it increasingly obvious that the slave system of the region was inherently unstable. In the 1780s, French colonies had produced more sugar than the British islands. But a decade of revolution had demonstrated how a European

power could lose control of valuable sugar colonies to internal insurrections, a lesson underlined in 1804, when Napoleon's expeditionary force was finally defeated by the former slaves of Saint Domingue under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who declared independence and renamed the country Haiti. To enslaved people elsewhere, this was inspirational; to slaveholders, it was deeply disturbing. For administrators interested in governing the British empire, the fate of Saint Domingue now offered a cautionary tale. Moreover, years of Caribbean warfare had shown that the cost of defending the colonies of the region with white British troops was so high that it was difficult to think of it as sustainable in the long term. By the time that Stephen wrote his essay, ending the slave trade seemed to offer partial solutions to those problems. It was certainly difficult for administrators in London to see how abolition could make the situation in the British Caribbean more precarious. Perhaps ending an unpopular trade that accounted for a small part of the nation's overall commerce could be risked without serious damage to the much larger trade with the West Indies, particularly given that self-sustaining enslaved populations existed in parts of the Caribbean, and some planters, nettled by abolitionist critiques, showed willingness to institute reforms that could enable births to exceed deaths elsewhere.[57]

Those sympathetic to abolitionism in government believed that ending the slave trade was the best way to effect what Stephen called an 'interior reformation' to master–slave relations within the colonies, forcing slaveholders to improve the conditions of their slaves.[58] Several influential observers argued that this would help to create a more tractable enslaved population. In 1804, the Under Secretary for the Colonies, Edward Cooke, predicted that the British parliament would soon end the slave trade, and speculated that enslaved people born in the Caribbean were less likely to rebel than newly arrived Africans. Cooke wrote to the Governor of Jamaica, informing him that although the most recent abolitionist bill had stalled in the House of Lords, it would certainly be reintroduced to Parliament and passed in a later session. He noted that the ending of the slave trade 'is not likely to interfere with the immediate interests of the planters of Jamaica to any great degree' and summarised his argument by stating:

> The disparity of numbers which exists between the whites and blacks is not likely to undergo any great alteration & the influence of a free black government in St Domingo may be always dangerous; the extinction therefore of

> that class of slaves on whose fidelity there is no reason to rely, and the propagation of those alone who by habits of infancy, childhood and education, are susceptible of attachment appears to be the securest system.[59]

The Haitian Revolution had therefore helped persuade the metropolitan government to reconsider the importance of security in their Caribbean colonies. A year later, the colonial secretary, Earl Camden, took the same line as Cooke. He thought that the best way for Jamaica to avoid an internal revolution was to 'prevent the necessity of importing fresh Negroes from Africa, whose minds cannot be softened by any principles of attachment to their masters', and when he introduced the Abolition Bill to the House of Lords in February 1807, the new prime minister, William Grenville, devoted a large part of his speech to these themes. Holding up the example of Saint Domingue as a warning to planters, he told them that 'the danger is at your own door' and was best avoided by 'obstructing the importation of more Slaves'. His speech focused on the threat to the sugar colonies from dangerous 'internal foes', but argued that ceasing slave importations would result in a state of society 'where the happiness of its members is consulted', where 'order and regularity will prevail'.[60] This case rested, as David Ryden, concludes, on the idea that the measure 'would further the cause of humanity at no expense to Empire or planter'. Grenville was committed to the moral cause of abolition and described the slave trade as 'the greatest injustice … by which the annals of mankind can possibly be disgraced'. But he also knew that pragmatic arguments were required to persuade a conservative Upper House, which had dashed abolitionist hopes time after time. The Lords approved his proposed bill in a vote of 100 to 34; it easily passed through the Commons, and received royal assent on 25 March 1807.[61]

Conclusion

On 21 February 1807, two days before the motion for abolition was debated in the House of Commons, the full text of Nelson's letter to Simon Taylor, sent from *Victory* in the Caribbean during the Trafalgar campaign, appeared in William Cobbett's *Political Register*.[62] Cobbett was connected to Taylor through George Hibbert, an MP and London merchant heavily invested in West Indian sugar and slavery.[63] Facing near-certain defeat in Parliament over the question of the slave trade, this anti-abolitionist network attempted to invoke the heroic reputation of

Lord Nelson, who, since his death at Trafalgar 16 months earlier, had been transfigured in the public imagination from a celebrated military hero into a patriotic martyr.[64] Opponents of abolition clearly hoped that Nelson's 'old school' views—valuing the West India colonies, opposing Wilberforce and deriding abolitionist ideas—could still shape the debate. They continued to argue that the slave trade was an integral part of the British navigation system. As the bill sailed through Parliament, Hibbert pointed out that British trade to and from the Caribbean employed nearly a thousand ships and more than 17,000 sailors. 'There could be no question', he concluded, 'as to the beneficial influence' of this 'upon our maritime, commercial, and naval prosperity'.[65] By 1807, however, those points had ceased to be effective in defence of the slave trade. Instead, it was its abolition that seemed increasingly to offer likely solutions to the problem of securing valuable but vulnerable colonial assets, and not even Nelson's mighty reputation could prevent it.

In his letter to Taylor, Nelson had claimed that the success of Wilberforce and his allies 'would certainly cause the murder of all our friends and fellow-subjects in the colonies'.[66] Taylor had earlier told Nelson that the outcome of the abolition debates 'will decide whether in future Britain shall have West India colonies or not or whether 80 millions sterling and the lives of all the white people in them are to be sacrificed'.[67] When the news of abolition finally reached the aged Taylor in Jamaica, he interpreted it as an act of betrayal and self-harm: the result of 'a madness persuading the minds of People at home' that would eventually 'annihilate the colonies' and 'most materially injure' the mother country.[68]

The ending of the slave trade did contribute to the economic decline of the sugar industry in the British Caribbean colonies, and it provided the context for new forms of slave resistance. But the apocalyptic visions of the anti-abolitionists did not materialise. Deprived of new captive labourers from Africa, most planters failed to find effective ways to encourage population growth and resorted instead to extracting as much labour as possible from their dwindling workforce. In Jamaica, the largest British sugar producer, they struggled to maintain pre-abolition levels of output, and, by the end of the 1820s, the Jamaican economy was in crisis, although this did not have the predicted effect of hurting metropolitan Britain, where industrialisation was in full flow, and whose overseas trade and empire were expanding on other frontiers.[69] The post-war years witnessed a series of uprisings and protests in the British Caribbean led not by newly arrived Africans, but by enslaved people who had been born in the colonies.

These events demonstrated that it was not simply the slave trade but the institution of slavery itself that created conditions for social unrest, and they influenced the debates that led to the ending of slavery in the empire during the 1830s.[70] None of those outcomes had been foreseen or desired by Members of Parliament when they voted to end the slave trade. They hoped that they were strengthening the slave system in a valued branch of the British empire, and it was only with hindsight that the Abolition Act of 1807 came to be understood as a step on the road to full emancipation.

Historians of abolition have long debated whether Parliament ended the British slave trade for moral or economic reasons. One of the questions at stake in these discussions is whether Britain abolished the trade out of altruism, or because it seemed somehow to be in the national interest.[71] In fact, contemporaries did not tend to make much of a distinction. Legislators and administrators accepted the immorality of human trafficking, but required reassurance that abolishing it would not undermine the nation's economic and maritime strength. For a time, anti-abolitionists made effective use of arguments based around entrenched blue-water principles, pointing out that the power of the navy and the defence of British liberties at home depended on the financial and maritime contributions of colonial commerce, including the slave trade. But revolution in the French Caribbean and the achievement of British naval mastery helped abolitionists to present the end of the slave trade as a safe measure, one which they claimed would shore up, rather than upset, the relationship between the slave colonies and the British metropole. Abolition was possible in 1807 because it was a popular measure, not just with the public, but within elite circles. It passed through Parliament thanks to the effective marshalling of religious, humanitarian and pragmatic arguments, under a sympathetic ministry, at a time when a unilateral reform appeared to offer no obvious threat to British interests and when fear of insurrection underlined the desirability of reform. It makes sense, therefore, as Philip Morgan remarks, to see the ending of the slave trade as a consequence of 'a coalescence of interests and ideology rather than as a triumph of ideology over interests'.[72]

The debate over the ending of the slave trade was defined in large part by blue-water ideals about maritime colonial trade and the national interest that had developed since the seventeenth century. These principles retained their power into the nineteenth century, in ways that sometimes provided a common grammar of understanding to competing British points of view on the slave trade, part of the intricate set of discursive overlaps that, as Swaminathan has noted, are easy to miss within a hostile

dialectic.[73] The old British Atlantic system of colonial preference and Navigation Acts remained in place in 1807, and although some abolitionist campaigners took a more radical and principled stance, the men who engineered the passage of the Abolition Act through Parliament sought to reform the old empire, not to destroy it. Moreover, the abolition of the slave trade became a feasible prospect thanks in part to the success of the old navigation system and the pursuit of blue-water British war aims. What Duffy calls a 'naval Armageddon'—in which the Royal Navy confiscated the colonies, choked the commerce and crushed the sea-power of Britain's European rivals—brought 'a decisive end to an era of 250 years of European maritime imperial rivalry' and the beginning of a definitive British global ascendancy, allowing Britain to take the lead on abolition.[74] Therefore, one of the unforeseen consequences of Nelson's 'endeavour to serve the public' during the wars with France was to provide conditions conducive to the eventual success of Wilberforce and his 'doctrine', something he did not hope for, but which remain part of his legacy nonetheless.

Acknowledgements
Some of the research presented in this chapter was funded by an AHRC Early Career Fellowship, held at the University of Southampton between 2011 and 2012 (Ref.: AH/I027290/1). The author is grateful to Roger Knight for advice about Nelson's correspondence and to John McAleer for his comments on earlier versions of the chapter.

Notes

1. Horatio Nelson to Simon Taylor, HMS *Victory* off Martinique, 11 June 1805, printed in John Knox Laughton, ed., *The Naval Miscellany* (London, 1902), I, pp. 438–9. Another version, redacting the reference to Wilberforce, appears in Nicholas Harris Nicolas, ed., *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, 7 vols. (London, 1844–46), VI, pp. 450–1. On Taylor, see Richard B. Sheridan, 'Simon Taylor, Sugar Tycoon of Jamaica, 1740–1813', *Agricultural History* 45 (1971), 285–96.
2. Roger Knight, 'Pursuing Nelson', *The RUSI Journal* 151 (2006), 70. Nelson's first long sea voyage, at the age of 12, was to the West Indies in a merchant ship. He spent many of his formative years in the Royal Navy in the region, and in 1787 married Frances Nisbet, niece of a Nevis sugar planter. Roger Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory: The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson* (London, 2006), pp. 26–7, 43–117. See also the chapter by

Siân Williams in this volume. In 1796, Nelson wrote to his old naval patron, William Locker, expressing displeasure about Wilberforce 'meddling again with the slave trade'. Nelson to Locker, HMS *Agamemnon*, Genoa Mole, 4 March 1796, in Nicolas, ed., *Dispatches and Letters*, II, p. 131.

3. See N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004); Daniel A. Baugh, 'Great Britain's "Blue-Water" Policy, 1689–1815', *The International History Review* 10 (1988), 33–58; Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce: The Uses of "a Grand Marine Empire"', in Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994), pp. 185–223.
4. Kathleen Wilson, 'Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon', *Past and Present* 121 (1988), 74–109; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).
5. For Atlantic perspectives on the American Revolution, see Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the American War of Independence* (Oxford, 2000). On British thinking about empire in the aftermath of the American War, see P. J. Marshall, 'Britain Without America – A Second Empire?', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume 2. The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 576–95; Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).
6. For examples, see Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1975); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (1975; Oxford, 1999); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1987); John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Antislavery: The Mobilisatition of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995).
7. David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, 2005). David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783–1807* (Cambridge, 2009); Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759–1815* (Farnham, 2009).
8. See Claudius Fergus, '"Dread of Insurrection': Abolitionism, Security, and Labor in Britain's West Indian Colonies, 1760–1823', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 66 (2009), 757–80; Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).
9. Steve Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 69 (2012), 34.

10. Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2002), p. 15.
11. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', p. 186. See also Stephen Conway, 'Empire, Europe and British Naval Power', in David Cannadine, ed., *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain's Maritime World, c.1763–c.1840* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 22–40.
12. Quoted in Conway, 'Empire, Europe and British Naval Power', p. 35.
13. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', p. 192.
14. Jacob M. Price, 'The Imperial Economy, 1700–1776', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 78.
15. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 180.
16. Quoted in Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 180.
17. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', p. 203.
18. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, 1992); Baugh, 'Great Britain's "Blue-Water" Policy'.
19. N. A. M. Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire, 1688–1793', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empir*e, pp. 170, 175–6; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, pp. 302, 319; Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce', p. 196.
20. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989); François Crouzet, 'The British Economy at the time of Trafalgar: Strengths and Weaknesses', in David Cannadine, ed., *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and its Afterlife* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 7. See also Martin Daunton, 'The Fiscal-Military State and the Napoleonic Wars: Britain and France Compared', in Cannadine, ed., *Trafalgar in History*, p. 19.
21. See Price, 'Imperial Economy', figures at p. 81.
22. Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War Against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 15–16; John McCusker, 'The Economy of the British West Indies, 1763–1790', in John McCusker, *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World* (London, 1997), p. 316.
23. See Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), p. 208; Michael Duffy, 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 190.
24. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies: Third Edition, with Considerable Additions*, 3 vols. (London, 1801), III, p. 433.
25. Nelson to William Marsden, Esq, Admiralty, 12 June 1805, in Nicolas, ed., *Dispatches and Letters*, VI, p. 453.
26. Nelson to Taylor, 11 June 1805, in Laughton, ed., *The Naval Miscellany*, I, pp. 438–9.

27. See 'Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave-Trade Database', http://www.slavevoyages.org [accessed 12 January 2015]. On 'seasoning', see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), pp. 49–51.
28. 'Voyages Database'; J. R. Ward, 'The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748–1815', in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 433.
29. See Trevor Burnard, '"Prodigious Riches": The Wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution', *Economic History Review* 54 (2001), 506–24; Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (Cambridge, 2013).
30. Thousands of enslaved people were involved in the fighting during the Jamaican revolt, usually referred to as Tacky's revolt after one of the leaders. It was, according to Trevor Burnard, the biggest single shock to the British imperial system before the American Revolution. Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), pp. 10, 170–1.
31. Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, p. 3.
32. For an overview of proslavery arguments in this period, see Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, pp. 191–203.
33. On the arguments of this period and British attitudes towards slavery, see Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*; Brown, *Moral Capital*.
34. Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London, 1793), II, p. 35.
35. William Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* 32 (1796), col. 751.
36. Michael Taylor, 'Conservative Political Economy and the Problem of Colonial Slavery, 1823–1833', *The Historical Journal* 57 (2014), 992.
37. Anon., *Observations on Slavery and the Consumption of the Produce of the West India Islands* (London, 1792), p. 4.
38. Nugent Papers, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica, MS72 (NLJ), 'Calculations of Mr Simon Taylor'.
39. Taylor to George Hibbert, Kingston, 11 May 1798, Taylor Family Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, London (ICS), I/B/21.
40. William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica Island*, 2 vols. (London, 1790), II, pp. 315–16.
41. Edwards, *History* (1793), I, p. iii; II, pp. 365–6, 375.
42. *Political Register*, 7 July 1804, col. 11; 18 January 1806, cols. 65–6; 16 February 1805, cols. 225, 237.
43. For trade figures, see Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (1977; Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), p. 21.
44. 'Minutes of Evidence on the Slave Trade', *House of Commons Sessional Papers*, vol. 72 (1790), Part 2, pp. 404–80.

45. Michael W. McCahill, ed., *The Correspondence of Stephen Fuller, 1788–1795: Jamaica, The West India Interest at Westminster and the Campaign to Preserve the Slave Trade* (London, 2014), pp. 134, 136–7.
46. Anon., *The Slave Trade Indispensable: In Answer to the Speech of William Wilberforce, Esq. On the 13th of May, 1789. By a West India Merchant* (London, 1790), pp. 15–16; 'Minutes of Evidence', pp. 469–70.
47. On the political impact of the French Revolution, see Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 276–8; Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, p. 437; Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, p. 198.
48. Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, pp. 370, 374–5; Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* 32 (1796), col. 752.
49. Quoted in Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, p. 371.
50. Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 32 (1796), cols. 751–3.
51. Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 29 (1792), cols. 1143–4; 32 (1796), cols. 894–5.
52. Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 28 (1791), cols. 55–7. For defences of the slave trade as a nursery of seamen, see Anon., *Slave Trade Indispensable*, p. 67; 'Minutes of Evidence', p. 476.
53. On the abolition of the trade to foreign and conquered territories, see Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 442–4; Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 346–57, 364–76.
54. James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), quote at p. 293.
55. For an overview of the expedition and of the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), especially pp. 251–301.
56. James Stephen, *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies; or, an Enquiry into the Objects and Probable Effects of the French Expedition to the West Indies; and Their Connection with the Colonial Interests of the British Empire* (London, 1802), quotes at pp. 115, 120. On the influence of Stephen and new pragmatic abolitionist arguments, see John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 165–9.
57. Philip Morgan, 'Ending the Slave Trade: A Caribbean and Atlantic Context', in Derek R. Peterson, ed., *Abolition and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens, OH, 2010), pp. 105–10.
58. Stephen, *Crisis*, p. 121.
59. Edward Cooke to George Nugent, Downing Street, London, 1 August 1804, NLJ.
60. Camden to Nugent, Downing Street, 9 February 1805, NLJ; *Substance of the Debates on the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (London, 1808), pp. 14, 20.
61. Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, p. 257; *Substance of the Debates*, p. 3; Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 396.

62. *Political Register*, 21 February 1807, col. 296. Curiously, Cobbett chose to redact the name 'Wilberforce' from Nelson's diatribe, perhaps conscious of the sensitivities that he could arouse by the posthumous publication of a private letter in a public debate.
63. Hibbert to Taylor, London, 1 August 1804, ICS, XVII/A/55.
64. See Knight, *Pursuit of Victory*, pp. 525–58.
65. George Hibbert, *Substance of Three Speeches in Parliament on the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and on the Petition Respecting the State of the West-India Trade, in February and March, 1807* (London, 1807), p. 53.
66. Nelson to Taylor, 11 June 1805, in Laughton, ed., *The Naval Miscellany*, I, pp. 438–9.
67. Taylor to Nelson, Kingston, 15 October 1802, British Library, Egerton MS1623.
68. Taylor to Hibbert, Kingston, 18 June 1807, ICS, I/I/29.
69. On Jamaican economic decline and labour practices after abolition, see Drescher, *Econocide*, pp. 142–61; Barry W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807–1833* (Cambridge, 1976); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, MD, 1992), pp. 118–19.
70. The most significant uprisings were in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1831). See Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), pp. 241–321; Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts.*
71. See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944); Roger Anstey, 'A Re-interpretation of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade, 1806–1807', *English Historical Review* 87 (1972), 304–32; Drescher, *Econocide*; Ryden, *West Indian Slavery.*
72. Morgan, 'Ending the Slave Trade', p. 121.
73. Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, p. 171.
74. Duffy, 'World-Wide War', p. 203.

CHAPTER 6

At War with the 'Detestable Traffic': The Royal Navy's Anti-Slavery Cause in the Atlantic Ocean

Mary Wills

The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 signalled an abrupt end to Britain's dominance in the trade of captive Africans forcibly transported across the Atlantic for sale in the Americas. To enforce the legislation, a squadron of Royal Navy vessels was dispatched to patrol the West African coastline and intercept and detain British slave ships which continued to trade in enslaved people. The West Africa squadron was active for the next 60 years, as Britain exerted increasing diplomatic pressure on other nations to end the slave trade, and secured treaties that granted the Royal Navy the power to seize foreign slave ships and to liberate the enslaved Africans found on board. The British colony of Sierra Leone developed as a base for the squadron and as a settlement for these recaptives. Nearly 200,000 Africans were released by the West Africa squadron during the period of its operation, although this is a relatively small share of the estimated 3.2 million Africans who embarked as slaves from West Africa between 1808 and 1863.[1]

This was an entirely new role for the Royal Navy, extending the scope and expectations of Britain's maritime supremacy. The primacy of the slave trade and the institution of slavery in the British Atlantic world prior to 1807 have been well-documented, and the Royal Navy is an ever-present part of this history. This volume has provided numerous examples of the navy's role in the various transatlantic trades, exchanges and interactions

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_6

in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As detailed in Chap. 2 by Siân Williams, for example, British naval strategy in the eighteenth century was heavily focused on the West Indies, to protect the valuable sugar industry built on slave labour. Furthermore, the slave trade's defenders in the 1780s and 1790s argued that the ships of the trade offered an important 'nursery' for British seamen.[2]

The Abolition Act overturned this relationship, and yet the Royal Navy retained a pivotal role, tasked now with policing and enforcing the abolitionists' vision, as chief persecutors of the transatlantic slave trade. Although suppression of the slave trade also took place in the Caribbean, the main theatre of the navy's interaction with the slave trade was thus relocated to the points of embarkation for enslaved Africans on the West African coast.[3] Britain possessed a vast territorial empire by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the dominance of the Royal Navy was regarded as an integral part of the coercive forces of the state.[4] The navy's role in suppression of the slave trade was, however, coercion of a very unusual enemy, and imbued with a high moral purpose. Revolutionary forces in the former North American colonies, France and Haiti had transformed the relationship between nation and empire, and the histories of Britain's 'age of abolition' are woven through these tumultuous times.[5] In 1807, the dominant narrative which emerged with regard to Britain's place in the changing Atlantic world was that of the world's leading abolitionist state and the principal emancipator of enslaved Africans, providing a morally just example for the rest of the world to follow. This elevated moral agenda had a significant impact on subsequent British ideas of 'improvement' for West Africa and its peoples, and justified the expanding British presence there. It also contributed to new, morally righteous validations for the navy in its role in policing and protecting the Atlantic empire, in periods of peace as well as war.

This chapter examines the role of the first naval officers tasked with delivering British abolitionist policy on the West African coast.[6] The voices of individual officers have thus far been largely excluded from broader narratives of anti-slavery and empire, and yet their testimonies simultaneously support and challenge some of the received views of Britain's anti-slavery cause in the Atlantic world.[7] Their accounts can be added to recent concepts of maritime history, which have been re-framed to include the navy's role as a social and cultural institution with a defining presence in overseas territories. These narratives challenge the assumption that seafarers were peripheral to and insulated from British social and cultural history.[8] This

chapter examines, first, the hopes and difficulties of the Royal Navy's task in this early phase of slave-trade suppression. Second, it explores naval officers' encounters with the slave trade and their beliefs in the abolitionist cause. The final section discusses how naval suppression was one part of what became a broader British anti-slavery assault on the West African coast, a moral and cultural crusade to put an end to the slave trade by reforming West African society. In these ways, it is possible to explore the role of naval officers in the evolving relationship between nation and Atlantic empire, and their contributions to the transatlantic exchange of information about the slave trade that was crucial to Britain's early abolition efforts.

A New Role

While the West Africa squadron was not formally established until 1818, a Royal Navy presence on the 'slave coast' was regarded as essential as soon as the implications of the Abolition Act became clear. The majority of the legal clauses of the Act concerned the system of seizure and prosecution of illegal slave ships, and it fell to the navy to prevent illicit British traders leaving the coast. The British colony of Sierra Leone served as the headquarters for anti-slave-trade operations. The establishment of a British colony on the West African coast was first envisaged by abolitionists such as Granville Sharp in the 1780s, as a counterpoint to the slave societies of the West Indies. The Sierra Leone Company was incorporated in 1791 by members of the Clapham Sect, the influential group of British philanthropists and social reformers. Their vision was for Sierra Leone and its borderlands to be transformed by 'legitimate' trade (as non-slave-based trade was termed), agriculture and the example of self-improvement. This experiment in abolitionist policy, it was hoped, would undermine the institution of slavery. However, the new settlement and its population (enlarged by 'resettled' members of London's 'black poor', black loyalists from Nova Scotia and Jamaican Maroons) were beset with problems and, as a result, in 1807 the British government declared Sierra Leone a Crown colony.[9]

It soon became clear that new resources were required to check the continuing slave trade. A Vice-Admiralty Court was constituted in the capital, Freetown, for the trial and adjudication of slave ships captured as prizes by the Royal Navy. Sierra Leone authorities became responsible for the resettlement of recaptives from captured slavers, the majority of whom remained in Freetown.[10] From 1819, international anti-slave-trade

courts, the Courts of Mixed Commission, were constituted there too.[11] Britain's maintenance of the colony was supported in humanitarian terms, as an exemplification of Britain's national honour, and as a statement of abolitionist intent to European rivals. Furthermore, as Seymour Drescher has argued, and as shall be explored later in this chapter, early British involvement in Sierra Leone highlighted the potential for 'social engineering' overseas.[12]

Captain Edward Columbine was one of the first British naval officers employed in suppressing the slave trade on the West African coast. His initial employment was as one of three commissioners charged by the British government with completing a survey from the Gambia to the Gold Coast. His description of the terms of his appointment reveals new British priorities in the region, for, in addition to an examination of settlements, the commission was tasked 'to devise such means … for carrying into effect the benevolent purpose of the legislature in the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade'.[13] Columbine's appointment was presumably attributable to his hydrographical experience; he spent part of his early career on the West Indies station, making surveys of St John's, Antigua and Trinidad.[14] As a commissioner, however, Columbine was under government rather than Admiralty instruction. The resulting change in priorities was made clear in a letter from William Wilberforce to Lord Liverpool in 1809, informing the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies that Columbine and other commissioners had yet to receive instructions for 'the best means of promoting civilization'. Wilberforce added that Columbine had received some Admiralty guidance, for 'a survey of the coast in a nautical way', but described this as 'a mere nothing'.[15]

That naval officers were expected to fulfil a role in West Africa that went beyond the 'nautical' was made clear when Columbine was subsequently appointed governor of Sierra Leone in 1809, tasked with administration of the colony and taking charge of naval operations. It was not until 1818 that the West Africa squadron's first commodore, Sir George Ralph Collier, was appointed. Collier's introduction to his report to the Admiralty in 1820 reveals the multifaceted nature of the role of British naval officers on the coast during this early period of suppression. It also makes clear Collier's initiative and willingness to engage with Britain's wider abolitionist remit, as he acknowledged that his report 'may be thought to embrace many subjects unconnected with the duties of a naval officer'. Nevertheless, he hoped that:

> viewing the increase of our African Colonial prosperity, as the best pledge for the freedom of Africa, their Lordships will receive every communication I make, and information I offer, however trivial, as embracing these combined objects, viz. the general improvement of our western African colonies, and the completion of that desirable result, the abolition of slave trading.[16]

In order to perform their roles effectively, officers like Columbine and Collier were expected to inform the Admiralty and government on the development of the British presence in West Africa. In Collier's case, and alongside the best means for suppression, his insights included detail on relationships in the settlements, different African peoples and the potential for lawful enterprise and establishment of further British territories.

Both Columbine and Collier were also closely connected to the African Institution, founded in 1807 by British abolitionists in order to support the suppression of the slave trade and to promote the 'civilisation' of Africa.[17] The Institution had considerable influence over the colony's administration and the government's abolitionist agenda in West Africa.[18] Its networks also extended to the navy, demonstrating how pivotal they perceived the navy's role to be. The *Report of the Directors* of 1812 described how members of the African Institution 'have been assiduous in their endeavours to excite the attention of naval officers on the subject of the slave trade'.[19] The annual reports are full of correspondence with naval officers relating to the trade in 'human wretchedness', and discussions of methods to put an end to it. Several officers, including Columbine and Collier, are also included in their lists of subscribers.[20] Alongside the African Institution, colonial governors and consuls and, from 1819, the Slave Trade Department of the Foreign Office, naval officers were part of this emerging 'permanent anti-slave-trade bureaucracy', to use David Eltis's phrase.[21]

The primary task of naval officers to suppress the trade in captive Africans leaving 3000 miles of West African coast was severely limited, however. A small naval force of two frigates and other smaller vessels under Columbine's command captured and condemned several slave ships but, as Britain was still at war, a permanent squadron did not operate until after 1815. 'If I had a few tenders', Columbine wrote in 1809, 'I would very soon put an end to this traffic'.[22] Even by 1818, however, Commodore Collier only had six vessels under his command.[23] There were notable successes: for example, Captain Scobell of HMS *Thais* destroyed a slave factory at Cape Mesurado in 1813, rescuing 230 enslaved Africans captured

by British slave traders John Bostock and Thomas Macquin.[24] However, with such few ships, the squadron had little chance of making an impact on the Atlantic trade in enslaved peoples, which was flourishing in the early nineteenth century. Slave dealers defiantly continued their trade in response to the significant increase in demand for slaves from the owners of coffee and sugar plantations in Brazil and Cuba. Columbine explained the motivations of those involved: 'The temptation is too great for the generality of the mercantile world to withstand. A slave which will not cost above 18 or 20£ here, is worth 90£ at the Havannah'.[25]

Difficulties also arose because of the ambiguity of the laws under which naval crews operated. The Act of 1807 was far from decisive: further acts and treaties successfully discouraged British subjects from slave trading, but the main trading nations—particularly Portugal, Spain and France—persisted in slaving ventures. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British exercised the rights they claimed as belligerents to intercept and search enemy ships. Since their enemies included France, Holland and Spain, suppression of their respective slave trades also became a legitimate aim. Both Denmark and the United States had moved to ban their citizens from slave trading, in 1803 and 1808 respectively, so the Royal Navy searched these ships for slaves, although with dubious legality, particularly as the United States refused to sign joint treaties providing for the mutual search and seizure of slave ships.[26] Some American and British traders breached the new laws by sailing under the flags of other European nations. Columbine described the schooner *Doris*, captured in 1810, as 'an American from Charlestown … but under fictitious Spanish papers'. Pinning down the true nationality of the owner became even more problematic when it transpired that he was 'a vassal of H[is] Britannic Majesty, lately a merchant at Henley in Oxfordshire'.[27]

With the advent of peace in 1815, the Foreign Office was successful in inserting an anti-slave-trade declaration in the Congress of Vienna, and again at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818. These committed the represented sovereigns to put an end to the trade.[28] However, such declarations were not accompanied by powers of enforcement. From 1817, a series of bilateral treaties were negotiated, which obliged each nation to allow its ships to be searched for slaves by the navy of the other. However, agreements in the early decades generally stipulated that ships could be detained and tried only if captive Africans were on board. Crucially, an intercepted vessel with renovations suggestive of the intention to carry slaves could not be guaranteed for condemnation until the inclusion of 'equipment clauses' into

treaties from the 1830s onwards.[29] Notions of state sovereignty, property rights and the legal basis of Britain's right to search and detain vessels caused diplomatic tensions, not least for the perceived 'element of statecraft' in the Abolition Act (alleged by some as a way for Britain to secure commercial hegemony on the seas via humanitarian means).[30] Naval officers were quick to learn that official British rhetoric surrounding the moral success of abolition did not necessarily produce results in terms of suppressing slave traffic. Commodore Collier believed that, despite the navy's exertions, 'the temptations are so great, and the facilities for evading actual detections so many … that all the zeal and anxiety of officers employed to put into force the orders of Government will still be baffled'.[31] A fully effectual naval police force would take time and resources, and British success remained subject to the persistence of slave traders.

In recognition of this, naval methods began to diversify from patrolling the coastline to the introduction of boat service up rivers to target slave embarkation points and apply pressure to African rulers and foreign traders engaged in slave dealing. This led to another source of problems, however: the spread of disease. Environmental conditions were a major source of difficulty for those serving on the West Africa squadron. Climatic extremes of heat, winds and tropical storms gave rise to the view of Africa as a 'horrid hole'. The prevalence of disease among Europeans on the coast also contributed to the station's notorious reputation.[32] Yellow fever was particularly deadly. Lieutenant George Courtenay quoted this infamous verse in his journal of 1823: 'To the Bight of Biafra, and Bight of Benin, Few come out, and many go in'.[33] Captain Columbine was to suffer first hand from these conditions. His wife and daughter both died from yellow fever while living in Freetown. Columbine died at sea from the disease in 1811, soon after leaving the colony in disgust at the conditions there. Faced with such testing circumstances, what motivated naval officers in their service on the West African coast?

Encounters with the Slave Trade

In the aftermath of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the mood of despondency in Britain—born of economic decline, unemployment and social unrest—was countered by a national enthusiasm for abolition as a celebration of a uniquely British devotion to freedom and moral progress.[34] The Royal Navy's activities played a key role in this spirit of national congratulation. The French slaver *Vigilante* was one of the several vessels

captured by Lieutenant Mildmay in the River Bonny in 1822, with 345 enslaved Africans on board. Mildmay's account of the encounter inspired a print, which was used by anti-slavery campaigners to highlight the cramped conditions on board 'this spectacle of accumulated suffering': the enslaved are shown restrained in pairs by handcuffs and leg irons.[35] The print's similarities to the *Brookes* of Liverpool, the famous abolitionist image of the 1780s, suggest that abolitionists repeated imagery that had successfully influenced the British public in the past, as well as served to reinforce the message about the cramped conditions that enslaved Africans were forced to endure on the Middle Passage. The accompanying text emphasised that the *Vigilante* was a French ship, naming Mildmay as the British officer who intercepted and captured the vessel. His valour in the capture of the ship is implied, a narrative that somewhat overshadows the impersonal representation of the enslaved 'cargo' (Fig. 6.1).[36]

Many naval officers subscribed to abolitionist sentiment. Captain Columbine faced an interesting moral shift, and one repeated in the careers of many naval personnel in this early period. His previous service in Trinidad saw him safeguarding the slave-holding interests of the islanders, who had presented him with a sword in gratitude for 'his services in protecting and defending the island'.[37] However, reflecting the shift in British society more generally, by 1810 Columbine believed that complicity in the slave trade degraded Britain's moral reputation. 'No man who is alive to the honour of his country, but must feel the Disgrace, not the Dignity, of permitting its flag to wave for so many years over a line of Slave-holes', he wrote.[38] As governor of Sierra Leone, Columbine had strong ties with William Wilberforce and other abolitionists of the African Institution, as did several other naval officers.

Religion clearly played a part: as Richard Blake has shown, many naval officers were influenced by the spread of evangelical sentiment in this period, which proved so powerful in driving the beliefs of British abolitionists.[39] Others were undoubtedly affected by the distressing conditions they encountered on captured slave ships. This was particularly the case for officers tasked with conveying such 'prizes' for condemnation, invariably at Sierra Leone. As the colony was a considerable distance from the major sources of slave exportation in the Bights of Benin and Biafra, prize voyages could be as long in duration as the infamous Middle Passage across the Atlantic. Between 1819 and 1826, for example, it took prize

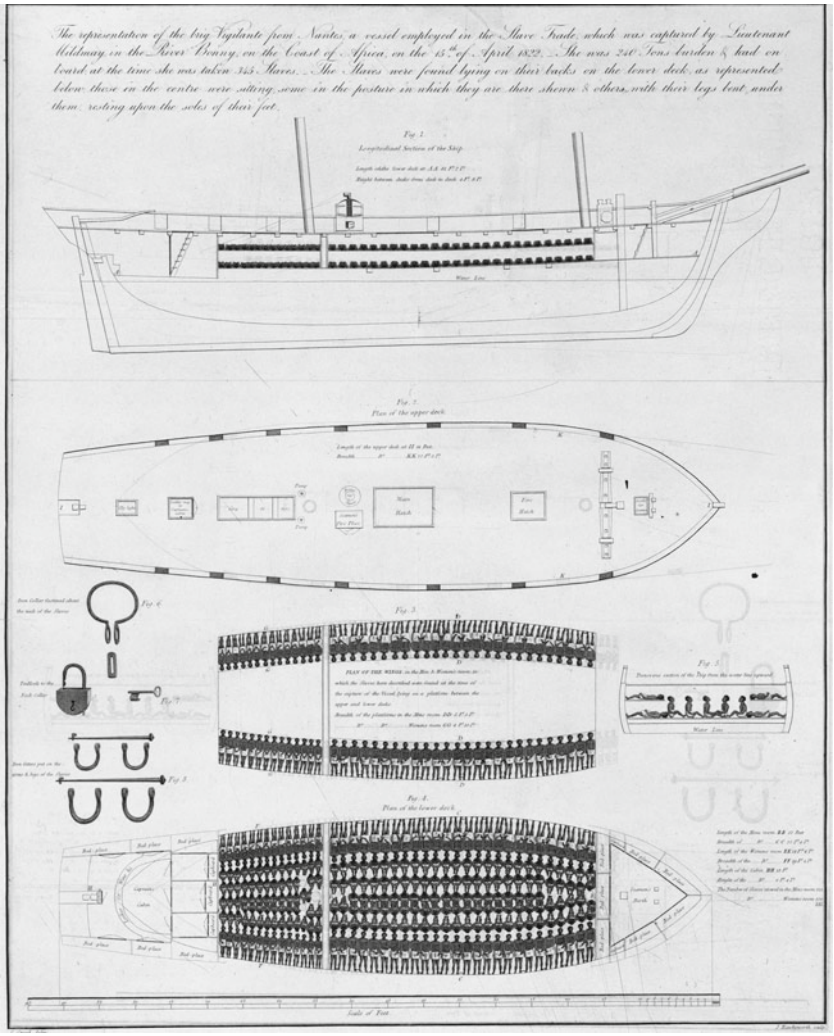

Fig. 6.1 John Hawksworth and S. Croad, *The Slave Ship* Vigilante, engraving, 1823 (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, PAH7370)

crews an average of 62 days to sail to Sierra Leone from the point of capture.[40] Naval personnel were exposed to significant human trauma in performing this duty. Lieutenant Digby Marsh of the *Tartar* was involved in the capture of a Portuguese slaver off Princes Island in 1819. He recorded in his book of private remarks that the Africans 'were in such a debilitated state as to require being carried to the boats'. He noted the emaciated weights of two men, aged 20 and 26, as 64lbs and 81lbs respectively. A 14-year-old boy weighed only 45lbs. Marsh added that the other Africans from the slave schooner were 'so sick and debilitated that they could not undergo the exertion of being weighed'.[41] Due to the spread of disease and the difficulties involved in alleviating crowded conditions, deaths of a significant proportion of recaptives were common on prize voyages. Commodore Collier reported that 46 out of the 266 captives on board the *Anna Maria*, taken by the *Tartar* in the River Bonny in 1821, died during its two-month passage to Sierra Leone.[42]

Many officers expressed sympathy and paternalism towards the enslaved. In 1815, HMS *Comus* captured three slave ships in the River Calabar. Commander John Tailour described how, after removing the leg irons from the captives, he 'took up a pair of the shackles, showed it them all round & with indignation of countenance threw them into the sea'.[43] Tailour and others clearly embraced their roles as liberators. An 1813 print, entitled 'African Slavery', depicts a slave in the Portuguese settlement of Benguela with an iron collar fastened around his neck. The accompanying caption reports that '[t]his miserable being was purchased & made free, by a British Naval Officer, for Sixty Dollars, who brought him to England in 1813, and had him Christened at Norwich when he was 14 years old, where he is now at School by the name of Charles Fortunatus Freeman'. The naval officer was Captain Frederick Irby of the *Amelia*, sent to command the vessels on the West African coast in 1811, and also a director of the African Institution.[44] Irby in fact rescued three African boys, as made clear by a note attached to the baptismal register of a Norwich parish church, which stated that the children were brought from Africa 'thro[ugh] the humanity' of Captain Irby. In the same year, records from a Hampshire church noted that a ten-year-old African boy 'from Poppoe' was rescued by Irby and baptised in the name of Irby Amelia Frederic.[45]

Such action supports the idea that naval officers were not passive spectators from the decks of naval vessels, but could be thoroughly engaged with humanitarian ideals.[46] Certainly officers' encounters with the human trauma of the slave trade had an impact on how they perceived the nature

of their duty as naval personnel. Sir George Collier had a distinguished naval career prior to his time on the West African coast, serving in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and the American War of 1812.[47] He was deeply committed to the work of the squadron, calling the slave trade a 'detestable traffic' and denouncing slave traders as 'the vilest and most depraved class of human beings'.[48] In his reports to the Admiralty, Collier wrote ardently of the 'baseness & atrocity' of the slave trade, 'so revolting to every well regulated mind', and expressed deep humanity towards the enslaved, alongside his own emotional distress at their 'merciless treatment'.[49]

Significantly, Collier linked his understanding of the nature of 'publick duty' on the West African coast to humanitarianism, writing that his actions against slavers were performed with 'no view to personal merit, for I did what humanity, and therefore my duty, only required'.[50] Furthermore, Collier claimed he was not unusual in recognising that his professional duty was imbued with a moral responsibility to release the enslaved. In his report of 1820, Collier wrote that a fast sailing vessel had been purchased at the joint expense of himself and the officers of the *Tartar* to search the rivers of the Windward Coast for slave ships. This was an act, according to Collier, driven by 'active benevolence by the dreadful scenes occasionally witnessed in the suffering misery of the unfortunate captives'. Collier further reported that the whole crew of the *Tartar* offered their pay 'as a security for their proportion of the expense in case of the non-condemnation of the [slave] vessel'. In contrast to stereotypes of British seamen as uncouth and unfeeling, Collier portrayed an entire crew affected and distressed by the sufferings they had witnessed. He concluded:

> It therefore strongly proves what the misery and sufferings of the slave must be, until he may reach his point of destination, when they could produce such strong effect upon so many unlettered and uneducated minds, as the crew of a man of war may be supposed to be composed of.[51]

In 1824, three years after his time on the coast, Collier committed suicide. He had suffered, it was believed, 'a state of temporary derangement'. This was unofficially attributed to aspersions cast against his professional conduct. (Collier, it was alleged, had allowed the escape of an American frigate in Porto Praya in 1815.) An unidentified naval officer publicly implied that his anti-slavery service may also have contributed to his condition, remarking that the 'many and severe wounds he [Collier] received

had long afflicted his bodily health, and his subsequent services on the coast of Guinea could not but prove injurious to a mind more than commonly sensitive, and to a constitution thus debilitated and weakened'.[52]

As military men trained to witness the brutalities of war and to an extent hardened to inhumanity, the profound emotion in some officers' narratives of their encounters with the slave trade is striking. Employment on the West Africa squadron comprised not only policing and coercing slave traders, but also involved a responsibility of care to enslaved Africans, which fundamentally affected some officers' understanding of their professional duty. Collier was keen to stress that 'the same philanthropic feelings, which actuate the conduct of so large a proportion of our country men are not confined to those resident on shore'.[53] Of course, many officers were as concerned with financial reward as abolitionist sentiment, and some, particularly later in the century, held more ambiguous views in relation to the virtue of the squadron's role and the anti-slavery movement more broadly.[54] Nonetheless, the humanitarian impulse was clearly an influential factor for some officers in their actions at sea, and also in the wider anti-slavery cause on shore.

Envoys of Abolition

The Royal Navy's anti-slave-trade role in the Atlantic Ocean is inseparable from histories of Britain's evolving national identity and emerging interest in West African territories in the early nineteenth century. The abolition of the slave trade prompted concerns about the application of British power for the good of the empire and its people. The imposition of abolition on the international stage was regarded as one way to effect change, but the British also wished to eradicate slave trading at its source in indigenous West African societies. This moral imperative was to be achieved, it was believed, by the superior example of British humanitarianism to raise the continent from its slave-trading traditions.[55] Britain's anti-slavery mission in West Africa was thus seen as dependent on the three tenets of the 'civilising' mission: the introduction of legitimate commerce, the spread of Christianity and the encouragement of a 'civilised' society. The establishment of Sierra Leone as a Crown colony and the work of British representatives there to stem the Atlantic slave trade marked a decisive attempt to establish British conceptions of social order and freedom on the West African coast.[56] As Christopher Bayly has argued, in this period the empire

was only loosely controlled from the centre: colonial governments, local conditions and metropolitan influences all played a part in formulating imperial policies.[57] Naval officers too had an important role to play.

The expectation that all official British representatives in West Africa had a responsibility to deliver the abolitionist message is highlighted by William Wilberforce's request in 1809 to Captain Columbine and his fellow commissioners preparing a survey of the coast. They were asked to report on the 'Physical and Moral capabilities of Africa and its inhabitants', to establish relations with African rulers and 'turn their minds … to the new order of things'.[58] In recognition of the importance of African agency in the supply of captive Africans, naval officers were tasked with taking messages of moral and economic progress to local rulers. Thus, in 1810, Columbine wrote to the kings of the Sherbro region, to encourage the end of their slave trading, which he advocated as 'a noble endeavour to make yourselves, and your children great, and your country happy'. He reiterated how the slave trade was responsible for many of Africa's ills, due to the subsequent deleterious effect on the production of indigenous resources: '[i]nstead of keeping the Africans to till their own soil, they are sent to till the Colonies belonging to Europe!'[59] Similarly, in 1815, Commander John Tailour recommended to local rulers in the Calabar River that those who may formerly have been sold into slavery 'might become useful to them for life by clearing away & cultivating their country, which will produce almost whatever they will take the trouble to put into the ground'.[60]

It was understood that both African and British manufacturers would prosper from such recommendations of legitimate trade: goods, such as ivory, cow hides, gold or beeswax were exchanged for British manufactures, like cotton, liquor and guns.[61] Naval officers therefore collected information on the economic potential of areas of the coast that lay beyond the British trading forts and settlements that had facilitated the slave trade in previous years. In his journal of 1820, Commander George Courtenay of HMS *Bann* wrote that the rivers of the Bight of Biafra may 'furnish a vast field for commercial speculation' in terms of ivory, palm oil, wax and ebony.[62] Commodore Collier reinforced the connection between successful naval suppression and the encouragement of legitimate commerce in his reports to the Admiralty, from which he believed in turn 'a profitable trade to Great Britain' would result. He cited gold specimens of the Ahanta Country as 'proof of the possibility of so rich a trade being thrown open one day or other to the enterprising spirit of Englishmen'.[63]

These narratives highlight how economic and strategic advantages for Britain became inextricable from humanitarian incentives. The advocacy of legitimate trade as an end to slave trading, while also providing Britain with a source of commercial potential, led to increased exploration in the West African interior, adding to the outpouring of geographic accounts of the area from the late eighteenth century.[64] This enthusiasm for information gathering also engaged the Royal Navy: the Hydrographic Department was created in 1795, and, with the coming of peace in 1815, the Admiralty began commissioning coastal surveys of certain regions of the West African coast, concentrating on the main river systems. For example, the rivers around the Bight of Biafra were surveyed in 1816–1817, under the command of Captain Tuckey.[65] One of the leading promoters of British exploration in West Africa was John Barrow, Second Secretary of the Admiralty and a former colonial administrator.[66] Increasingly, exploratory expeditions also became a vehicle for suppression of the slave trade and a means to assess the potential of areas to be 'civilised', as naval officers accompanied and offered support to British explorers and naturalists. In the early 1820s, for example, Scottish naval officer and explorer Hugh Clapperton was recruited by the Colonial Office to two expeditions to discover the course of the River Niger, with the view to open diplomatic and trading relations with Britain. He was instructed by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, to stress 'the very great advantages' of abolition, which would lead local rulers 'to be ranked among the benefactors of mankind'.[67]

Discussions of the African character were part of this wider developing awareness of West Africa. Missionary societies began work in Sierra Leone in the early nineteenth century, with the aim of promoting the healing force of Christian faith and values among both the formerly enslaved and those who had traded in captive Africans. Inseparable from this evangelical religious enthusiasm were debates in British society about the obligation for 'civilising' and 'improving' the African continent and its people.[68] A common image of Africans presented by abolitionists in the early nineteenth century—exemplified by the famous Wedgwood 'Am I not a man and a brother' medallion—was as the suffering and respectable victim of slavery, deserving of pity and protection. Out of such perceptions developed the idea that national virtue was linked to ideologies of benevolent paternalism, whereby those of 'superior' feelings had a duty to help the less fortunate.[69] This was part of a wider force of religious enthusiasm that extended to indigenous peoples around the world, a missionary impulse that directed attention to the moral and spiritual condition of 'the heathen'.[70]

West African Sketches (1824) is a series of essays compiled from the reports of, among others, Commodore George Collier and Charles MacCarthy, governor of Sierra Leone between 1818 and 1824. While it is unclear which author penned which 'sketch', the tone of the publication regarding the British role in West Africa is unequivocal:

> Let us but cast our eyes on the map of Africa, and rejoice in the opportunities and facilities we possess to become the favoured instruments of Heaven, in redeeming from the darkness of idolatry, and the multiplied evils of bondage, so large a portion of the human family; and by thus doing, bring into exercise the noblest energies and duties of our nature as men, as Britons, and as Christians.[71]

The destructive effects of the slave trade had caused a 'dismembered' society, tied to a lack of Christianity and the 'moral turpitude' of perceived heathenism. The African character was, however, 'certainly not beyond the power of habit and education to model and assimilate' if subject to the 'fostering care' of Britons.[72] The desire to prevent Africa's return to former savage and barbarous ways meant traditional African beliefs, or 'superstitions', were considered as particularly dangerous. Education of the children of 'these gross idolaters' was, in Commodore Collier's opinion, 'the best way of arriving at that important desideratum, the quiet and silent introduction of Christianity into that part of Africa'.[73] Sierra Leone was regarded as a testing ground for humanitarian ideas and a marker of African potential. In 1818, Lieutenant Digby Marsh of the *Tartar* regarded the colony as being 'in a most flourishing state'. He believed 'just praise is due' to the 'Governor and Gentlemen of Sierra Leone as well as the missionaries who are appointed to introduce Christianity and civilization amongst the sable savages of Africa, for the progress they have already made'.[74]

Not all naval personnel in this period were so impressed with the potential impact of the missionary cause, however. Captain Columbine, for example, believed that the African character was deficient to a degree as to make 'improvement' impossible. 'People in England may talk as they please about the natural excellence of the African disposition, when unshackled by slavery', he wrote, 'but as far as I am able to judge, they have as strong a natural & cultivated bias to craft & rascality as any knaves I ever met with'.[75] Here Columbine exemplified some of the contradictions in the British perception of West Africa in the early nineteenth century: while he deplored the slave trade as a blight on Britain's moral reputation, he firmly

believed in racial inequality.[76] Complexities surrounding naval officers' racial attitudes abounded, and abolitionist beliefs did not necessarily preclude negative perceptions of African peoples. The belief that Africans were not capable of moral improvement without intervention from Europeans was propounded even by the most sympathetic naval officers, George Collier among them, and these sorts of racial and cultural theories of paternalism and 'trusteeship' for non-Europeans gained strength as the century progressed.[77]

When naval officers left their ships to pursue anti-slavery negotiations on shore, it was often the brutal and wretched image of Africans that prevailed in their narratives. The popular representations of degenerate Africans from travel literature undoubtedly influenced their preconceptions. Early-nineteenth-century sensibilities were also affronted by African nudity, associated with excessive physicality, immodesty and promiscuity.[78] Midshipman Cheesman Henry Binstead's encounters with local people at Fernando Po in 1823 revealed such stereotypes:

> on my first seeing them [I] was doubtful whether it was a human being from its strange colour and appearance … never did I expect such a horrid wild set of savages [;] there [*sic*] hair was folded up in red clay and the whole of the body laid over with it, their smell was most noxious and there [*sic*] faces was painted with a kind of white was making in the whole a most hideous appearance.[79]

Such attitudes were unsurprising, considering black people were regarded as the objects of ridicule in British caricature, literature and popular culture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. George Cruikshank's 1818 caricature 'Puzzled which to choose!!' is one example of metropolitan attitudes towards race. Naval captain and novelist Frederick Marryat is depicted on a mission to Timbuctoo, where the king presents him with the choice of his daughters for marriage. The Africans are portrayed as savage and infantile; the nakedness and promiscuous expressions of the daughters particularly contrast with the refined and polite depiction of the naval officer.[80] Such encounters, real and imagined, between naval officers and African people demonstrate the conflicting rhetoric surrounding the British presence in West Africa in this period, and exemplify some of the moral tensions regarding concepts of racial identity and of freedom and its applicability to Africans (Fig. 6.2).

Fig. 6.2 George Cruikshank, *Puzzled which to Choose!! or, The King of Tombuctoo offering one of his daughters in marriage to Capt—(anticipated result of the African mission)*, hand-coloured etching, 1818 (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, PAG8631)

Conclusion

The British Atlantic world experienced a 'dramatic repositioning' during the age of revolutions and abolition.[81] While Britain's economic investment in the slave trade was over, the task of policing the trade was just beginning. This chapter has argued that Britain's anti-slavery efforts and imperial agendas in the Atlantic world were bound tightly together in the early nineteenth century, with the Royal Navy and its officers playing a pivotal role in delivering abolitionist goals, at sea and on land. Britain assumed a new moral responsibility to suppress the transatlantic traffic, a statement of humanitarianism and national honour, which transformed Britain's relations both with West African polities and with her international rivals. While suppression may have reinforced notions of Britain's

naval supremacy, the navy was more than the coercive arm of this mission. As law enforcers, envoys, negotiators and liberators, officers had responsibilities to Britain's broader anti-slavery mission on shore, to take abolition beyond Sierra Leone's borders and transform the beliefs and practices of African peoples. Notions of British identity, patriotism and moral duty found new form in the humanitarian cause. As David Eltis has asserted, in the years immediately following abolition, the primary goal for abolitionists was the 'imposition of a conception of freedom' on others.[82]

Did these changes herald a new British Atlantic? The early nineteenth century certainly witnessed the beginning of a new expansion in the British presence in West Africa, as the region became increasingly significant in its potential for commercial opportunity, exploration and Christianisation. This shift in focus, like the loss of the American colonies or expansion in the East, is another marker in the history of Britain's evolving relationship with the Atlantic world. However, in the short term at least, the economic heart of Britain's Atlantic empire remained unchanged. Slavery remained alive and well in the British colonies, with many British plantation owners still making substantial profits until the Emancipation Act of 1833.[83] Slavery and anti-slavery remained profoundly contested concepts in early-nineteenth-century political debate and print culture. The sites of naval suppression in Britain's Atlantic world—naval vessels, slave ships, African settlements, Atlantic islands—can be regarded as further spaces in which the 'war of representation' over slavery and the slave trade were fought.[84] Officers' experiences uncover some of the moral ambiguities of the first decades of Britain's abolitionist mission. They contribute to dialogues on race, identity and benevolence which had an impact in West Africa, the metropole and the wider empire. Their narratives provide insight into how naval patriotism, professionalism and notions of duty interacted with anti-slavery rhetoric and imperial impulses. They also offer new perspectives on the navy's role in the British Atlantic in the early nineteenth century, a role where promoting an international humanitarian agenda was as prominent as policing the ocean.

Notes

1. David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London, 2010), p. 274.
2. Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987), p. 21.

3. John Beeler, 'Maritime Policing and the *Pax Britannica*: The Royal Navy's Anti-Slavery Patrol in the Caribbean, 1818–1846', *Northern Mariner* 16 (2006), 1–20. The Royal Navy was also active in the Indian Ocean after 1807, deployed to stop the French trade in slaves to Mauritius.
4. C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London, 1989), p. 162.
5. Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).
6. The relative absence of seamen's accounts in the surviving material makes this a study of naval officers rather than all naval personnel.
7. Slavery continued in the British Atlantic colonies until the 1830s. Therefore, the work of the navy before that period focused specifically on anti-slave-trade activity. However, while the term 'anti-slavery' is more applicable to the later period, this chapter uses the phrase to incorporate all abolitionist efforts.
8. See, for example, Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987); Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807* (Cambridge, 2006); Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750–1850* (Basingstoke, 2009).
9. Suzanne Schwarz, 'Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company', in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles, eds., *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool, 2007), pp. 252–76. This model influenced other colonisation attempts on the West African coast. For example, in 1792–93, naval lieutenant Philip Beaver led a party of settlers to colonise the island of Bulama, conceived, in his words, 'as a means of gradually abolishing African slavery'. The scheme was abandoned after 18 months. See Philip Beaver, *African Memoranda: Relative to an Attempt to establish a British Settlement on the Island of Bulama* (London, 1805).
10. Most recaptives had little choice but to serve as apprentices in the colony, a system attacked by some contemporaries as another form of slavery. See Suzanne Schwarz, 'Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century', *History in Africa* 39 (2012), 175–207; Emma Christopher, '"Tis enough that we give them liberty"? Liberated Africans at Sierra Leone in the Early Era of Slave-Trade Suppression', in Robert Burroughs and Richard Huzzey, eds., *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade: British Policies, Practices and Representations of Naval Coercion* (Manchester, 2015), pp. 55–72.
11. Tara Helfman, 'The Court of Vice Admiralty at Sierra Leone and the Abolition of the West African Slave Trade', *The Yale Law Journal* 115 (2006), 1122–56; Farida Shaikh, 'Judicial Diplomacy: British Officials and

the Mixed Commission Courts', in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon, eds., *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807–1975* (Eastbourne, 2009), pp. 42–64.

12. Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford, 2002), p. 89.
13. University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Sierra Leone Collection (hereafter UIC), Series III, Folder 9, Journal of Edward Columbine, 4 February 1809, ff. 1–2.
14. Christopher Terrell, 'Columbine, Edward Henry (1763–1811)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), online ed., January 2015 [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64853, accessed 30 January 2015].
15. The National Archives (hereafter TNA), CO 267/25, William Wilberforce to Lord Liverpool, 26 December 1809.
16. National Museum of the Royal Navy (hereafter NMRN), MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report on the Coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820', ff. 1–2.
17. Wayne Ackerson, *The African Institution (1807–1827) and the Antislavery Movement in Great Britain* (New York, 2005).
18. David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987), p. 105.
19. *Reports of the Directors of the African Institution*, Sixth Report (1812).
20. Phrase used by Captain John B. Curran of HMS *Tyne* in correspondence published in *Reports of the Directors of the African Institution*, Eleventh Report (1817), pp. 7–8. Subscribers paid an annual fee to the organisation. Commodore Collier was an Honorary Life Governor. Captain Frederick Paul Irby, in charge of naval suppression between 1811 and 1814, was a director.
21. Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 111.
22. UIC, Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journal, 12 March 1810, ff. 62–3.
23. This number remained under 10 throughout the 1820s before increasing steadily to 27 by 1848, although it was invariably the smallest warships that were sent to the West African coast. In all, the Royal Navy committed up to 13% of its total manpower to the squadron. See Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1949), Appendix C; Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 96.
24. *Reports of the Directors of the African Institution*, Eighth Report (1814), p. 851.
25. UIC, Series III, Folder 10, Journal of Edward Columbine, 23 August 1810, ff. 174–5. For the increase in demand and price of slaves in Brazil and Cuba, see Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, pp. 200–3, 270, 280.

26. Robert J. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century', in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth, eds., *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 78–91.
27. UIC, Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journal, 21 April 1810, ff. 111–12.
28. See John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013), Chap. 7, for the early diplomatic efforts of British abolitionists.
29. 'Slavery in Diplomacy: The Foreign Office and the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade', *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians: History Note*, 17 (2007), 4–8; Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 45.
30. Christopher L. Brown, 'Slavery and Antislavery, 1760–1820', in Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, c.1450–c.1850* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 602–17, quotation on p. 615; Maeve Ryan, 'The Price of Legitimacy in Humanitarian Intervention: Britain, the Right of Search, and the Abolition of the West African Slave Trade, 1807–1867', in Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 231–55.
31. National Maritime Museum (hereafter NMM), WEL/10, 'Report of the Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa', 1820, unfoliated.
32. Phrase used by naval surgeon R. M. Jackson in June 1826 to describe the River Bonny, in *Journal of a Voyage to Bonny River on the West Coast of Africa in the Ship Kingston from Liverpool*, ed. Roland Jackson (Letchworth, 1934), p. 133. See John Rankin, 'British and African Health in the Anti-Slave-Trade Squadron', in Burroughs and Huzzey, eds., *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 95–124.
33. UIC, Series V, Folder 16, Journal of George Courtenay, unfoliated.
34. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992), pp. 359–60.
35. *Case of the Vigilante, a Ship Employed in the Slave Trade; with Some Reflections on That Traffic* (London, 1823), p. 12.
36. Marcus Wood, 'Popular Graphic Images of Slavery and Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century England', in Hamilton and Blyth, eds., *Representing Slavery*, p. 148.
37. NMM, Accession No. WPN1254.
38. UIC, Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journal, 12 January 1810, ff. 50–2 [Columbine's emphasis].
39. Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy, 1775–1815: Blue Lights and Psalm-Singers* (Woodbridge, 2008).
40. R. T. Brown, 'Fernando Po and the Anti-Sierra Leonean Campaign: 1826–1834', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6 (1973), 250.

41. Somerset Record Office, A/AOV/69, 'Private remarks, occurrences, etc., HM ship *Tartar*—from England to the coast of Africa', *c.* 1818–19, unfoliated.
42. John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870* (London, 1969), p. 183.
43. National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), MS 9879, John Tailour to General Sir Charles William Pasley, 3 May 1815, ff. 333–5.
44. Clark and Orme, *African Slavery*, steel engraving with colouring, 1813, NMM, Accession No. ZBA2440. *Reports of the Directors of the African Institution*, Seventh Report (1813) noted Irby's 'spirit, energy and activity' as commodore, and his 'praise-worthy exertions to promote the objects of the Institution' (p. 1).
45. Norfolk Record Office, PD 26/4, Baptismal Register for the parish of St Peter's Mancroft, 1813; All Saints, Fawley, www.stgeorgesnews.org/2004/06f11.htm [accessed 15 January 2015].
46. In his study of the East African suppression campaign, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London, 1987), Richard Howell identified a similar humanitarian tradition among naval officers. See Jane Samson, *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu, HI, 1998), for the association of naval power and humanitarianism in the nineteenth-century maritime Pacific world.
47. Andrew Lambert, 'Collier, Sir George Ralph, Baronet (1774–1824)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), online ed., January 2015 [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58443, accessed 30 January 2015].
48. NMM, 'Report of the Forts'; *British and Foreign State Papers, 1821–1822*, compiled by the Foreign Office (London, 1829), George Collier to the Lords of the Admiralty, 27 December 1821, p. 191.
49. NMRN, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 13, 241–2.
50. *British and Foreign State Papers*, George Collier to the Lords of the Admiralty, 27 December 1821, pp. 215–16.
51. NMRN, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 108–12.
52. *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet & Plymouth Journal*, 3 April 1824; *The Morning Post*, 26 March 1824.
53. NMRN, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 110–11.
54. Prize money was paid for each ship captured and, later, each African liberated. For further discussion of the range of motivations for service, see Mary Wills, 'A "Most Miserable Business": Naval Officers' Experiences of Slave-Trade Suppression', in Burroughs and Huzzey, eds., *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 73–94.
55. For a discussion of the paradoxical relationship between 'humanitarianism' and Britain's colonisation of many parts of the world in this period, see Alan

Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge, 2014).

56. Joel Quirk and David Richardson, 'Anti-Slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-Historical Perspective', *The Journal of Modern European History* 7 (2009), 68–92.
57. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, Chap. 7.
58. TNA, CO 267/25, William Wilberforce to Lord Castlereagh, 19 January 1809.
59. UIC, Series III, Folder 11, Papers of Edward Columbine, [August 1810], ff. 103–5. In an attempt to spread the message of abolition into Sierra Leone's borderlands, Captain Columbine was aided by John Kizell, a former American slave born in Sierra Leone, who had returned to his homeland and acted as a negotiator with local rulers.
60. NLS, Copy letter from John Tailour.
61. Gustav Deveneaux, 'Buxtonianism and Sierra Leone: The 1841 Timbo Expedition', *Journal of African Studies* 5 (1978), 39.
62. UIC, Courtenay Journal.
63. NMM, 'Report of the Forts'; NMRN, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 194–5.
64. For example, the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was founded in 1788. Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850* (Madison, WI, 1964), pp. 206–7.
65. Richard Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II. The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2001), p. 249; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 165–6.
66. David Lambert, *Mastering the Niger: James MacQueen's African Geography and the Struggle over Atlantic Slavery* (Chicago, IL, 2013), pp. 12–15.
67. UK Hydrographic Office Archive, LP 1857/Box M760, Lord Bathurst to Hugh Clapperton, 30 July 1826; Jamie B. Lockhart, *A Sailor in the Sahara: The Life and Travels in Africa of Hugh Clapperton, Commander RN* (London, 2008).
68. Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester, 2004).
69. Quirk and Richardson, 'Anti-Slavery', 87–8.
70. C. A. Bayly, 'The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760–1860: Power, Perception and Identity', in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (London, 1999), pp. 19–41; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford, 2002).
71. *West African Sketches: Compiled from the Reports of Sir G. R. Collier, Sir Charles MacCarthy, and other Official Sources* (London, 1824), pp. 3–4.
72. *West African Sketches*, pp. 3, 22, 24.

73. NMRN, 'Second Annual Report', f. 216.
74. SALS, 'Private remarks'.
75. UIC, Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journal, 27 February 1811.
76. The main force of evangelicalism which drove British abolitionism during this period had, at its heart, a conservative faith in a hierarchical society, in which racial and social inequality was accepted as a necessary foundation for a stable society. See Catherine Hall, 'Troubling Memories: Nineteenth Century Histories of the Slave Trade and Slavery', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (2011), 147–69.
77. Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism' in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III. The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 198–221.
78. Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971), pp. 134–6. See, for example, Captain William Snelgrave's *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade* (1734), a narrative of the conquest of Dahomey filled with stories of human sacrifice and cannibalism.
79. NMRN, 2005.76/2, Diaries of Cheesman Henry Binstead, 9 June 1823.
80. Such 'miscegenetic humour', in Marcus Wood's words, and comic exploitation of popular racist attitudes was a recurrent theme in the work of satirists of this period. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester, 2000), p. 163.
81. Brown, 'Slavery and Antislavery', p. 616.
82. Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 104.
83. See Catherine Hall, et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2014).
84. David Lambert, 'Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation over Slavery', *History Workshop Journal* 64 (2007), 103–4.

CHAPTER 7

Atlantic Empire, European War and the Naval Expeditions to South America, 1806–1807

James Davey

On 9 May 1803, as Britain and France moved inexorably towards resuming armed conflict, *The Morning Chronicle* published an article that amounted to a strident anti-war manifesto. It was an entirely characteristic interjection from the newspaper, which had long been aligned with the Whig parliamentary faction led by Charles James Fox. Indeed, so perfectly did the article chime with his known opinions, many contemporaries assumed that the piece had been written by the statesman himself. Throughout the French Revolutionary War of 1793–1801, the Foxite Whigs had led a determined opposition to the conflict, and with war seemingly once more on the horizon, the *Chronicle* article maintained this long-held aversion to a war against France. However, rather than focusing on high principle and ideology, as the earlier criticism had done, it was instead emphatically pragmatic, and pointed to the futility of any war. 'France is, and will remain, invulnerable on the Continent of Europe', it stated, and argued forcefully that only by creating a broad Continental alliance could France be combated and decisively defeated. Britain's small army was dwarfed by the enemy's, and the nation's sure shield—the Royal Navy—would struggle to secure the nation's interests. In a conflict against a Continental hegemon, 'a naval or colonial war … can *never lead* to any decisive victory over France'. On the contrary, it was 'on the continent of Europe alone that France is to be beaten into a peace more secure than the present'.[1]

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_7

The *Chronicle*'s arguments were deeply controversial, for they directly conflicted with the strategy that had been followed by Britain in the previous war. During the 1790s, as indeed in most other eighteenth-century wars, the British government, under William Pitt, had focused British naval and military might in the Atlantic. In particular, it was expected that the conquest of France's rich West Indian colonies would destroy French commercial power (while extending that of Britain), and also lead to the acquisition of imperial possessions that would off-set any French gains in Europe.[2] In 1799, the Secretary of State for War, Henry Dundas, highlighted the strategy in stark terms:

> Great Britain can at no time propose to maintain an extensive and complicated war but by destroying the colonial resources of our enemies and adding proportionately to our own commercial resources, which are, and must ever be, the sole basis of our maritime strength. By our commerce and our fleet, we have been enabled to perform those prodigies of exertion which have placed us in the proud state of pre-eminence we now hold.[3]

Vast expeditions were sent to Martinique, St Lucia, Guadeloupe and Saint Domingue, and though all were seized, the human costs were terrible, with over 100,000 British casualties, half of whom died. The captured colonies provided significant revenues to the state, but they paled in comparison with the great advances made by the French in Europe, and virtually all were handed back at the conclusion of the peace treaty in 1802 (with the exception of Trinidad and the Asian colony of Ceylon).[4] By contrast, France recovered all the colonies she had lost during the conflict, and maintained her expanded European borders.[5] There was little doubt who had won the war.

It followed that commentators writing in 1803 had only to look back on the previous conflict to see that Britain's traditional 'blue-water' policy of colonial expansion was not always effective.[6] Nonetheless, Tory opponents remained naturally hostile to the *Chronicle*'s arguments. William Cobbett, writing in his *Weekly Register*, responded in characteristically vitriolic terms. 'The Royal Navy is necessary to the maintenance of the honour, the security, the independence, of the country', he stated: it defended the nation from foreign attack and protected its commercial prosperity around the world. He acknowledged that 'a war, merely colonial and naval, carried on upon the mean and selfish plan of the last war, would produce no good effect is certain', but argued that, administered differently, the policy could again be successful:

> There is hope, great and solid hope, that, by a colonial and naval war, into which the whole spirit and utmost exertion of England, should be thrown, and steadily pointing through all the reverses of fortune, to a great and definitive object, interesting to the world, not only our own lasting security might be provided for, but that the oppressed continent might be brought into action, and its efforts crowned with ultimate success.

In contrast, the 'pacific exertions' of Fox and his acolytes would 'tend to our further dishonour and our final slavery'.[7]

The barbed newspaper exchanges of May 1803, coming before a shot had even been fired in the war, built on decades of political antagonism. It also represented two very different views of how a war with France should be fought. When Britain finally declared war on 18 May 1803, those who had argued against an overtly imperialist policy would have been relieved to see the vast majority of Britain's naval resources concentrated firmly in Europe. Indeed, one of the striking features of the Napoleonic Wars was how little emphasis was placed on extending Britain's imperial position. In contrast to the conflict that preceded it, there was little interest in attacking enemy islands and colonial territories, and the Napoleonic Wars saw no large-scale expeditions launched from Britain to capture French West Indian possessions. Indeed, the belief—previously unquestioned—that colonial conquest led automatically to commercial gains was increasingly challenged as events in Europe dominated the thoughts of ministers.[8] For Britain, with only a small army to call upon, the war remained overtly naval in character, but it was in the Channel, the Mediterranean, the North Sea and the Baltic that the majority of naval forces combated the forces of France and its allies. By July 1803, 76% of ships, and 77% of naval seamen, were positioned in European waters, establishing a concentration of naval resources that continued throughout the war.[9]

That Britain should prioritise the European theatre is not surprising. Stephen Conway has noted that, during the conflicts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the vast majority of naval forces were stationed not in imperial regions but in European waters.[10] Moreover, in 1803, this concentration made clear strategic sense. Following the war's outbreak, a vast hostile army was camped on the northern coast of France, ready to invade Britain at a moment's notice, renewing a long-standing threat to British security. However, the focus of British policy-makers and commentators remained on Europe long after fears of invasion had receded, as territories and nations fell to Napoleon's armies.[11] This necessarily questions the degree to which Britain followed a pure 'blue-water' policy, and also

undermines the common association of naval power with the expansion and defence of empire.[12] Though navy and empire were commonly seen as mutually sustaining throughout the eighteenth century (and even more so during the Victorian *Pax Britannica*), colonial warfare took on a lesser priority amid a war of unprecedented scale and scope, in which national survival was by no means assured.

This is, of course, a question of proportion. Despite the focus on Europe, empire continued to demand resources. As C. A. Bayly has noted, the period 1790–1820 witnessed a great expansion of British dominion overseas, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, much of which occurred during the Napoleonic Wars.[13] In addition, it remained vital to protect British trade and imperial stations, since colonies provided resources and revenues to the British polity; roughly a quarter of the nation's military might was tied down in colonial garrisons (as well as in European bases such as Gibraltar and Malta).[14] These outposts also absorbed a sizeable proportion of the nation's naval strength, and small naval fleets were sent to the West Indies, the East Indies and North America. Colonial campaigns were conducted by local forces and provided considerable windfalls, without which the economic cost of war was hard to maintain.[15] Furthermore, throughout the Napoleonic Wars, Britain reacted quickly to reinforce its imperial possessions in the face of a direct enemy threat. During the French naval sortie to the West Indies in 1805, the British government took steps to preserve its interests in the region: 5000 men were assembled at Cork, ready to be carried across the Atlantic in the event of a serious French attempt on the Caribbean islands.[16]

Nonetheless, on only one occasion during the Napoleonic Wars did Britain launch an expedition from Europe for the purpose of colonial conquest. In late 1805, Lieutenant-General David Baird and Commodore Home Riggs Popham commanded an operation to capture the Cape of Good Hope, a crucial strategic post that guarded Britain's trade with the East Indies. What followed, however, was a far more ambitious attempt at imperial expansion. Following the seizure of this vital base, Popham embarked on an audacious and unauthorised attack on Spanish South America, in the hope of conquering the River Plate region (known then as Rio de la Plata) and adding it to the British empire. Opportunistic though the operation was, for the first and only time in the war, Britain committed vast numbers of military resources to a war for imperial gain and commercial expansion. Following the news of Popham's initial success, people across Britain turned to the possibilities of empire. Merchants quickly

mobilised to take advantage of new markets, while the short-lived government of William Grenville, known patronisingly as the 'Ministry of All the Talents', saw a rare opportunity to claim military success. For a brief few months, cabinet ministers began to plan the conquest of vast stretches of Spanish America, while people from across British society contemplated the seemingly boundless commercial opportunities available in the region. The episode, then, marked a unique moment of imperial adventure in the war.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the expeditions to Rio de la Plata have received considerable historical scrutiny. John D. Grainger has written extensively about the operation, first in a *Mariner's Mirror* article, and subsequently in an edited work that brings together a number of key primary documents.[17] Hugh Popham's entertaining biography of the main naval protagonist covers the expedition in some detail, while Martin Robson's work on the diplomatic relationships between Britain, Portugal and the territories of South America analyses the expedition.[18] Ian Fletcher produced a comprehensive narrative of the expedition, which has been followed more recently by Ben Hughes's book, which serves as the most detailed account yet.[19] However, while these studies have improved our understanding of the operational events that took place in Rio de la Plata, they have generally refrained from considering the wider imperial connotations of the episode. Investigating the events of 1806–7 opens up new perspectives not only on the Napoleonic Wars themselves, but also on the way people at the time thought about and advocated the extension of empire, as debates centred on calculations of immediate national interest and economic practicality, as well as longer-term strategies about imperial conquest and investment. This chapter does not seek, then, to offer up new perspectives on the military operations themselves, but instead situates the expeditions to Rio de la Plata in the wider debates about the nature and meaning of empire in the early nineteenth century. This was not limited to the aims of imperial investment, but also encompassed the geographical remit of empire. The expeditions to Rio de la Plata saw a reconfiguration of the British Atlantic world: not only did they give rise to an increased focus on 'informal empire', rather than the typical focus on conquest and permanent settlement; they also saw British imperial interests focus more intensely on the untapped potential of the southern Atlantic, a region hitherto unexploited.

At the heart of these changing dynamics was the Royal Navy. Capable of transporting military forces from Britain and the Cape to South America,

the navy played a crucial role in connecting Britain's Atlantic world. From the war's outbreak, the navy allowed Britain to move troops and resources around the Atlantic Ocean, if not quite at will, then certainly with an ease that none of its rivals could match, and was therefore the key force that allowed empire to be protected, exploited and advanced. However, as this chapter will show, few agreed on the precise form this empire should take, or indeed that imperial advance was even necessary or useful. As the reactions of *The Morning Chronicle* and Cobbett's *Weekly Register* suggest, the idea of a colonial war was fraught with controversy. The expeditions to Rio de la Plata offer an insight into the way the British government, parliamentarians and indeed the broader political nation thought about and advocated the extension of empire in the early nineteenth century, as well as the fact that ideas about imperial conquest in this period were neither unanimous nor consistent. This chapter, then, will investigate how the British government defined the role and purpose of the navy in supporting and forwarding imperial advancement amid an all-consuming European war.

Throughout the eighteenth century, British merchants and governments had cast covetous eyes upon Spain's South American trade.[20] From the Seven Years War onwards, the British empire expanded greatly to include much of North America, India and the Caribbean. South America, however, had been left largely untroubled by British expansionism, and the region remained under the control of the Spanish and Portuguese. By the turn of the nineteenth century, it was becoming clear that these empires were far from robust, and intelligence began to arrive in Britain that the colonial populations were dissatisfied with Spanish imperial government. From Britain's perspective, the timing could not have been better, for the great wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France required ever-larger supplies and markets to counteract expanding French power in Europe. The underdeveloped commercial possibilities offered by South America, in particular its vast supplies of bullion and great potential as an export market for British produce, seemed an ideal place to achieve this.[21] Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, plans were repeatedly considered either for attacking Spain's South American colonies or taking control of strategic points of the Spanish American empire, but none were taken up, and Britain refrained from direct intervention.[22]

The onset of the Napoleonic Wars once again brought South American schemes to the fore. In the early months of the war, a number of projectors argued forcefully that Britain should attempt to tap into the vast wealth

of the Spanish empire. In 1803, an unsigned memorandum written to the prime minister, Henry Addington, spoke of the great colonial and maritime resources possessed by the Iberian powers because of their control of South America. Nicholas Vansittart, later to be Secretary to the Treasury, hoped that an assault on Vera Cruz would encourage the Spanish colonies to seek independence and thus be brought under British influence.[23] In November 1803, Popham, who was already a well-connected naval captain, also advocated a South American venture. He noted that South America sent $50 million per annum to Spain, and that to deprive her of those provinces would, moreover, destroy her maritime power.[24] By early 1804, Lord Mulgrave wrote to Pitt anticipating a French withdrawal from the Caribbean island of Saint Domingue, hoping that this 'might be made to lead very naturally to the completion of the great & extended views upon South America which we often discussed at Bath'.[25] These projections revealed the wide variety of views about imperial advancement, making it clear that they were by no means consistent, ranging as they did from conquest, to the control of strategic areas, to the encouragement of local populations to rise up against their Spanish masters.

However, Addington's government of 1801–4 was not disposed to colonial ventures, and even on Pitt's return to power in 1804, his attempts to create an anti-French coalition led him to downplay imperial ambitions. In 1804, he deliberately abandoned his Spanish-American projects so as not to alarm the Russians, who were growing increasingly concerned about British imperial expansion.[26] Once again, European concerns took precedence over imperial ambitions. A correspondent writing to Cobbett's *Weekly Register* stated that 'the war abroad should be *solely* naval', but was adamant that this should not involve colonial acquisition:

> I am most decidedly of opinion, that no military operations should be carried on against the colonies of France. … Our own islands most undoubtedly, should be kept in a state of perfect security, and should not again be exposed to the incursions of the brigands from the adjacent colonies of Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, or Martinique. By allotting respectable military establishments to each of our own islands, by a judicious disposition of our naval forces in the West Indies, and by a vigilant, active, and close blockade of the French Islands, these would, in all probability, be nearly as soon in our possession as though we were to proceed against them by regular attack, without incurring one twentieth of the expense, and without sacrificing the lives of His Majesty's loyal subjects. You will conclude from this, Sir, that I am of opinion, our military operations should be confined to Europe.

The only colonial warfare Britain should undertake was 'providing the blacks with the means of driving the French out of St. Domingo, by supplying them with arms, ammunition, and such other necessaries they may be in need of, but not by attempting to make any other conquests'.[27]

This disavowal of imperial ambition rested on British over-confidence. With the French navy locked in port, it was hoped that Britain's imperial possessions were safe from attack. 'In India and America he [Bonaparte] can do little more than create some temporary mischief', wrote the *Morning Post* in July 1803.[28] In 1804 and 1805, French naval squadrons were able to break the shackles of the British naval blockade, with some even reaching the Caribbean. The most famous, Villeneuve's dash across the Atlantic in 1805, prompted a frantic pursuit by a fleet under Horatio Nelson, and much concern in Britain. Charles Grey stood up in Parliament to state:

> It certainly is an extraordinary spectacle at the end of two years of a war, undertaken to limit the aggrandizement, and reduce the power of France … that we now see her more powerful than ever on the continent, growing formidable on the ocean, threatening our foreign possessions with a powerful armament, of which though we are ignorant of the destination, we are almost certain that it will go to some quarter where we have not adequate force to oppose it.[29]

However, in reality these French incursions did little to disrupt British trade, and the small Leeward Islands fleet under the command of Commodore Samuel Hood went about systematically capturing a number of enemy possessions in the West Indies. This not only added rich and commercially important islands to the British empire, further expanding its trading networks, but also removed bases from which French privateers could operate. By late 1804, St Lucia, Tobago and the Dutch colonies of Demerara, Essequibo, Berbice and Surinam were all under British control.[30]

Instead, it was events in Europe that continued to bedevil British policy-makers, as Napoleon's empire expanded ever eastwards. As late as 1805, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Castlereagh, reflected that only control of Spanish America would serve as an adequate recompense for the exclusion of Britain from the Mediterranean.[31] In late 1805, the British decided to launch a major expedition to take the Cape of Good Hope, a prized possession that had been captured during the

previous war, but returned to the Dutch Batavian Republic at the Peace of Amiens. An operation to send a force to take it again had been under consideration since Pitt's government came to power in 1804, only to be repeatedly postponed due to the uncertain state of naval operations in Europe.[32] Reports of the Cape's weakened state—and of the inhabitants' apparent desire to overcome their Dutch rulers—meant that the operation was never taken off the table. In September 1805, an expedition was finally launched under the command of the army officer Lieutenant-General Sir David Baird and Sir Home Riggs Popham (Fig. 7.1).[33]

The force sent to the Cape was the first—and indeed the only—major imperial expedition launched from Britain during the war, a testament to the colony's strategic importance. With the Netherlands now part of Napoleon's empire, the colony's position at the gateway between the Indian and Atlantic oceans offered a friendly base for French privateers. Napoleon himself was well aware of the Cape's importance to Britain. 'Of all the enterprises which England is able to undertake', he wrote in 1805, 'we see only one which is rational, it is the conquest of the Cape of Good Hope'.[34] British policy-makers expected the Cape to serve a further function, namely to act as a military entrepôt for India, capable of sustaining a brigade of troops that could be transported around the British empire. In 1805, Lord Castlereagh outlined the rationale in clear terms: 'The true value of the Cape to Great Britain is its being considered and treated at all times as an outpost subservient to the protection and security of our Indian possessions'.[35] This was particularly imperative in September 1805, for the British government had heard reports of a potential uprising in India. Popham's orders allowed him to send the military force straight to India following the capture of the Cape if he felt it necessary. It was a degree of discretion that the government would come to regret.[36]

After a long voyage and a brief battle, the Cape was taken. Popham then did something extraordinary: without any authority or orders from government, he decided to launch an attack on Spanish South America. As we have seen, he had long been a proponent of operations against the region, and he was already convinced that it was a mine of wealth and resources. On his voyage south, he had received considerable intelligence that suggested that the region was not only poorly defended, but also that the inhabitants were ready to throw off their Spanish oppressors. Furthermore, on a personal level, he was desperate to extend his successful expedition to the Cape with an even more glorious venture. Popham persuaded Baird to lend him troops, and he secured 1000 soldiers for

Fig. 7.1 *Home Riggs Popham* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, PAH5888)

the expedition.[37] In April 1806, a force commanded by Popham and Brigadier-General William Beresford proceeded to sail across the South Atlantic. Popham was aware that his actions directly contravened the overt policy of the British government, namely to avoid the expense and inconvenience that came with additional imperial possessions. Half-way across the ocean, he revealed his plans to the Secretary of the Admiralty, and noted that: 'I am much aware that much has been said on the expediency of foreign territorial acquisition taken simply as conquest'. Instead, he argued that the commercial opportunities available in South America overrode any such doubts the ministry might have.[38]

Popham's force arrived off the Rio de la Plata on 7 June 1806 (Fig. 7.2), and met with considerable initial success. The troops were landed and, shortly afterwards, the city of Buenos Aires fell with little resistance. Treasure worth $3.5 million was captured, much of which was swiftly loaded onto *Narcissus* to be sent home, along with Popham's triumphant dispatches. Conscious that he had gone beyond his orders, he was determined to market the commercial possibilities of the region in a belated attempt at justification. He reported to the Admiralty that he was 'in full possession of Buenos Ayres and its dependencies, the capital of one of the richest and most extensive provinces in South America', and, assuming it was now the government's intention to retain possession of the soon-to-be-conquered province, demanded further reinforcements to secure it.[39] Popham also took care to write to mercantile organisations and to the mayors and corporations of numerous northern manufacturing cities, stressing the boundless economic potential of South America:

> Hitherto the trade of this country has been cramped beyond belief, and the manufactures of Great Britain could only find their way to this rich province by neutral bottoms, and contraband intrigues; but from this moment its trade will be thrown open. I need not point out to merchants of your extensive information how beneficial the commerce of this hitherto neglected country will be, and you may form some judgement of its immense population, by that of this city, which alone contains 70,000 inhabitants, wanting all sorts of goods of European manufacture.

It was a deliberate and sophisticated attempt to influence public opinion, constituting economic propaganda of the highest order.[40]

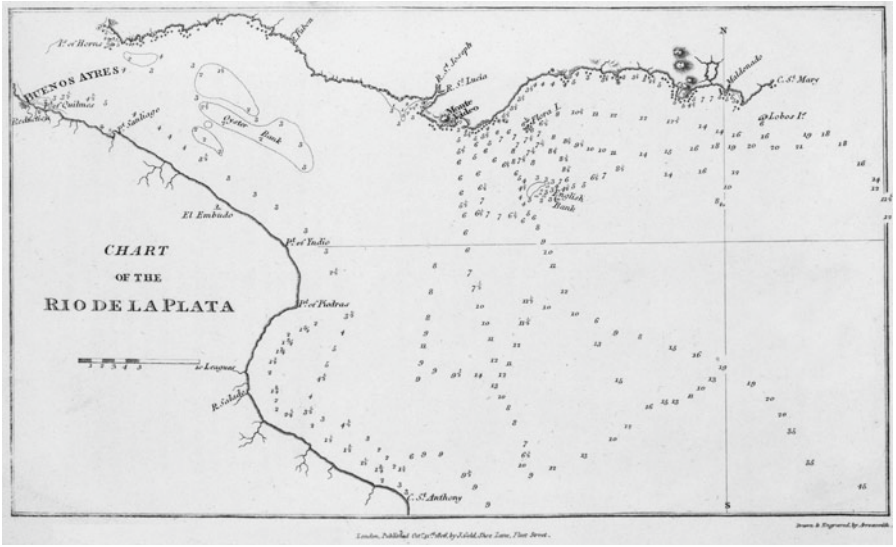

Fig. 7.2 Chart of the Rio de la Plata (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, PAH5910)

The news of the success arrived in Britain with *Narcissus* on 12 September 1806. The treasure was conducted to London by eight wagons, escorted by 30 sailors and a Royal Marines band, and a salute was fired at every major town on the route.[41] Buenos Aires was, as *The Times* put it, now 'part of the British Empire'.[42] This stark and surprising imperial success saw people turn for the first time in the war to the possibilities of a war of colonial expansion, and created what can only be described as a 'mania' for imperial investment. Some even went as far as to envisage a new and extended British Atlantic world, encompassing the old Spanish empire. Many in Britain were under the impression that the entire region had fallen, or at least would do so very quickly. *The Morning Post* spoke of the 'subjugation of the province', while *The Times* noted that 'there can hardly be a doubt that the whole colony of La Plata will share the same fate as Buenos Ayres … they will see that it is their true interest to become a colony of the British empire'.[43] As the news broke, newspapers in Britain were quick to proclaim the commercial opportunities available. 'The capture of Buenos Ayres has filled the world with commercial joy', wrote *The Morning Post*. The paper reported that the Privy Council was to issue an Order in Council opening a commercial intercourse with 'this new and valuable colony', and it described the region as 'one of the most important additions that has ever been made to the British dominions'.[44]

Popular enthusiasm for imperial ventures was nothing new. In the early 1740s, Admiral Edward Vernon won almost universal plaudits for his successful victory at Porto Bello, and over the subsequent decades numerous other leaders achieved great celebrity as a result of imperial ventures.[45] Popham's success in 1806 was far more than a simple victory over a European enemy. Instead, it was a moment of genuine excitement for the British empire. Reports went into great detail about the specific commodities that could be traded and the vast commercial potential on offer. *The Caledonian Mercury* noted that goods could be imported into Britain 'that will enrich the colonial as well as British adventurer', while offering the promise of further, as yet undiscovered, resources: 'there is no doubt, that when the interior is explored, botanical discoveries may be made of the most salutary nature'. It stated that Buenos Aires produced the finest tobacco in the world due to 'immense plains' and 'rich soil', and that 'this valuable and useful article may be cultivated to infinite advantage'.[46] For some, the capture of Buenos Aires promised a new direction in both the war and British imperial policy:

> The capture of Buenos Ayres is certainly a very important acquisition in a commercial, but still more so in a political point of view. It is a most auspicious event, which, if followed and improved by wise measures, may lead to most important consequences, and form a new era in the history of the world.[47]

With British efforts in Europe incapable of affecting Napoleon's continental hegemony, the prospect of a new world of imperial exploitation in South America offered a tantalising alternative.

Nor was this commercial expectation far-fetched. Within a week of the first reports of the capture of Buenos Aires, *The Morning Post* commented that 'The greatest activity prevails, of course, in the commercial world', noting that nine ships had already been taken up, destined for that settlement, and predicting ten times that number would soon follow.[48] Many of Popham's letters to manufacturing cities were published in local and national newspapers, spreading the word about the opportunities available in the region, while the 'Corporation of Manchester' went so far as to publish an enthusiastic response in numerous national and local newspapers.[49] Newspapers offered detailed syntheses of the British-manufactured goods in demand in South America, and urged merchants to take advantage. *The Caledonian Mercury* stated that 'English goods should go directly to South America, unshackled by the heavy duties and difficulties raised by the jealousy of the Spanish customs', where they might be sold at nearly 500% 'under their present prices, and in ten times the quantity at present exported'.[50] *The Times* noted favourably that all private property in the city had been respected, and expected that 'Such unexampled generosity and moderation will doubtless make the inhabitants of the Spanish colonies wish to be connected with Great Britain. By such a union we should have a never-failing market for our commodities'.[51]

Amid this popular fervour for empire, news of Popham's success provoked a disjointed reaction in governmental circles. When he had first sailed, William Pitt had been in power, but by September 1806 he had been replaced by a new government, 'The Ministry of All the Talents'. It struggled to establish a coherent policy towards the new conquest. At the Board of Trade, Lord Auckland saw the acquisition as a means of satisfying merchant pressure for new markets.[52] Following meetings at the Board of Trade, the Privy Council adopted measures to allow the commercial exploitation of the region, and reduced the import duty from the region from 34.5 to 12.5%. Numerous British goods would be exported—orders

of goods worth £2 million were already being spoken of.[53] The new prime minister, Lord Grenville, was torn between a disinclination to invest significant military resources in the region, and the imperial possibilities being trumpeted in the press. 'I always felt great reluctance … embarking in South American proposals because I knew it was much easier to get into them than out again', he wrote. Nor did he agree with the commercial arguments being put forward by Popham and numerous other mercantile projectors, for while the war with France had closed up some markets for British exports in Europe, there were numerous others—in the United States and West Indies—which could supplant those lost. However, Grenville came under great pressure as a result of Popham's propaganda efforts: 'The capture of Buenos Ayres, trumpeted up as it has been by Popham and his agents, has already produced such an impression as will make the surrender of that conquest most extremely difficult'.[54]

Government policy began to bend in the wind of public celebration and mercantile ambition. While sceptical of occupation, Grenville recognised that the temporary possession—and the threat of a more permanent conquest—could have a diplomatic resonance. The government was at this time involved in ill-fated peace talks with France, and Grenville hoped vehemently that the capture of Buenos Aires would make a 'deep impression' in France.[55] Grenville believed the capture would cancel out the recent French conquest of Naples, and wrote to the peace commissioner, Lord Lauderdale, 'to make use of it effectively'.[56] For Grenville, then, the capture was not about permanent conquest or liberation, but about international bartering.[57] There was certainly no ambition to liberate the local population, and most viewed 'with horror' the prospect of an independent—and likely revolutionary—South America. Ultimately, impotent in Europe and fascinated by the potential riches of South America, the British government had stumbled upon an opportunistic and ultimately ad hoc imperial policy.[58] This was given greater credence when the peace talks between Britain and France broke down in October 1806, and Napoleon won a decisive military victory over the Prussians at the Battle of Jena. Isolated from the Continent, with no allies and only a small military force, the prospect of victory in Europe looked bleaker than ever. In a letter to the prime minister, the cabinet minister Earl Fitzwilliam saw Napoleon's victory as a turning point in history in similar tones to the recent animated newspaper reportage: 'The disasters in Germany, I find, exceed the French reports; these are only preparations to the destruction even of the Russian

empire; the end of the old world'.[59] The 'new world', it seemed, was to be in South America.

As early as 23 September, Grenville had decided to send further expeditions to assist in the conquest of South America, and he commissioned several reports on the area. From October, numerous reinforcements were sent to the region, all convoyed by the Royal Navy. Rear Admiral Charles Stirling had been sent on *Sampson*, along with two supply ships, to take command of the forces off La Plata, even before news of the fall of Buenos Aires had arrived.[60] On 9 October 1806, a force of 3000 troops under Brigadier-General Sir Samuel Auchmuty was sent directly to reinforce Beresford. Weeks later, a further force of 4000 soldiers, commanded by Colonel Robert Craufurd and Rear Admiral George Murray in *Polyphemus*, was directed to conquer Chile; four further line-of-battle ships—*Spencer*, *Theseus*, *Captain* and *Ganges*—were gathered to convoy Craufurd's expedition.[61] The navy's ability to transport troops speedily and efficiently around the Atlantic world—and then sustain them on arrival—offered a considerable advantage over Britain's enemies, for imperial ventures on this scale were beyond the capabilities of France and Spain. At one moment of inter-service friction, the First Lord of the Admiralty (and brother of the prime minister) Tom Grenville made this plain to his military equivalent. 'Craufurd cannot come and go unless Admiral Murray should carry him', he said simply. 'You will I am sure at all events see that the naval part of this question forms a very principal feature.'[62]

For all that the navy allowed British military power to be projected around the world, the vast distances involved meant that expeditions were essentially sent blind.[63] This was borne out in early January 1807, when disastrous news arrived in Britain. In early August, after only seven weeks of occupation, the citizens of Buenos Aires had risen in revolt and forced the British troops to surrender. The British force had always been small, and a great storm had sunk or disabled many of Popham's gunboats just as the Spanish were attacking, which prevented them from intervening.[64] In the aftermath of this news, Murray and Crauford were re-directed to Rio de la Plata, while an even larger military force under the command of Lieutenant-General Whitelocke was gathered and sent to the region. By this time, even the most supportive cabinet ministers were beginning to have doubts about the ministry's South American policy. William Windham, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies and one of the great supporters of South American intervention, wrote to Tom Grenville, stating that 'Our measure is, I am persuaded, a very bad one

… upon comparing dates and distances the effect is likely to be to place us some time hence in a state of the most complete embarrassment'.[65] Tom Grenville was having similar doubts himself. 'I am more than ever convinced', he wrote to his brother, 'that all these distant expeditions are of necessity subject to so many chances that I have little stomach for them'.[66] Despite these misgivings, the reinforcements went ahead, for, having committed to the venture, the prime minister, William Grenville, felt that he could not turn back.

As the reinforcements arrived in La Plata, the campaign briefly swung in Britain's favour. Stirling arrived at Maldonado on 3 December 1806, and Popham was recalled, much to his fury.[67] The first military force under Auchmuty arrived in February, and, supported by a naval force under Stirling, proceeded to seize the city of Montevideo. Following its capture, the navy struggled to take control of the rivers to the north of Buenos Aires, their progress impeded by the narrow, shallow waters. No matter how far the smaller ships penetrated, it was always possible for the enemy to cross the river further upstream.[68] Three months later, Whitelocke's troops arrived, followed soon after by Craufurd's force, which had been redirected from Chile, bringing the entire force's strength to 15,000 troops. Whitelocke marched again on Buenos Aires, but was repulsed after a bloody fight. He had suffered over a thousand casualties, and had seen a similar number taken prisoner. He continued to hold Montevideo, but he was desperate to extricate the prisoners, and increasingly aware that the conquest of the region was an impossibility. In July 1807, he signed an armistice, in which he agreed to evacuate the entire region for the prisoners' safe return, thereby ending the British expeditions to Rio de la Plata. Whitelocke would take the blame for the defeat—he was court-martialled and dismissed 'with ignominy' (Fig. 7.3).[69]

For the navy, the campaign had been a sobering one. While it had performed remarkable feats in moving troops around the globe so quickly and adeptly, in the uncharted waters around Buenos Aires, it had discovered the limits of sea power. The expeditions had also briefly ended any prospect of further large, imperial expeditions being launched in the war. As early as December 1806, Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood had noted the worth of colonial acquisitions in a war focused in Europe:

> We shall hear no more, I trust, of our sending great armies and expeditions to distant colonies, at a time when all our powers should be concentrated at home. It is not as it was in former wars, when France was to be subdued

Fig. 7.3 *Storming of Monte Video* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, PAI6994)

> by her colonies. Her Ruler acts on a very different principle; his force is collected; he sends no armies to succour or defend colonies; his object is to strike at the heart, and not at the extremities.[70]

In Britain, a new ministry led by the Duke of Portland replaced the 'Ministry of the All the Talents' and was more sceptical of the South American policy. Even before the news of Whitelocke's defeat had arrived, the new Secretary of State for War, Lord Castlereagh, had begun to doubt 'whether the value of such an occupancy and such a connexion, either during war, or upon a peace, is such as to compensate for the drain and encumbrance it must prove upon our other military operations and on our population'. The policy of the previous ministry, he argued, 'will be productive of little commercial or political benefit, and must be felt as a great waste of our military means'. In a long memorandum, he criticised the 'hopeless task of conquering this extensive country, against the temper

of its population'. Only a scheme of 'liberating South America', in the process gaining popular support, was workable, but any thought of pursuing such a policy was abandoned following Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, and the subsequent revolt against French rule.[71]

In the aftermath of the expeditions to Rio de la Plata, Europe became the centre of British strategic attention once again. For the remainder of the war, a small naval squadron would be stationed off South America, and, with Spain now allied to Britain, the trade of the region was opened to British merchants. From late 1806 onwards, Britain faced a new threat: Napoleon's Continental System. This enabled him to use his unrivalled dominance of the European continent to attack British trade in a wholly novel way: removing the markets for British goods by prohibiting continental Europe from trading. In doing so, he expected to decimate Britain's export trade, creating a balance-of-payments deficit and an extensive outflow of specie that would ultimately reduce and destroy British wealth and productive capacity, while also weakening the British economy by depriving it of certain critical commodities, not least the crucial supplies of naval stores from the Baltic and wheat from the Continent.[72] It was an unprecedented and wide-ranging attempt at economic strangulation, for Napoleon was striking at the heart of the British commercial system. Moreover, Napoleon came very close to achieving his primary aim: that of reducing British gold reserves. Specie at the Bank of England fell from £6.9 million in 1808 to £3.3 million in 1811, and fell further to £2.2 million by 1814.[73]

However, the British were able to combat the system in two ways, and the untapped wealth of South America would play a crucial part. Firstly, the Royal Navy was employed to organise an illicit trade to and from the European continent, based on the simple reality that the interest to continue trading was stronger than the political forces that worked for its prohibition. A shadow economy emerged across the Continent, as merchants used smuggling, fraud and bribery to ensure the survival of trade with Britain.[74] Though trade to the Continent was greatly reduced, it continued. Secondly, Britain was able to locate other export markets to replace those lost in Europe. British exports to North America and particularly to the untapped territories in South America grew dramatically in the years after 1806, and proved a crucial supplement to the trade lost in continental Europe. Between 1806 and 1810, exports to South America rose from £1.8 million to £6 million.[75] It transpired, in other words, that vast commercial wealth could be attained without the need for conflict, conquest or a war of liberation.

Indeed, in the years after Popham's ambitious but ultimately doomed attack, Britain established a very different form of imperial expansion. As trade with the Spanish South American colonies blossomed, Britain established something akin to an 'informal empire', one that would continue to flourish into the nineteenth century. This was, as Gough has put it, a 'new, invisible empire of commerce', as British investment flowed into the South American continent.[76] Politicians and merchants alike took advantage of the possibilities and, by the mid-1820s, British exports to the region totalled £5 million, amounting to 13% of its total exports. Though this plateaued in the late 1820s, as the market for British goods began to dry up, Latin America remained an important export market, albeit one limited by rival merchants and the lack of direct political influence.[77] What influence Britain had relied less on ministerial ambition—after 1815, British governments remained resolutely conservative in the face of commercial interest—but on the Royal Navy, the force capable of defending trade and representing the British state.[78] The creation of the South America Station in 1808, initially to guard Portuguese dominions there, but subsequently to protect the increasingly vast trade conducted to and from the region, was, therefore, a harbinger of things to come.[79]

Like much of the British commercial and imperial system, then, the 'informal empire' that emerged in South America after 1806 depended on naval power and naval protection. To contemporaries, mercantile reliance on the navy was assumed: William Cobbett noted in 1803 that 'the ship-owner must know, that, without the protection of the Royal Navy, his trade must instantly cease'.[80] In the years after 1805, France's naval fleets were confined to port by the rigorous and determined Royal Navy blockade, and though numerous enemy sorties were attempted, they failed to threaten Britain's burgeoning Atlantic trading system. Furthermore, the Royal Navy, as we have seen during the 1806 expeditions to Rio de la Plata, was also at the heart of Atlantic imperial movements. Its ability to transport troops speedily and efficiently around the Atlantic, and then to sustain them once in place, offered a considerable advantage over Britain's enemies. It was, of course, the conduct of an individual naval officer, and his manipulation of mercantile networks, that had almost single-handedly re-directed government policy.

That the navy played a key role in British Atlantic imperialism is hardly a new or surprising observation. However, what is less frequently commented upon is how naval actions could alter and even shape imperial policy. True, in a war against a Continental hegemon, imperial considerations

were subsidiary, even peripheral, and as a result, the meaning and purpose of empire became ambiguous. Looking back on the expeditions to Rio de la Plata in May 1807, Lord Castlereagh criticised the confused ambitions of the men who had launched the expeditions:

> Upon a perusal of the correspondence in the office, it does not appear that any original purpose prevailed in the Councils of the late Government, to commence operations in South America, or that, when commenced by the expedition against Buenos Ayres, they ever came to a very precise determination with respect to the principles upon which they were to be carried on.[81]

With few strategic options available, the attempted invasion of Spanish South America was an opportunistic effort made by ministers desperate to do something to affect the war, but who gave little thought to the form of empire they were advocating. Perhaps more importantly, though, the expeditions to South America heralded a new 'informal' form of imperialism that would dominate into the nineteenth century. Burnt by the failed attempt to secure a permanent political presence in the region, Britain's new empire would be one built on trade alone. Moreover, the commercial exploitation of South America that followed meant that British interests would no longer be confined to the northern Atlantic Ocean. In this, the expeditions to the Rio de la Plata (along with the permanent capture of the Cape) were part of a broader reconfiguration, and expansion, of Britain's Atlantic world.

Over the subsequent years of warfare, numerous other imperial possessions were captured around the globe. All were achieved using local forces. As before, the vast majority of naval forces remained in Europe, while the British military campaign on the Iberian Peninsula saw the resources of the army concentrated on the European continent. Despite this disposition, the small colonial garrisons and squadrons proved very effective, and, by the end of 1811, every colonial possession of France and her dependents was in British hands. This marked, as Duffy has commented, 'the most complete ascendency ever achieved in 250 years of imperial warfare', but not even this 'imperial and naval Armageddon' could force Napoleon to come to terms.[82] As *The Morning Chronicle* had predicted eight years earlier, an 'imperial strategy', if indeed we can even call it that, could not overwhelm a Continental hegemon, certainly not one as dominant as Napoleonic France. It would take a further four years of bitter warfare in Europe before Napoleon was finally defeated.

Notes

1. *The Morning Chronicle*, 9 May 1803.
2. Michael Duffy, 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume 2. The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 186–7.
3. Quoted in Duffy, 'World-Wide War', p. 191.
4. Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987); Christopher D. Hall, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War, 1803–1815* (Manchester, 1992), p. 77.
5. Piers Mackesy, *War without Victory: The Downfall of Pitt, 1799–1802* (Oxford, 1984), p. 208.
6. Daniel A. Baugh, 'Great Britain's "Blue-Water" Policy, 1689–1815', *International History Review* 10 (1988), 33–58; Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 79.
7. 'Summary of Politics', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 7–14 May 1803. See also *Cobbett's Annual Register*, 7–14 May 1803, pp. 723–35.
8. Hall, *British Strategy*, pp. 95–6.
9. The proportion of ships stationed in European waters never fell below 68%, and the proportion of seamen stationed in Europe never fell below 70%. Indeed, in 1812, the proportion of men reached as high as 81%. These data are taken from The National Archives, Kew (TNA), ADM 8/86, 'Admiralty List Books'. These figures exclude the categories 'Convoys and Cruisers' and 'Not Assigned to Station—Unknown', which list ships with no known location.
10. Conway notes that only in the early stages of the War of American Independence, before France and Spain had entered on the colonial side, was a majority of naval force located outside the European theatre. See Stephen Conway, 'Empire, Europe and British Naval Power', in David Cannadine, ed., *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain's Maritime World, c. 1760–c. 1840* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 24–5; Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 79.
11. Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 79.
12. There is a considerable historical debate over the geographical direction of British policy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For a 'blue-water' argument, see Baugh, 'Great Britain's "Blue-Water" Policy', and N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain* (London, 2004), esp. pp. lxii–xv. For a continental approach, see Brendon Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (London, 2007). For the most balanced analysis, see Conway, 'Empire, Europe and British Naval Power', pp. 22–40.

13. C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London, 1989).
14. Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 76.
15. Richard Bonney, 'Towards the Comparative Fiscal History of Britain and France during the "Long" Eighteenth Century', in Leandros Prados de la Escosura, ed., *Exceptionalism and Industrialisation: Britain and Its European Rivals, 1688–1815* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 214.
16. Duffy, 'World-Wide War', p. 192; Hall, *British Strategy*, pp. 79–80.
17. John D. Grainger, 'The Navy in the River Plate, 1806–1808', *Mariner's Mirror* 81 (1995), 287–99; John D. Grainger, ed., *The Royal Navy in the River Plate 1806–1807* (Aldershot, 1996).
18. Hugh Popham, *A Damned Cunning Fellow: The Eventful Life of Rear-Admiral Sir Home Popham KCB, KCH, KM, FRA 1762–1820* (Tywardreath, 1991); Martin Robson, *Britain, Portugal and South America in the Napoleonic Wars: Alliances and Diplomacy in Economic Maritime Conflict* (London, 2010).
19. Ian Fletcher, *The Waters of Oblivion: The British Invasion of the Rio de la Plata, 1806–1807* (Tunbridge Wells, 1991); Ben Hughes, *The British Invasion of the River Plate 1806–7: How the Redcoats were humbled and a Nation was born* (Barnsley, 2013).
20. Charles F. Mullett and John Dalrymple, 'British Schemes against Spanish America in 1806', *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 27 (1947), 269.
21. Duffy, 'World-Wide War', pp. 192–3.
22. John Lynch, 'British Policy and Spanish America, 1783–1808', *Journal of Latin American History* 1 (1969), 1–30.
23. Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 97.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Duffy, 'World-Wide-War', p. 194.
27. Correspondent quoted in *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, 1–8 July 1803, see also *Cobbett's Annual Register*, 1 July 1803.
28. *The Morning Post*, 5 July 1803.
29. *Hansard*, House of Commons, 20 June 1805.
30. Arthur Aspinall, ed., *The Later Correspondence of George III, 1783–1810*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1962–67), vol. 4, p. 143; Bruce Collins, *War and Empire: The Expansion of Britain, 1790–1830* (London, 2009), p. 232.
31. Hall, *British Strategy*, p. 79.
32. 'The Second Capture of the Cape of Good Hope 1806', in W. G. Perrin, ed. *The Naval Miscellany* (London, 1928), vol. 3, pp. 196–7.

33. L. C. F. Turner, 'The Cape of Good Hope and the Anglo-French Conflict, 1797–1806', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 9 (1961), 376.
34. Quoted in Turner, 'Cape of Good Hope', p. 368.
35. Quoted in John McAleer, '"The Key to India": Troop Movements, Southern Africa, and Britain's Indian Ocean World, 1795–1820', *The International History Review* 35 (2013), 299.
36. Admiralty to Popham, 24 September 1805, in Perrin, ed., *Naval Miscellany*, pp. 219–22.
37. Popham, *A Damned Cunning Fellow*, pp. 145–6.
38. Popham to Marsden, 30 April 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 26–8.
39. Popham to Marsden, 8 July 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 37.
40. *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmoreland &c.*, 20 September 1806; Grainger, 'River Plate', p. 288.
41. Robson, *Britain, Portugal and South America*, pp. 88–91; Martin Robson, *A History of the Royal Navy: The Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2014), p. 186.
42. Grainger, 'River Plate', p. 288.
43. *The Morning Post*, 15 September 1806; *The Times*, 15 September 1806.
44. *The Morning Post*, 16 September 1806.
45. See Kathleen Wilson, 'Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon', *Past and Present* 121 (1988), 74–109. See also Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–178*5 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 22–4, 151–3; Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, 'Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England', *Journal of British Studies* 27 (1989), 208–10; James Davey, 'The Naval Hero and British National Identity, 1707–1750', in Duncan Redford, ed., *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World* (London, 2014), pp. 13–37.
46. *The Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1806.
47. *The Morning Post*, 26 September 1806.
48. *The Morning Post*, 22 September 1806.
49. See, for example, *The Morning Post*, 20 September 1806; *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 September 1806; *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmoreland &c.*, 20 September 1806; 'Resolutions from Manchester' in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 125.
50. *The Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1806.
51. *The Times*, 15 September 1806.
52. Lynch, 'British Policy', pp. 17–20.
53. As reported in *The Caledonian Mercury*, 20 September 1806, and *The Morning Post*, 22 September 1806.

54. Grenville to Lauderdale, 22 September 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 123–4; Robson, *Britain, Portugal and South America*, pp. 91–100.
55. Grenville to Lauderdale, 14 September 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 123.
56. Ibid.
57. See, for example, Grenville to Lauderdale, 22 September 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 123–4; Grenville to Lauderdale, 1 October 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 126–7. This chimed with a commentary in *The Times*, which noted: 'This country stands now on a much prouder footing than it has done since the Negotiation with France commenced. … BUONAPARTE must be convinced that nothing but a speedy peace can prevent the whole of Spanish America from being wrested from his influence, and placed for ever under the protection of the British Empire'. *The Times*, 15 September 1806.
58. Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 5–6, 115.
59. Earl Fitzwilliam to Grenville, 3 November 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 140.
60. Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 112; Grainger, 'River Plate', p. 288.
61. Tom Grenville to Windham, 23 October 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 136.
62. Tom Grenville to Windham, 26 February 1807, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 165–6.
63. Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. ix–x.
64. Grainger, 'River Plate', pp. 289, 293, 295.
65. Windham to Tom Grenville, 30 December 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 150.
66. Tom Grenville to the Marquess of Buckingham, 17 February 1807, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. 161–2.
67. Popham to Baird, 16 December 1806, in Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, p. 196.
68. Grainger, ed., *River Plate*, pp. xii, 174–5.
69. Hughes, *British Invasion of the River Plate*, pp. 218–19.
70. Cuthbert Collingwood to Blackett, 9 December 1806, in G. L. Newnham Collingwood, ed., *A Selection from the Public and Private Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood: Interspersed with Memoirs of his Life* (London, 1828), p. 256.
71. Lynch, 'British Policy', p. 23; Ben Hughes, *British Invasion of the River Plate*, p. 220.
72. Lance E. Davis and Stanley L. Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History since 1750* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 30, 38.
73. B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 657; Davis and Engerman, *Naval Blockades*, pp. 32–3.

74. Katherine B. Aaslestad, 'War without Battles: Civilian Experiences of Economic Warfare during the Napoleonic Era in Hamburg', in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagermann and Jane Rendall, eds., *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 119, 123.
75. Deane, *British Historical Statistics*, p. 495.
76. Barry Gough, 'Profit and Power: Informal Empire, the Navy and Latin America', in Raymond E. Dummett, ed., *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (London, 1999), p. 69.
77. Alan Knight, 'Britain and Latin America', in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume 3. The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999) p. 127; Martin Lynn, 'British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century', in Porter, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume 3*, pp. 115–16.
78. Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1993), p. 36.
79. Gough, 'Profit and Power', p. 77.
80. *Cobbett's Annual Register*, 7 May 1803.
81. Lord Castlereagh, 'Memorandum for the Cabinet Relative to South America', 1 May 1807, in Charles William Vane, Marquess of Londonderry, ed., *Correspondence, Despatches and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, 12 vols. (London, 1851), vol. 7, p. 315.
82. Duffy, 'World-Wide War', pp. 203, 205.

CHAPTER 8

Atlantic Periphery, Asian Gateway: The Royal Navy at the Cape of Good Hope, 1785–1815

John McAleer

In February 1798, as he travelled to India to take up his post as governor general, Richard Wellesley, the Earl of Mornington, broke his journey at the Cape of Good Hope. He took the opportunity of landfall to report on the recently acquired colony to Henry Dundas back in London. Wellesley's account is extensive and provides considerable detail on the strategic advantages and economic possibilities possessed by the Cape (and any European power holding it). But he noted another important consideration: 'As a naval station, I look upon the Cape to be still more important'.[1]

Wellesley's acknowledgement of the significance of the region for the Royal Navy runs somewhat counter to many subsequent assessments, which regard the Cape as merely a stopping-off or revictualling point at the entrance to (and exit from) the Indian Ocean world of trade and commerce. Indeed, in the historiography of Britain's presence there, the navy's activities in late-eighteenth-century South Africa are often reduced to Commodore George Johnstone's abortive assault in the early 1780s and George Keith Elphinstone's successful capture of the Dutch colony in 1795. Many assessments follow Lord Nelson's judgement, offered to the House of Lords in November 1801, that the Cape was 'merely a tavern on the passage [to India], which served to call at, and thence often to delay the voyage'.[2] The purpose of this chapter is to offer a recalibration of this interpretation. While the navy's relationships with other areas of the

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_8

Atlantic have been the subject of considerable and sustained scholarly scrutiny, this chapter moves the focus south of the equator. By exploring the role played by the Royal Navy in South African waters in the period, the discussion suggests that a 'naval Atlantic'—characterised by colonial and commercial protection, resource exploration, and flows of information and ideas—stretched to the furthest limits of the Atlantic world, and helped to secure access to another oceanic trading system in the process. This chapter focuses primarily on the two decades following the Cape's capture by British forces in 1795. This was a period of increasing British involvement in what was, to all intents and purposes, a Dutch colony. It was only after the final settlement at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 that Britain acquired a formal claim to the Cape Colony. Before this, however, the Royal Navy and its personnel were key agents in brokering the British engagement with the region.

The Royal Navy presence at the Cape corresponds to key aspects of its role elsewhere around the Atlantic rim, and is characterised by similar themes and preoccupations. First, the navy represented a localised British military presence in the region, actively involved in protecting British trade and commerce. Second, as in various other locations around the Atlantic, the navy played a crucial role in assessing, exploring and exploiting the resources of the region. Naval personnel were involved in charting coasts and identifying potential sources of naval stores at the Cape. And the exigencies of the ships and men on station led to extensive engagement with the landscape and resources of the colony. Third, the pan-Atlantic infrastructure of the navy linked this part of the Atlantic periphery to metropolitan Britain, providing a ready-made channel for the transmission and diffusion of information and ideologies. In short, ships carried ideas as well as men. The naval mutinies at the Cape in 1797 highlight the devastating effectiveness of such a mobile and global force in the dissemination of ideas to the furthest reaches of the Atlantic world. Finally, and as with other colonial societies in the Atlantic, the navy interacted with local settlers and colonists. Sometimes, as in the War of American Independence, this elicited a hostile response. In the case of South Africa, however, the naval presence helped to foster a sense of identity and common purpose against the French enemy among the small group of British settlers and officials. Taken together, these examples confirm the navy's vital role in connecting this region on the southern edge of Britain's Atlantic world to the rest of that maritime system.

But the focus on South Africa and the South Atlantic poses broader questions about the extent of the naval Atlantic. The location of the Cape, at the geographical periphery of this oceanic world, encourages us to examine the ways in which 'Atlantic' patterns of naval activity were modified when they came into contact with wider, global concerns. And the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, during the course of which the Cape and much of the surrounding region came under British control, marked an important moment in the development of the British empire. Indeed, Michael Duffy suggests this period may mark 'the real, unplanned, and unintentional, "swing to the East" of British Imperial development'.[3] The chapter concludes, then, by considering some of the geographical and chronological limits of this naval Atlantic world.

Protecting Trade

Protecting British trade was perhaps the most obvious role fulfilled by the Royal Navy across the Atlantic world. When Britain captured the Cape in 1795, it acquired a key strategic asset for defending and expanding the country's trade with Asia. And the Royal Navy was one of the principal agents charged with capitalising on this advantage, controlling the adjacent seas and protecting vital shipping lanes. The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty were 'fully aware of the importance of the possession, and of the protection an efficient naval force on that station will afford to the British settlements and commerce in the east'.[4] Lord Spencer wrote to Admiral Elphinstone on station in South Africa that it was 'not unlikely that the enemy may before long be turning their thoughts a little more seriously towards an attack in that quarter, and I hope that the force you will have by the time this letter reaches you will enable you to give them a good reception'.[5] As Lord Macartney told Dundas, 'we must always have a strong naval force at St Helena in time of war to cruise between that island and the Cape'.[6] Although, in this instance, the trade being protected originated in another ocean, the activities and operations undertaken by the navy to defend it echoed the steps taken elsewhere around the British Atlantic: protecting convoys, disrupting enemy fortifications on land and engaging its ships at sea, blockading ports and gathering intelligence.

An early instance of the use of Cape-based naval ships to protect merchant vessels is provided by the first commander-in-chief, Thomas Pringle, in 1796. He reported that two ships from his squadron, *Trident* and *Fox*, sailed from the Cape 'having under charge the outward bound

India Ships'.[7] At the same time—the end of November 1796—*Jupiter* and *Sceptre* returned to the Cape 'from their cruize off the Mauritius, having captured three small Vessels, two of which they destroyed'. Meanwhile, three further vessels—*Crescent*, *Braave*, and *Sphynx*—were detached 'to look into Foul Point and Augustine's Bay' on Madagascar. They succeeded in capturing five French vessels and destroying 'an establishment of the enemy's at Foul Point'.[8] All of this activity was set against the backdrop of potential engagement with a major French squadron: 'There were none of the enemy's ships of war at Mauritius during the time the British squadron was cruizing off there, but by information received from a Flag of Truce (sent in with Prisoners) they were soon expected'.[9] In July 1798, Hugh Christian sent some of his squadron 'off the Mauritius … with orders to destroy the posts at Madagascar belonging to the enemy'.[10] In February of the following year, Francis Dundas informed the authorities at Calcutta that the *Dædalus* had 'arrived a few days ago with her prize *La Prudente*, French frigate, fitted out from the Isle of France, which with other mishaps to the enemy and the vigilance of our Navy will in a great measure restore security in the Indian Seas'.[11]

In addition to engaging in localised skirmishes with the French, the Royal Navy protected wider British commercial and political concerns by boarding suspicious merchantmen and blockading enemy ports. For example, an American vessel, the *Caroline*, a cutter of only 38 feet, was seized as it entered Table Bay in 1798. It was suspected (correctly, as it turned out) of carrying dispatches from the French Directory to the Isle of France. Richard Cleveland, its young captain, concealed the messages successfully, but he was nevertheless detained by the suspicious authorities. By the time Cleveland was allowed to leave the colony, the dispatches were useless.[12] The following year, in March 1799, George Losack sailed for Mauritius with four naval vessels 'where I intend to cruize until the latter end of May … in order to prevent any communication with Buonaparte's army or Tippoo Sultan and those ports'.[13] Richard Wellesley was concerned that France would reinforce its colonial outposts in the southern Indian Ocean. As a result, he recommended that Sir Roger Curtis 'take immediate measures for establishing the most strict and effectual blockade of the ports of the Isle of France, which your naval force will permit'.[14] And Admiral Peter Rainier, commander-in-chief of the East Indies station, was similarly convinced that it would be 'a measure of great advantage to His Majesty's service as well as the protection of the British trade eastward of the Cape' if a regular blockade of the island could be maintained from South Africa.[15]

These activities in defence of British trading concerns continued into the early years of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of October 1805, Home Popham sent Captain Ross Donnelly off in command of HMS *Narcissus* in search of intelligence, with licence to perform whatever 'deceptions and expedients' were necessary for the task.[16] By the end of the month, Donnelly reported to his commanding officer that he 'fell in with the Columbus Guinea Ship yesterday, the master of which Mr Callan informed me [that] French privateers were infesting the coast and had captured the *Horatio Nelson*, the stoutest ship coming out this season, after a severe action'. But the navy's presence turned this state of affairs around, as Donnelly and his men set about dismantling the privateers' operations by capturing their brig. As he told Popham, 'I rejoice this nest of thieves, for they have plundered from all nations, is destroyed'.[17] A few months later, Donnelly was successful again. He and his men ran a French vessel ashore, 'of 32 thirty-two-pounders and 250 men', which had just sailed from Table Bay. This ship, which was carrying ordnance for Mauritius, had recently 'captured a South Sea Whaler and an East Indiaman'. Although Donnelly could not give conclusive proof of its name, 'from circumstances and her fast sailing we supposed her to have been La Bellona which has done a great deal of mischief in these seas'.[18]

Naval Exploration and Resource Assessments

As well as conducting military operations, the Royal Navy was invariably involved in establishing the British presence around the Atlantic world through activities like mapping and charting, the identification of resources and the assessment of their use and development. By engaging in knowledge-gathering processes such as surveying, the navy became a crucial instrument for exploring and understanding the British Atlantic. As with other regions around the ocean's rim, the navy's officers and crew were intimately acquainted with the harbours and bays around the Southern African coast, and they were aware of the colony's resources and limitations.[19]

Long before any British territorial presence had been established at the Cape, the government in Whitehall considered establishing a penal settlement in South West Africa. Edward Thompson was dispatched to reconnoitre the potential location: the bay of Das Voltas. Setting off in September 1785, Thompson was instructed 'to fix a settlement' there, which 'would answer every purpose to government and be a safe retreat for our East

India ships on their return to refresh and to protect them from the enemy as the French have used Portuguese settlements in Angola'. Without any fixed naval presence in the region, however, the mission was predicated on luck and chance. Unfortunately for Thompson, his luck ran out before he could even cross the equator: he 'caught a fever' at Appollonia on the coast of present-day Ghana and died on 17 January 1786. The mission was continued by Lieutenants Thomas Boulden Thompson and Home Riggs Popham, although the penal settlement was never established.[20]

Ten years later, in December 1795, and with the Cape in British hands, the Royal Navy explored the south-western coast of Africa again. George Keith Elphinstone, who had captured the Dutch colony only months before, instructed Commodore John Blankett to use the *Star* brig to examine the coast from the Cape northwards to 'Whalefish or Waalvis Bay, reporting the soundings, wood, produce, water, &c.'. This scientific mission would also fulfil a practical and strategic purpose by consolidating British control of this stretch of coast by 'preventing strangers from fishing as forbidden by the publick order'.[21] As a result, Captain Alexander was duly dispatched in the *Star* to investigate and report his observations, the availability of shelter and other stores, 'to warn off all foreign ships from the whale fishery … and to use every means of conciliating the natives to our interests'.[22] The impulse to use the navy as a tool to acquire greater knowledge (and control) of the vicinity was in evidence again a few years later. Thomas Pringle 'found it of the utmost consequence to explore and get information of the almost totally unknown coast of Africa to the eastward of the Cape'. For this purpose, Pringle 'employed Lieutenant McPherson Rice, of His Majesty's Ship Trusty, and sent him in the Hope brig'.[23]

After Britain retook the Cape in 1806, the navy was surveying again. On this occasion, Home Popham sent 'Lieutenant Callendar', 'on the naval half-pay', to explore Plettenberg Bay.[24] James Callander, a master mariner from Scotland, had served in the navy for 20 years before coming to South Africa.[25] In December 1798, during the first British occupation of the colony, he was commissioned by Lord Macartney to report on the bays, rivers and forests of the coast between Mossel Bay and Algoa Bay.[26] His report on that occasion had been glowing, and his opinion of the region around Plettenberg Bay for Popham was similarly 'very favourable':

> It contains several islands well placed to defend the anchorage, around which the marine of England might ride in security, and he entered an inlet which he penetrated to some distance, having soundings throughout, sufficient for

> the navigation of vessels exceeding 300 tons burden. He stated that on each side of it was a continued line of trees capable for shipbuilding, and a kind of flax, from its texture, suited to serve as a substitute in naval equipments.[27]

A few years after the British presence in the region was confirmed, a belief was still abroad that a naval station could be established in a place like Saldanha Bay 'because it presents one of the finest harbours in the world for the accommodation of Men of War, as well as for the ships belonging to the East India Company, and every description of vessel likely to frequent this coast'.[28] The 'discovery of a large and capacious land-locked harbour in the Knysna River' was also promising. According to the governor of the colony, Lord Charles Somerset, 'the advantages likely to result from this last discovery appear to strike all nautical men whom I have had an opportunity of consulting upon them very forcibly'.[29]

If the identification of secure harbours was essential for the navy's operations in the Atlantic, so too was the availability of 'naval stores'. The importance of timber, hemp and other supplies has long been recognised as vital for the successful exercise of seapower.[30] A tangible reminder of this is found in a letter written by Lord Minto, on his way to take up his appointment as governor general in India. His entourage was delayed at the Cape as his ship required 'a new main yard … to replace a very imperfect and defective one which we had sprung on the passage'. This spar was 'transported with some difficulty by land from Cape Town to False Bay'.[31] Building, repairing and maintaining the navy's fleet of ships relied on reliable access to sources of supply. Russia and the Baltic states were the principal sources of the hardwoods, mast timber and hemp that were such crucial components of British naval power in the eighteenth century.[32] But the political and strategic difficulty of guaranteeing access to the Baltic, particularly when Napoleon's Continental System was in force, meant that officials at the Admiralty were always keen to secure other sources of supply.[33] One of the most basic ways in which the navy engaged with different regions of the Atlantic, therefore, was by identifying places that could supply the practical requirements of shipping.

Soon after the Cape came into British hands, a document was presented to the cabinet outlining the advantages offered by the region. Chief among these were the stores and supplies to be had there, which might benefit the Royal Navy. For starters, 'the ordinary Cape wine and brandy have been found to answer for the Navy & might at a reasonable rate be had for the

troops in the West Indies'.[34] According to a Mr Cochrane cited in the margin, almonds, raisins and 'all kinds of dried fruit fit for sea stores are plentiful & cheap … and in particular might supply the Navy'. Finally, 'the Navy might also be supplied with any quantity of salted provisions from the Cape'.[35] If feeding men was important, so too was the procurement of 'stores'. For a sustained and successful British occupation of the Cape, identifying and procuring good-quality, easily accessible naval stores were essential. The need for hemp made the author hopeful that, although 'the quantities hitherto raised at the Cape have been inconsiderable', 'the low lands would yield it of a good quality'.[36] In terms of wood for shipbuilding, 'timber is very scarce at the Cape'. The most promising was 'stink hout—of this last kind it is said that plenty might be obtained for ship building from the SE coast of Africa and that it is of excellent texture'.[37]

The search for such stores characterised the early years of the British presence at the Cape, and frustration at their absence became a constant refrain in correspondence between the distant Atlantic outpost and London. The first British military commander of the Cape, James Craig, was blunt in declaring that there was insufficient lumber in the country 'to build a stable'.[38] The lack of naval stores was a major disadvantage. Lord Macartney told Thomas Pringle that, 'with regard to the supply of wood for the navy, I know of no method of procuring it in the neighbourhood of the Cape Town but by paying the price demanded by those who have it to sell, which like any other article here, I believe tripled in price since our possession of the Cape'.[39] Although the search for suitable supplies in the immediate vicinity was ultimately unsuccessful, the interest in identifying such sources demonstrates the central role played by the Royal Navy in brokering British engagement with the topography, resources and physical realities of the new colony.

The strategic value of Southern Africa to British interests, and the consequent Royal Navy presence, meant that many areas in the region were explored extensively as potential sources of stores for ships. The Master Attendant reported to the Navy Board, for example, that two 'decked craft' had been sent to Saldanha Bay, where 'they cut a load of fire wood for the use of the other craft and for the people of the yard'.[40] The forests around Plettenberg Bay also seemed to promise considerable amounts of timber for ship building, repair and fuel.[41] Investigations into their potential for supplying ship-building timber, spars and masts were commissioned. Some people even held out the hope that the forests would be able to export timber to Britain, thereby reducing the navy's dependence

on Baltic and Canadian supplies. In May 1797, Andrew Barnard, the resident colonial secretary at the Cape, announced that Lord Macartney wanted 'a return of timber and wood of various kinds laying at Plettenbergs [*sic*] Bay'.[42] The following month, Macartney gave instructions to his trusted confidant John Barrow, who was about to embark on a fact-finding expedition inland. Barrow was detailed to take particular notice of the potential of the areas he passed through to provide naval stores:

> What timber or other naval stores you meet with fit for the use of the Royal Navy? What hemp or flax, pitch or tar, or substitutes for them are or may be raised in the neighbourhood of such ports as those articles can conveniently be shipping from.[43]

The importance of naval stores was a recurring refrain throughout the early years of the British administration of the Cape, as administrators and naval men made thorough investigations of the colony's resources in search of the elusive matériel. The year after Barrow set out on his travels, Admiral Hugh Christian dispatched the *Rattlesnake* with the *Echo*, a transport vessel, to Plettenberg Bay with the master shipwright John Narracott and 18 shipwrights 'to procure timber for the use of the yard and to examine the nature of the wood'.[44] Narracott's report, which runs to three pages, gives a sense of the navy's requirements as well as the detailed nature of the investigations being undertaken to supply this crucial arm of state:

> Stinkwood, or the native wood of this country bearing an acorn the same as oak of different dimensions, it grows to about 70 feet long and 3 feet diameter, is fitting for stern-posts, keelpieces, main pieces of rudders, floor and transom knees, is to be had in abundance for ships of all dimensions, and when cut into plank is superior to any oak, when oak work is required, and bottoming in particular.[45]

The region was reexamined by the Navy Board following the Cape's recapture by British forces in 1806.[46] Rear Admiral Stirling sent 'specimens of forty different kinds of woods which grow in and about Plettenberg Bay' to the Board, and apparently some of these were of sufficient quality for use as 'stern posts, keel pieces, main pieces, knees, transoms, floors, planks, masts, yards and topmasts'.[47] On his arrival in South African waters as naval commander-in-chief, Albemarle Bertie similarly took up the Navy Board's questions on timber and facilities:

> We are desirous of ascertaining how far the resources of that country may do away the necessity of sending supplies from hence, and particularly whether woods fit for masts and yards may not be obtained there, and the inconvenience and expense of sending out spars thereby avoided.[48]

In response, Bertie reported that substitutes for hull parts could be obtained in any quantity, but timber for masts and yards was more doubtful, as the pine substitute appeared to be too brittle and heavy. In any case, it was uncertain whether any timber could be obtained economically.[49]

The demand for naval stores, and their identification and cultivation, remained a pressing issue throughout the first two decades of the British administration at the Cape. Richard Collins, an army officer, was sent on a mission of exploration to the outer limits of the colony by the governor, Lord Caledon. Collins reported that 'an object of infinite importance, which might also be attended to here, presents itself in the cultivation of flax and hemp':

> Circumstances render the supply of these articles from our colonies of the highest concern to the mother country; and if the same encouragements to the growth of this produce were held out to the inhabitants of the Cape, that have stimulated to exertion those of Canada, a much less valuable possession, there is every reason to suppose that they would be attended with at least equal success.[50]

Some years later, the rope-making potential of hemp was again on the agenda. Following the discovery of a harbour near the Knysna River, Sir Jahleel Brenton, naval commissioner at the Cape, 'urged strongly the benefit to be expected from establishing a few families there for the purpose of making experiments in the cultivation of hemp, for which the soil is said to be peculiarly well adapted'.[51] In 1811, Algernon Frederick Jones, of Portsmouth Dockyard, was appointed to travel to the Cape in the *Dolphin* storeship in order to investigate 'the nature and qualities of the woods growing in the forests in the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope, which may be applicable to the various purposes of ship building, and also in taking measures for removing the same from the said forests'.[52] At the same time as Jones was preparing to embark, Admiral Robert Stopford informed John Wilson Croker at the Admiralty that transports were about to leave Table Bay 'to proceed to Plettenberg's Bay on the east coast of Africa, to ship a cargo of timber and spars for the use of the naval yard at this place, and of His Majesty's dock yards in England'. Stopford gave further details about the prospects:

> This timber called Stinkwood or African Oak has been found to be in many respects equal to the English Oak for all purposes of ship building; it abounds in the forests in the neighbourhood of Plettenberg's Bay, from which abundance of crooked timber of this wood can be procured.[53]

Like many before him, however, Stopford's assessment proved illusory. The following year, he conceded that 'the survey lately taken of the forests in the neighbourhood of Plettenberg's Bay does not promise that extensive supply of good ship timber which former reports encouraged me to hope'.[54] Jones had spent 12 months in the region, drawing up a detailed report 'upon the forests and timbers growing therein, in the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay, together with the means of removing it therefrom to the Bay for shipping'. Jones was much less sanguine than earlier reports about the quality of the timber and the feasibility of exploiting it. Having 'minutely surveyed these forests for an estimated extent of 60 English miles, but more particularly in the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay', accompanied by the most experienced woodcutters, Jones concluded that good timber was scarce and inaccessible.[55] Stopford had to acknowledge that Jones had been methodical in his enquiries and he regretted that even the stinkwood—'the best wood' available in the vicinity—was found to be 'deficient, and growing in places far remote from the sea side, in the transporting of which the nature of the country presents most serious obstacles'. By way of compensation, Stopford thought that 'the rapid improvement of this colony in point of agriculture, its great capacity for producing excellent wines in any quantity, as well as corn and fine wool, leave little doubt of its powers to supply His Majesty's troops and navy in India with many essential articles, particularly wine, so much preferable to the arrack of the East Indies'.[56]

Despite repeated investigations and exhaustive surveys and searches, the great desideratum—abundant stores and supplies—proved impossible to find in the short term. Eventually, the Admiralty turned its attention even further afield, hoping to find a supply of timber and other naval stores on Madagascar. An early-nineteenth-century report on the island lauded its resources. There was 'iron and timber in great plenty for the purposes of house and ship building':

> The ports and rivers on the coast are numerous and some of them very fine harbours equal in depth to any draught of water our ships may require. The wax, tallow, hides etc. that the island abounds with will be found equal, if not superior in quality, to any of those articles we at present get from Russia.[57]

And the author felt that it was 'needless to say' that 'the variety of timber the island naturally produces for the purposes of building and fuel may be procured at a very cheap rate as a supply for the Cape of Good Hope'.[58] But, although there was an 'abundance of good timber' there, the local conditions prevented its exploitation. A few years later, Robert Stopford warned Croker in London:

> It is mostly of a very heavy nature, and from the extreme unhealthiness of the climate for six months of the year, I do not think the waste of Europeans who must be employed on many occasions in procuring this timber would be compensated by its acquisition.[59]

Ultimately, the navy's supply needs went unsatisfied at the Cape and its immediate surroundings, until regular shipments of timber could be sent from the Knysna River later in the decade.[60] Nevertheless, by encouraging such extensive and forensic investigations of the surrounding regions, the search for stores shows how the navy and its requirements played a crucial role in the British engagement with the local region in the early years of British rule.

Mutiny and Naval Networks

The navy's role as a military force to protect British trade and its exploration of the resources of the region are powerful indicators of its central position in the consolidation of the British presence in Southern Africa, and offer analogies to the situation elsewhere in the Atlantic. However, perhaps the most powerful evidence in support of the idea of an interconnected 'naval Atlantic' extending south of the equator is found in the mutinies that broke out at the Cape in late 1797. The Royal Navy's range of operations took its ships and men around the Atlantic and beyond. It also carried ideas and intelligence, its networks of shipping and communication linking the metropolis and colonies, and colonies with each other. While the circulation of revolutionary ideas around the Atlantic world is now readily acknowledged, analysis of their impact is often confined to the North Atlantic.[61] But the outbreak of mutiny in the squadron at the Cape—inspired by similar unrest at Spithead and the Nore earlier in the same year—demonstrated the close connections existing in the Atlantic system, as well as the ways in which maritime links accelerated the diffusion of news, ideas and ideologies around the Atlantic world. In the first

instance, this connectedness helped to pass on information about the mutinies back in Britain. The networks of news reached all the way to the Cape, from which it could be dispatched to India. Accounts of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore arrived at the Cape on 31 August via the East Indiaman *Arniston*, which left England on 5 June, bound for China.[62] In early September 1797, Macartney wrote to Major General William Sydenham, a friend and colleague from his days at Madras, to say that 'you will hear by these ships various rumours of tumults, mutinies and distresses of all kinds at home'.[63]

In fact, sailors in the British squadron at the Cape knew about the Nore mutiny before their superiors, indicating the lines of communication along which revolutionary information spread globally.[64] Thomas Pringle received news from Evan Nepean, dated 3 May, 'acquainting me that disturbances of a very serious nature had taken place among the crews of the ships at Spithead, in order that being aware of the circumstances, I may be prepared to take the most vigorous and effectual measures for counteracting any attempt that might be made by ill designing persons to excite a Spirit of Mutiny among the Ships of the Squadron under my Command'.[65] But the intelligence arrived too late.

On 2 October, 'some strong symptoms of mutiny appeared on board' the *Vindictive*, which were overcome 'by the prudence and spirit of her commander', Captain Gardner.[66] To prevent the spread of contagion, the ship was separated from the rest of the squadron, but this only served to aggravate tensions. Another warning came on 5 October, when an unsigned letter was dropped on the deck of the *Tremendous*. Addressed to Captain Stephens, it alleged abuse of sailors on the *Rattlesnake*, and demanded an immediate amelioration of conditions in order to 'keep disturbance from the fleet'. No official reaction was forthcoming. So, on 7 October, a jacket was attached to the jib-boom of each naval ship lying in Simon's Bay and the *Tremendous*, *Trusty*, *Imperieuse*, *Braave*, *Rattlesnake*, *Chichester*, *Star* and *Suffolk* rose in general mutiny.[67] It seems that the poor quality of provisions, especially of bread and biscuit, caused by the failure of the wheat harvest at the Cape in 1797 and the absence of supplies requested from the Victualling Board, provided a common grievance.[68] Lord Macartney recalled that the 'disturbances continued until Thursday last when the Royal Standard was hoisted on board the Flag Ship as a signal that good order and discipline were re-established in the fleet'.[69] Through mediation and dialogue, Admiral Pringle succeeded in quelling the unrest, reassuring the sailors that all cases of alleged abuses would be

examined.[70] This had the necessary effect and, on 12 October, Pringle 'issued a proclamation of pardon and amnesty and we hope that there is now an end to this unpleasant business'.[71]

The similarities between the mutinies in Simon's Bay and at Spithead—in terms of both the sailors' organisation and the nature of the crews' grievances—are remarkable.[72] Lord Macartney's explanation for the outbreak of mutiny was straightforward. In 'complaining of grievances, depriving the officers of their commands, [and] appointing committees and delegates', the sailors at the Cape were 'imitating all the rebellious formalities of the naval mutineers in England'.[73] A body of recent scholarship has shown that news and memories of other mutinies affected sailors considering such a course of action.[74] Macartney acknowledged that news travels and that the mutinies at the Cape appeared 'solely to have proceeded from mere wantonness in the sailors and a vanity of aping their fraternity in England'.[75] For Pringle, the mutineers' actions were 'nearly the same with that which is reported to have lately taken place in His Majesty's fleet in England, and I fancy was instigated by it, the information of which had been brought about a month ago'.[76] The sailors recognised this too, declaring that 'the people of this squadron has [*sic*] heard something of the conduct of His Majesty's Fleet in England, and the regulations that has taken place in consequence with regard to extra allowance of pay and provisions'.[77]

One of the most dangerous outcomes of the mutiny was its potential to spread elsewhere. And, without some deterrent, the canker of mutiny could spread very quickly. Macartney warned Robert Brooke on St Helena: 'I am not therefore without apprehension of something similar having happened in the ships of war that convoyed the fleet from hence to St Helena, especially as the time is now elapsed within which we expected some of them to return'.[78] And he feared even greater consequences:

> I should not be at all surprised to hear of some disturbance of the same kind in Admiral Rainier's squadron, as soon as it is informed of what has passed here and elsewhere. This spirit of sea mutiny seems like the sweating sickness in Edward the 4th's reign, a national malady which, as we are assured by the historians of the day, not content with its devastations in England visited at the same time every Englishman in foreign countries at the most distant parts of the globe:
>
> The General Air
> From Pole to Pole, from Atlas to the East
> Was then at enmity with English Blood.[79]

The fear of mutinous and revolutionary sentiment spreading, so evident in the authorities' reactions and responses to the naval mutiny at the Cape, indicates just how porous and interconnected oceanic boundaries were.

Despite some later rumblings of discontent, Macartney's fears were not realised.[80] A year after the first signs of mutiny at the Cape, Lady Anne Barnard commented that 'we are glad to have got the navy back to the Bay'. The return of the navy offered something more than military protection: 'The blew [*sic*] coats make the place cheerful'.[81] In this assessment, Lady Anne touched on another aspect of the navy's interactions with Southern Africa and another way in which the Royal Navy served to draw the disparate elements of Britain's Atlantic world together: its role as an indicator of, and focus for, British identity.

Symbolic Navy

The physical presence of naval ships and personnel in Southern Africa—and their involvement in commercial protection and resource identification and exploitation—offers a tangible link with the rest of the British Atlantic. But the number of ships that the Admiralty was prepared to put at the disposal of the local commander-in-chief, even in times of war and heightened tension, was limited. Lord Macartney rehearsed the situation 'for the intended service and defence of this important place' to Dundas: 'Our naval strength at present consists of five ships of the line, two of fifty guns, seven frigates and four sloops or small vessels, besides the store ship, mostly in good order but none of them sufficiently manned'.[82] In terms of numbers, naval presence was also reasonably modest. An enclosure to the Admiralty in the correspondence of Thomas Pringle shows that 'the full complement of the ships on the South African station should be 5271 seamen and marines, whereas there were only 3830 effective men, of whom 350 were foreigners who entered from the captured Dutch fleet'.[83] More recently, the research of John Day has underlined the relatively minor role of the Cape station in operational terms: in 1809–1810, the Cape naval base supported only two per cent of the navy's vessels.[84]

It is important, therefore, to remember that the Royal Navy also provided a symbolic link between the Cape and the rest of the British world. By virtue of its presence around the Atlantic, this institution had a symbolic power for British administrators and settlers in Southern Africa, on the outer rim of this world. For them, the navy was not necessarily or solely equated with the officers, sailors and sloops that they encountered

every day in Cape Town or Table Bay. Rather, it was an institutional thread linking these people with their relatives and friends in Britain, and connecting them with the larger national and imperial picture. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the navy played a fundamental role in the formation of national identity in Britain.[85] The importance of the idea of naval heroism extended beyond British shores, and helped to form a crucial part of British identity not just in the British Isles, but throughout the British empire.[86] In this regard, then, the Royal Navy's role in South Africa can also be taken to refer to the impact of naval victories in Europe and elsewhere in the Atlantic on British sentiment and perceptions in the fledgling colony. The navy's power extended beyond the number of ships on station or men at its disposal.

Henry Dundas sent news to Lord Macartney of 'the brilliant and decisive victory' won by Admiral Duncan at the Battle of Camperdown in October 1797.[87] Although it took place far away, in the northern hemisphere, this British naval victory over the Dutch confirmed that the recently acquired British possession in Africa was now secure, and Macartney 'had little to apprehend from the actions of our enemies'. But it also had a propagandistic value: 'Its publication at the Cape cannot fail to destroy the hopes of the disaffected and to add to the attachment already manifested by the great majority of the settlement to His Majesty's mild and patient government'.[88] And more than this, the Cape played a role as a relay station for the Royal Navy, distributing news of its victories beyond the boundaries of the Atlantic Ocean throughout the course of the war. By the beginning of January 1798, Macartney had received Dundas's letter and was busy spreading the good news of the 'signal victory' to Lord Hobart in India.[89] Later, Lady Anne Barnard wrote in celebration of 'the news of glorious victory gained by Admiral Nelson over the French Fleet' at the Battle of the Nile. Once again, the Royal Navy and its exploits in faraway waters helped to bolster British confidence: '[Nelson's victory] has assured the people more than anything that has before happened that we shall now be able to keep possession of the Cape'.[90] She wrote excitedly to Dundas:

> First let me in three cheers express my joy in all the late glorious events which I dare say will form as bright a moment in History as England ever saw, as light gains double by shadow, and dark was the shadow which preluded these victorys [*sic*]—I see Lord Nile or Lord something of the Nile is the new peer, I hope his eldest son won't be Baron Crocodile.[91]

The successes of the navy gave her confidence, even in this part of the world: 'I have said nothing of your invasion, but I trust Lord Nelson will have swept the sea clear long ere we shall be sailing into the Channel'.[92] The acting governor of the colony, Francis Dundas, was equally effusive, writing to the East India Company authorities in Bombay to say 'we have heard that the modern Alexander [Napoleon] has already met with unforeseen difficulties, and that Admiral Nelson, after a most glorious victory over the French fleet, is now so triumphant in the Mediterranean that in all probability the means of sending any supplies to Bonaparte, or even of his holding any communication with France, is at an end'.[93] As well as offering practical benefits of protecting trade or exploring the resources of the colonial hinterland, the navy also elicited an emotional response from Britons at the Cape, inspiring pride and confidence, and helping to bind them with family, friends and colleagues elsewhere in the Atlantic.

Conclusions: The Limits of the Naval Atlantic

Southern Africa was both part of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and unique within that system. One of the peculiarities of its situation was the link with India. Richard Wellesley, for example, very much regarded the Cape and its naval squadron as an adjunct to his forces in the East, to be deployed for the greater benefit of his Asian schemes. He asked Roger Curtis to deploy the Cape squadron under his command in support of Peter Rainier's squadron. In doing so, Curtis would 'render a great service to the British Empire in India by contributing any aid to this deficient branch of the naval service in these seas'.[94] Others recognised that a naval presence in South Africa could benefit British interests in India. One author suggested the advantages of keeping 'the greater part of our naval armament for the east hemisphere at the Cape rather than in India' because the 'Navy could be kept here cheaply … at [a] rate of one fourth what it would cost to send provisions from England'.[95] The navy's presence in Southern Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century does not just advertise the geographical extent of the British Atlantic world in the period. It also suggests the flexibility of its boundaries. If Southern Africa was at the outer edge of the Atlantic, it was also part of an Indian Ocean trading world. Indeed, it connected these oceanic basins in myriad commercial, political and military ways, as well as in geographical and tidal terms.[96]

In many ways, then, the Royal Navy in Southern Africa encapsulates some of the inherent contradictions of the region, located at the gateway

between two maritime worlds at a time when Britain's maritime and territorial empire was being reorientated towards its nineteenth-century Asian centre of gravity. Writing to Evan Nepean in the immediate aftermath of the mutiny at the Cape, Thomas Pringle exclaimed that 'the situation of the naval department here require[ed] much more ample and minute explanations than can possibly be given by letter'.[97] But, for all that, the Royal Navy in South Africa was part of a naval Atlantic world. As in other parts of the Atlantic, the navy and its ships protected trade and territory, explored and assessed resources and connected people and places both literally and symbolically.

The presence and activities of the Royal Navy in Southern Africa and the South Atlantic offer insights into two distinct but interconnected themes. First, the navy's protection of trade, its assessment of locations and resources, its symbolic role for colonists and settlers and even its susceptibility to mutiny provide a detailed picture of the ways in which the navy engaged with the region and integrated it into the wider British Atlantic world. This example has parallels elsewhere in the Atlantic and therefore demonstrates the central role played by the Royal Navy in consolidating Britain's empire in the eighteenth-century Atlantic Ocean. But the Cape, and its location at the edge of that oceanic space, also points to the globalising tendencies that would, ultimately, subsume the Atlantic empire of the eighteenth century into the wider British world that developed in the nineteenth.[98] The strategic value attributed to the region, and its evolving role in the Victorian empire, lie beyond the scope of this chapter. But in the century that followed the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the Cape was one of those vital British military positions that helped to create a nineteenth-century global empire. And in all of this, the navy continued to be 'at the centre of events', playing a crucial part in the process of defending and consolidating what Benjamin Disraeli called a 'great maritime empire', which extended 'to the boundaries of the farthest ocean'.[99]

Acknowledgements
The author would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of the British Academy. A Small Research Grant awarded by the Academy helped to fund some of the archival visits and research on which this chapter is based, and for that I am very grateful.

Notes

1. National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD51/3/1/34, Richard Wellesley to Henry Dundas, 28 February 1798.
2. William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 36 vols. (London, 1820), XXXVI, p. 185.
3. Michael Duffy, 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), p. 184. The phrase refers to the work of Vincent Harlow, who famously identified 'a diversion of interest and enterprise from the Western World to the potentialities of Asia and Africa', and which he detected throughout the eighteenth century. See Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793*, 2 vols. (London, 1952–64), vol. 1, p. 62.
4. War Office to James Craig, 14 February 1796, in George McCall Theal, ed., *Records of the Cape Colony*, 36 vols. (London, 1897–1905) (hereafter *RCC*), I, p. 326.
5. British Library (BL), Add. MS 75856, p. 287, Lord Spencer to George Keith Elphinstone, 8 August 1796.
6. Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg (B'hurst), MS63/3, George Macartney to Henry Dundas, 4 February 1798.
7. Thomas Pringle to Evan Nepean, 18 November 1796, *RCC*, I, p. 483.
8. Pringle to Nepean, l5 January, 1797, *RCC*, II, p. 45.
9. Ibid.
10. The National Archives, Kew (TNA), ADM 1/56, Hugh Christian to Nepean, 11 July 1798.
11. Francis Dundas to Fort William, 18 February 1799, *RCC*, II, p. 363.
12. Alan R. Booth, *The United States Experience in South Africa, 1784–1870* (Cape Town, 1976), pp. 18–19.
13. George Losack to Nepean, 10 March 1799, *RCC*, II, p. 382.
14. Wellesley to Roger Curtis, 24 October 1800, *RCC*, III, pp. 346–7.
15. BL, Add. MS 75834, Peter Rainier to Spencer, 10 December 1799.
16. Home Popham to Ross Donnelly, 4 October 1805, *RCC*, V, p. 247.
17. Donnelly to Popham, 30 October 1805, *RCC*, V, pp. 248, 249.
18. Donnelly to Popham, 25 December 1805, *RCC*, V, p. 258.
19. Recognition of the maritime potential of the region, and detailed assessment of its harbours and resources, was not just confined to the navy. Private individuals and traders also played their part. See Edwin A. G. Clark, '"The Spirit of Private Adventure": British Merchants and the Establishment of New Ports and Trades in the Cape of Good Hope, 1795–1840', in Stephen Fisher, ed., *Innovation in Shipping and Trade* (Exeter, 1989), pp. 111–30.

20. Jill Kinahan, 'The Impenetrable Shield: HMS *Nautilus* and the Namib Coast in the Eighteenth Century', *Cimbebasia: Journal of the State Museum, Windhoek* 13 (1990), 24. See also Emma Christopher, *A Merciless Place: The Lost Story of Britain's Convict Disaster in Africa* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 321–39.
21. 'Instructions to Commodore Blankett', *RCC*, I, p. 226.
22. TNA, CO 49/1, John Blankett to Henry Dundas, 23 December 1795. For further details, see Jill Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships: The Exploration of the Namibian Coast by the Royal Navy, 1795–1895* (Windhoek, 1992), p. 27.
23. Pringle to Nepean, 25 September 1798, *RCC*, II, p. 288.
24. For more on the region around Plettenberg Bay, see Winifred Tapson, *Timber and Tides: The Story of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay* (Cape Town, 1973).
25. Patricia Storrar, *Portrait of Plettenberg Bay* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 40. The spelling of Callander's surname varies in the sources.
26. Peter Philip, *British Residents at the Cape, 1795–1819* (Cape Town, 1981), p. 52.
27. Alexander Gillespie, *Gleanings and Remarks collected during Many Months of Residence at Buenos Ayres* (Leeds, 1818), p. 25.
28. Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle (CRO), D/LONS/L13/1/91 (*c.*1815–16), 'The Importance of the Cape of Good Hope Considered', p. 4.
29. Lord Charles Somerset to Lord Bathurst, 18 December 1817, *RCC*, XI, p. 426.
30. In addition to timber for shipbuilding and fibres for cordage, materials such as turpentine, rosin, pitch and tar were all required. See Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652–1862* (Cambridge, MA, 1926). For a more recent discussion, see P. K. Crimmin, 'Searching for British Naval Stores: Sources and Strategy, *c.*1802–1860', *The Great Circle* 18 (1996), 113–24.
31. Hampshire Record Office, Winchester (HRO), 31M70/51/a, Lord Minto to George Tierney, 18 May 1807.
32. Roger Knight, *Britain against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793–1815* (London, 2014), pp. 17–18.
33. See James Davey, 'Securing the Sinews of Sea Power: British Intervention in the Baltic, 1780–1815', *International History Review* 33 (2011), 161–84. On the perspective from the Baltic, see Anita Čerpinska, 'Riga Export Trade at the Time of the Continental Blockade (1807–1812)', in Katherine B. Aaslestad and Johan Joor, eds., *Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System: Local, Regional and European Experiences* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 241–58.
34. Foyle Special Collections Library, King's College, London, DT2042, [John Bruce], 'Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope' [*c.* 1796], p. 69.

35. Ibid., pp. 69–70, 75.
36. Ibid., pp. 69–70.
37. Ibid., pp. 79–80.
38. Craig to Henry Dundas, 5 October 1796, *RCC*, I, p. 469.
39. Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies, Rhodes House, University of Oxford (RH), MSS.Afr.t.3, Macartney to Pringle, 25 November 1797.
40. TNA, ADM 106/2003, Donald Trail to Navy Board, 23 December 1795.
41. TNA, ADM 1/55, Elphinstone to Admiralty, 12 October 1795.
42. RH, MSS.Afr.t.2, Andrew Barnard to Messers Brandt and de Waal, 18 May 1797.
43. RH, MSS.Afr.t.2, Macartney to John Barrow, 30 June 1797.
44. TNA, ADM 1/56, Christian to Nepean, 11 July 1798.
45. TNA, ADM 1/56, 'Remarks made by John Narracott, Master Shipwright, at Plettenberg Bay Forest, Cape of Good Hope, during the months of July, August and September 1798'.
46. John Frederick Day, 'British Admiralty Control and Naval Power in the Indian Ocean, 1793–1815' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2012), p. 150.
47. Navy Board to Albemarle Bertie, 29 April 1808, *RCC*, VI, p. 321.
48. Ibid.
49. Day, 'British Admiralty Control', p. 196.
50. Richard Collins to Lord Caledon, 6 August 1809, *RCC*, VII, pp. 128–9.
51. Somerset to Lord Bathurst, 18 December 1817, *RCC*, XI, p. 426. See also George McCall Theal, *History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872*, 5 vols. (London, 1915–20), vol. 1, pp. 312–13.
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63. RH, MSS.Afr.t.3, Macartney to William Sydenham, 12 September 1797.
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65. TNA, ADM 1/56, Pringle to Nepean, 15 November 1797.
66. RH, MSS.Afr.t.3, Macartney to Brooke, 14 October 1797.
67. Nicole Ulrich, 'International Radicalism, Local Solidarities: The 1797 British Naval Mutinies in Southern African Waters', *International Review of Social History* 58 (2013), 72.
68. Day, 'British Admiralty Control', p. 151.
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75. B'hurst, MS52/2, Macartney to Dundas, 13 November 1797.
76. TNA, ADM 1/56, Pringle to Nepean, 13 October 1797.
77. TNA, ADM 1/56, 'General Statement of the Grievances complained of by the Different Ships' Crews of the Squadron' [October 1797].
78. RH, MSS.Afr.t.3, Macartney to Brooke, 14 October 1797.
79. B'hurst, MS52/2, Macartney to Henry Dundas, 13 November 1797.
80. Later in the month, Francis Dundas was unhappy that the mutinous spirit had not been quelled as 'effectually' as he initially thought. B'hurst, MS52/8, Francis Dundas to Henry Dundas, 29 October 1797.
81. Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas, September 1798, in A. M. Lewin Robinson, ed., *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas* (Cape Town, 1973), p. 175.
82. RH, MSS.Afr.t.4, Macartney to Dundas, 10 July 1797.

83. Pringle to Nepean, 18 November 1796, *RCC*, I, p. 483.
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85. Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2006).
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89. RH, MSS.Afr.t.3, Macartney to Lord Hobart, 6 January 1798.
90. Lady Anne Barnard to Macartney, 25 January 1799, in Dorothea Fairbridge, ed., *Lady Anne Barnard at the Cape of Good Hope, 1797–1802* (Oxford, 1924), p. 86.
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92. Lady Anne Barnard to Macartney, 12 November 1801, in Fairbridge, ed., *Lady Anne Barnard*, p. 297.
93. Francis Dundas to Bombay, 23 January 1799, *RCC*, II, p. 345.
94. Wellesley to Curtis, 24 October 1800, *RCC*, III, p. 346.
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96. See Gerald Groenewald, 'Southern Africa and the Atlantic World', in D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard and William O'Reilly, eds., *The Atlantic World* (Abingdon, 2015), pp. 100–16; John McAleer, *Britain's Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763–1820* (Cambridge, 2016).
97. TNA, ADM 1/56, Pringle to Nepean, 15 November 1797.
98. Groenewald, 'Southern Africa and the Atlantic World', p. 109.
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CHAPTER 9

Epilogue: Love and Death—The Royal Navy in the Atlantic World

Kathleen Wilson

> You gentlemen of the navy are great encouragers of sin, and traffic mightily in that merchandise … 'tis a strange thing, that people who face death so near, should have no thoughts of saving their souls. Charles Shadwell, *The Fair Quaker of Deal* (1720)

> The extacy [*sic*] of joy displayed by the public on receiving the news of Lord Howe's glorious victory, proves how much more Britons are delighted by success at sea than on land. The sea is our protecting element, and as long as *Britannia rules the waves* nothing can hurt us. A victory at sea must ever give more heart-felt pleasure than twenty victories on the Continent. *St James's Chronicle*, 12/14 June 1794.

> Come, I must carry you to our love scenes. Captain Sandys has asked Miss Eliot—refused. Captain Sterling was attentive to Miss Elizabeth E; but never having asked the question, Captain Berkeley is, I hear, to be the happy man. Captain Kelly is attached to a lady at Nevis, so he says: I don't much think it. He is not steady enough for that passion to hold long. … Rosy has had no offers: I fancy she seems hurt at it. Poor girl! You should have offered. I have not gallantry enough. A niece of Governor Parry's has come out. She goes to Nevis in the *Boreas*; they trust any young lady with me, being an old-fashioned fellow. Captain Horatio Nelson to William Nelson, 20 February 1785.[1]

As we have seen throughout this volume, the Royal Navy was a major political, social and international player not only in Britain's rise to maritime dominance in the eighteenth century, but also in the lives, identities

J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5_9

and pocketbooks of those who dwelled within reach of its ships. Across the Atlantic trade routes, in towns from London and Cork to Kingston and, by 1795, Cape Town, in wartime and in peace, the navy made its presence felt in large and small ways. It did so by battling enemies, policing trade, protecting slavery and, after 1807, enforcing anti-slavery, garnering intelligence and charting coastlines. It also unleashed crowds of sailors, officers and supernumeraries on to the taverns, streets, shops, theatres and assembly rooms of colonial and metropolitan port towns, where naval personnel and both water-borne and land-lubbing entrepreneurs of various sorts attempted to seduce, cajole, cheat or otherwise engage each other in ways that augmented local trade and social life, and legitimised the fiscal-imperial state simultaneously. The vast governmental sums spent on naval manoeuvres, equipment and men, the extensive range of commercial interests—from naval suppliers and shipbuilders to merchants, insurers and bankers—and the equally vast numbers of families who had members in the naval service, voluntarily or not, meant that the Royal Navy and its undertakings received avid public attention that extended from the king, the Admiralty and Parliament to the cottages of the labouring poor. This volume has approached the Royal Navy as 'a mobile and pan-imperial arm of the British state' in order to demonstrate how the navy integrated Britain's scattered Atlantic possessions into a fairly coherent British Atlantic world, extending the sinews of naval power and political authority from the slave coasts of West Africa to the West Indies, from Ireland to the South Atlantic and into Latin America, shaping social networks and transhemispheric connections for some centuries to come. As such, the Royal Navy is ripe to be incorporated into critical imperial histories, whether 'old' or 'new'. It can illuminate unexpected continuities and contingencies in the exercise of national authority abroad, and so enhance our understanding of the ways in which Britishness and empire were made, understood and occasionally undone, the product in all cases of the ebbs and flows of people, goods, practices and ideas that accompanied navy ships wherever they dared to sail.

In this brief epilogue, I would like to suggest a few of the ways we can continue to contextualise the workings of the Royal Navy and its impact upon far-flung populations through the lenses of cultural history. This undertaking can track how and where naval histories became entangled with and embedded in the experiences, imaginaries and representations of the diverse denizens of a transoceanic nation, region and empire. To be sure, a topic so grand in scope goes beyond the reach of a short discussion, as the Royal Navy affected domains of global eighteenth-century British

life, commerce and identity that ranged from theatre, fashion, painting, sculpture, literature, interior design, housewares and sociability, to modelling and regulating gender roles and materialising transcontinental marriage markets for Britons abroad.[2] This discussion is organised instead around the poles of love and death: each was central to the ways in which the Royal Navy was, however variously, apprehended and dealt with in the matrices of everyday life, and may even hint at how it was that the Royal Navy and its officers captured the eighteenth-century public imagination in ways that kings and queens never quite did, at least not until after Waterloo.

England—and, after the Union of 1707, Britain—had long regarded itself as a 'trading nation', sustained and safeguarded by the sea. Concepts of patriotism, rooted in classical ideals about citizenship and modified by early modern civic humanism, had a similarly long history, which demanded that various forms of masculine austerity, force and self-sacrifice be put to the service of the polity.[3] Over the course of the eighteenth century, 'trade', 'patriotism' and indeed the Royal Navy itself took on new resonances that directly affected notions of the national character and the nature of British political leadership. Indeed, if the 'romance of nation' emplotted by war, conquest and loss—that of 'self-sacrificing love', as Benedict Anderson would have it—was the crucible of the modern nation, then that martial alliance was, like other love affairs, capable of producing multiple readings of what such love required, produced and dissolved.[4]

Although the essays in this volume have revealed how intimately the navy could become involved in everyday life in port towns and colonies, it is important to point out from the start that, for the vast majority of Britons living in Britain and the Atlantic colonies—the untutored and unwashed as well as the literate and urbane—the navy came to bear its familiar associations with love and patriotism through representation. The commercialised culture of print, which allowed British subjects wherever they lived to follow the navy's engagements and participate imaginatively in the battles at sea and in Parliament, served as an outlet for debating what its victories and setbacks meant for the individual and the polity. The degree to which this phenomenon was empire-wide is frequently overlooked, as the growth of the provincial press in Britain proceeded in conjunction with both the expansion of provincial urban amenities and of British overseas possessions, where ports, forts, factories and relay stations were quick to establish presses, newssheets and even newspapers, and—where there was sufficient density of European settlers and traders—theatres, coffeehouses and assembly rooms. The multi-cultural denizens

of even the most tenuous outposts, in other words, like the sailors aboard navy ships, strove to make their own contributions to a broader, pan-imperial urban culture, and this frequently took the form of reports on local engagements by or assessments of naval action.[5]

So, if the commercial press made it possible for more people to be located at the 'front lines' of battle, virtually or actually, it also imparted meaning to their experiences with the stresses and strains of perpetual war, the invasion scares and manpower shortages produced thereby, and the economic hardships caused by the loss of a family head or member. In this way, ordinary people were drawn into international struggles, raising aspirations for recognition by the state, while also showcasing the harsh and retributive realities of naval life. Indeed, the navy blended the adventure capitalism of the Atlantic world with the strict hierarchies and class and racial exploitation of the fiscal-military state. It should not be surprising, then, that the most familiar face of that state took the form of an aggressive and authoritarian navy that had the coercive power to make British subjects pay the piper, rather than call the tune. To be sure, as our second opening quotation suggests, the navy had been portrayed since at least 1688 as the essential and patriotic choice for the defence of a trading nation, the most appropriate site for imagining and realising the nation-at-arms, which made Britons more delighted by 'success at sea than on land'. Accompanying this belief that 'the Navy was as essential to our Safety and Wealth as Parliament or Magna Charta',[6] the representations of 'Jack Tar', which increasingly populated the prints and stages of London and provincial and colonial cities, displayed him as an essentially honest, profane, stout-hearted, freedom-loving and amorous figure, insensible to danger and peril, and thus as a spur to and support of the self-sacrificing love of nation that was meant to animate patriotism among a broader populace.[7]

On the ground, however, and around the littorals of empire, such love could be more difficult to sustain. Ironically, the navy's storied reforms of the 1740s, which sought to render commander, sailors and civilian officials more accountable by oversight, regulation and penal remedies, could turn local populations against both the service and its personnel. Although, as Stephen Conway has argued in this volume, the Navigation Acts were largely accepted as an 'architecture of empire', the navy's efforts to enforce them could lead to shows of local disaffection and violence. As early as 1684, American colonists were denying Parliament's right to regulate their overseas trade, and a vigorous contraband trade was pursued and

defended, in defiance of international treaties and Navigation Acts alike, between the Caribbean and continental American and Spanish colonies up to and after the War of American Independence. This accompanied the common colonial perception that the service was part of the parasitic apparatus of an unsympathetic or tyrannical state.[8] At the same time, the struggle for prizes or profits that was authorised, unofficially at least, by naval command could undercut plans for protection, or for the assault and conquest of enemy holdings. In the decade prior to the War of Jenkins's Ear, naval officers on Caribbean stations frequently found themselves caught between the need to enforce the laws against contraband trade with the Spanish colonies and the desire to profit from its continuance.[9] After Admiral Vernon's promising, if ultimately disappointing, assaults on the Spanish outposts of Porto Bello, Chagres and Cartagena, Vernon's protégé, Commodore Knowles, illegitimate son of the fourth Earl of Banbury, stayed on in the Caribbean in order to launch an assault on two Spanish privateering stations. However, with his subordinate officers committed to plunder, the actions came to frustrating conclusions.[10] The pursuit of prizes and martial discipline were incompatible, as the 20% of Knowles's squadron who were killed or wounded in these ventures discovered. But plunder and prizes remained the main draw for recruitment and hindrance to desertion.[11] Such examples should suffice to suggest how and why opposition, and worse, arose towards these representatives of the king's government. While locals were happy to embrace the navy when it appeared to protect their interests, they were equally delighted to evade or resist its policies when necessary, and each position sought justification in terms of Englishmen's liberties.

Location, then, counted a great deal in determining if the love of country and acceptance of imperial authority went hand in hand. The ways in which the imperatives of local trade and defence affected support of the navy can also be demonstrated by tracing the rise to public prominence or infamy of fighting or timid commanders. Vernon's victories had produced wild celebrations across Britain, America and the Caribbean, but little else in terms of glory or gain. 'We have lost seven millions of money and thirty thousand men in the Spanish war', Horace Walpole declared in disgust in March 1744, 'and the fruit of all this blood and treasure is the glory of having Admiral Vernon's head on alehouse signs'.[12] Still, commemorative products such as coins, prints, pottery and medals saturated markets for people keen to celebrate British aggression, skill and daring in the face of alleged Spanish hostility and ministerial malfeasance.[13] Moreover, Vernon's

fame, however temporary, set a pattern for the future, when the success or failure of British fleets came to be judged on their capacity for annihilation of the enemy, an imperative that became increasingly shrill as the century progressed. Particularly after the string of inconclusive engagements or outright defeats that followed in the War of the Austrian Succession, the Admiralty set about trying to raise morale and the British success rate by making clear that half-way and inconclusive measures would no longer be tolerated.[14] But this new attitude emanating from the Admiralty had been anticipated by economic pamphleteers in the outports and colonies since the previous decade, when merchants and opposition parliamentarians had insisted that 'the Acquisition of Tracts of Land and Territories to Enlarge Dominion and Power' was the best way to gain advantage over Britain's European rivals.[15]

Such ambitions were difficult to realise in action. After Cartagena, the Vernon-Ogle expedition returned to Jamaica, most of its crew dead or sickly, before sailing to Guantanamo Bay to mount an assault on Santiago de Cuba. Vernon had denounced this project as useless, and so it proved to be. In the next war, after a string of British defeats that extended from Calcutta to Monongahela, Admiral John Byng infamously attempted and failed to oust the French from the British possession of Minorca. Byng was peremptorily relieved of command by the Newcastle administration, tried by court martial and ultimately executed, 'pour encourager les autres', as Voltaire quipped. The ministry used Byng's failure to cover up its own shortcomings—including the decrepit state of the fleet with which it had supplied Byng—by fanning the flames of public discontent in the streets and newspapers.[16] Opposition-backed pamphlets and street theatre articulated an alternative view: that the loss of Minorca was but the latest in a long string of blundering ministerial policy decisions that had weakened Britain, threatened the colonies and served Hanoverian interests, and that the nation's aristocratic leadership was to blame. Such point-and-counterpoint sallies within the expansive and transoceanic culture of the day demonstrated how political pressures and consumerism alike worked to make the shortcomings and strengths of Britain's premier force and its leadership a matter of public debate and consumption, a perception that would only grow stronger after Britain's victories in the Seven Years War.

At the same time, ambitious officers were ready and willing to advance their own reputations in the public sphere, and politicians—eager to appropriate naval heroes to their agendas—competed for the right to endow officers and their actions with suitable ideological meanings. The

problem with the policy of demobilisation in peacetime meant that Britain was caught unprepared for the crisis of the War of American Independence. During its first years, the navy was an ineffectual partner, at best, to land forces. Although effeminate army officers were frequently blamed in the British press for the lack of success against the Americans (despite the early victories in Long Island and New York), the Royal Navy appeared unable to be where it was most needed. In the Caribbean, in particular, the navy seemed to be missing in action, and demands for more troops and men-of-war to protect the islands inundated the imperial state.[17] 'All is tumult, hurry and confusion', the Rev. William Jones reported from Jamaica. 'A general Murmur of discontent is heard buzzing thro' every part of Jamaica, that so little Attention is paid to its safety and defense from the mother-country, to whom the Loss of it, especially at this Juncture, wou'd be very considerable.'[18] With a British public at home and abroad divided by the war effort, it was again more difficult for the navy to appear as an unambiguous patriotic force. Admiral Keppel, a member of the Rockingham opposition, had refused to serve against the American colonists, but agreed to head the Channel Fleet in 1779 to fight the French. However, the fourth Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, sent his supporter, Sir Hugh Palliser, to sea with Keppel in a subordinate command, and Keppel believed that the indecisive outcome of his battle against the French, on 27 July 1778, off Ushant, near Brittany, was partly due to Palliser's deliberate disregard of his orders. Palliser, in return, pressed for a court martial of Keppel by the Admiralty on charges of misconduct and neglect of duty. Keppel was acquitted, but this time the Opposition Whigs won the propaganda war: 'Admiral Keppel has fill'd the mouth of every Englishman of late … and has honours heeping [*sic*] upon him from every quarter except from the government' was how Norwich radical Philip Martineau described things in March 1779, as Keppel was celebrated in street theatre and demonstrations as both a stalwart and courageous officer and an attempted victim of government corruption and incompetence.[19] Keppel was nonetheless discharged from his command, receiving his reward only after American victory had precipitated the fall of North's ministry, as he was made a viscount in 1782 and became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1783.

A different model of political whitewashing occurred in the celebrations that surrounded Admiral George Rodney, a supporter of North's government. His spectacular victory at Cape St Vincent in 1780, when he captured seven Spanish ships and re-supplied Gibraltar, was exceeded only

by his victory off 1782 at the Battle of the Saintes, when he deployed the tactic of 'breaking the line' to capture seven French ships and so prevented an invasion of Jamaica. As the hero who preserved the British empire in the Caribbean, he was celebrated in Britain and especially Jamaica, as Siân Williams has shown in this volume, where street processions, songs, toasts and *feux de joie* celebrated his skill and valour, and where the local legislature voted to erect a statue of Rodney between the governor's residence and the assembly building. However, Rodney, of distinguished lineage and compromised financial circumstances, and with many virtues in terms of his commitment to and talent for sea command, was nothing if not a man on the make. He had distinguished himself in both of the previous wars, contributing to impressive victories at Cape Finisterre (1747) and elsewhere that made him enough money in prizes to buy a country estate and a seat in Parliament. In the next war, he played an important role in taking Martinique in 1762. His naval career was devoted to capturing sufficient wealth to pay off the numerous creditors he acquired in his disorderly and reckless private life. He was also prone to combine hostility to 'rebels', black and white, American or British, with a thorough-going anti-Semitism. In 1772, Rodney implicated Kingston's Jews in the 'pernicious and Contraband Trade' with the Spanish, and in 1781, after he captured the Dutch island of St Eustatius for the Crown, he targeted the Jewish merchants of the island for their alleged role in supporting rebel American commerce.[20] Sheltered by the North administration from parliamentary wrath, the hero of Jamaica harboured prejudices that did not bode well for the rule of a multi-cultural empire, not to mention legitimate commerce and national honour, an objection that was even raised in Kingston.[21]

Finally, even in the final set of wars of the century, against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, the most energetically engineered positive publicity for admirals could backfire. Admiral Lord Howe, an officer with a distinguished career stretching back to the Seven Years War, had served in the American conflict, only to resign his command after the Battle of Rhode Island (1778), which ended in a pursuit of French ships back to Boston, citing a lack of trust of North's ministry and badly equipped ships. Like Keppel, he opposed the North ministry and refused to serve again until after its fall, when he was made First Lord of the Admiralty under Lord Shelburne. When war against Revolutionary France was declared, Howe again took command of the Channel Fleet, and emerged victorious at the Battle of the Glorious First of June in 1794, when his fleet of 22

British ships defeated a French grain-convoy fleet of 25 ships, capturing seven. He had taken seriously the directive to take decisive action, deploying a strategy later used by Nelson, defying naval convention by ordering each of his ships to turn, face and rake their opposing enemy ships.

However, although widely celebrated in the British press, prints and tableaux as a show of British force in the face of a revolutionary threat, the victory was only partial, for French Rear Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse had been able to save the grain and return it to home ports, thus allowing both sides to claim victory. Here, the ministry strove to turn a 'strategic stalemate into a political victory for Pitt's government and an ideological victory for loyalism'.[22] But neither elite orchestration of popular acclaim nor Howe's victory succeeded in stamping down expressions of radical discontent. In Harwich, the town refused to illuminate for Howe's victory, and it refused again to celebrate the victory at Cape St Vincent in 1797. The national thanksgiving for the latter was marred by anti-Pitt demonstrations across the country, with City Foxites declaring the procession to St Paul's to be a 'Court Thanksgiving', with nothing to offer ordinary citizens, and journeymen coachmakers staged a mock execution of Pitt for tripling assessed taxes on horses and carriages. The prime minister was burnt in effigy in 'twenty different parts' of the metropolis and in larger provincial towns.[23] It took Nelson and Napoleon to swing the weight of public opinion in Pitt's favour. When Nelson, using the tactic engineered by Howe, effected the total annihilation of the French fleet of Admiral Brueys at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, prints, cartoons, pamphlets and newspaper reports flooded the markets, print shops and coffeehouses of London, provincial and colonial towns, and Nelson became a hero on a scale heretofore unknown. 'Victory is certainly not a name strong enough for such a scene as I have passed', Nelson reported.[24] His total annihilation of the French fleet at Alexandria had the effect of galvanising British publics, even those for whom revolution and France were admirable things.

Indeed, up until and beyond his death at Trafalgar in 1805, Nelson—and his battered, bruised and dismembered body—had come to symbolise both the sacrifice and the sheer courage of ordinary seamen in ways to which most people—men, women and children—could relate. The spectacles of demobilised and dismembered soldiers and sailors, singing, begging or dancing for money in the crowded streets of Kingston, London and other port towns across the Atlantic empire had become a familiar sight after demobilisations. But it may have taken Nelson and his own physical disabilities to make all of them icons of patriotic love—British

heroes who also gave their lives or limbs, often only to come home unrewarded and in limbo to await their back wages. Beloved by radicals, opposition Whigs and loyalists alike, Nelson showed how an admiral and his subordinates should act, even when faced with daunting odds: with vivacious, self-sacrificing love.

In the *longue-durée* view, then, the greatest and perhaps most remarkable success of the Royal Navy in the eighteenth century was to make itself a symbol of the virtue, courage and self-sacrifice of the nation-in-arms—this *despite* the opposition that its measures abroad and in the colonies could simultaneously stir up—while also twinning the fate of the navy and the fate of Britain in the world. Its escapades modelled forms of patriotism and manliness to be put to the service of the nation-state, but also revealed the darker side of love of country, exposing the craft, subterfuge, prejudice and self-interest that naval service involved. As an emblem of the British *state*, the navy was subject over the decades to the pushes and pulls of political divisions and public opinion about the wisdom of governing counsels. But, following the massive popularity of heroic admirals, it had also become the face of the British *nation*, in a way that the German-born and German-descended monarchs were not quite able to achieve.

The kind of patriotic love mobilised through representations of the most brilliant or ignominious adventures of admirals and commodores—a love of king and country that many admirals, such as Nelson and Rodney espoused, as we have seen in this volume—may have bypassed the ordinary seamen. The allure of prizes and promotion that drew many younger sons to the service made the navy a profession in which money and honour seemed to go hand in hand, and victories were 'handsomely tipped with gold', as Admiral Vernon had put it.[25] But for an ordinary or even able-bodied seaman, prize money, not to mention wages, were more sorely and infrequently won. Indeed, if one were a seaman, the wars and armistices of European leaders were hard labour to endure, for death, not love, seemed to stalk even the cleanest and most well-equipped men-of-war, particularly those headed for the 'torrid zones'. A well-known ballad, Richard Glover's *Admiral Hosier's Ghost*, helped to popularise the horrors that ensued from a West Indian tour:

> Sent in this foul clime to languish
>
> Think what thousands fell in vain,
>
> Wasted with disease and anguish
>
> Not in glorious battle slain.[26]

Hosier lost his own life, as well as that of seven captains, 50 lieutenants and 4000 seamen, to yellow fever and malaria, out of a total squadron of 4750 men. The moral of the story, available to anyone who heard the ballad, was that the Caribbean was a death trap, and so it proved to be. The occasion of the War of Jenkins's Ear threatened to repeat the performance with a vengeance: out of the total number of troops in 1741—roughly 10,715 seamen and 4985 soldiers—Vernon and General Wentworth, who was in charge of the land forces, lost more than a sixth of their men between them. Tobias Smollett vividly described the state of the hospital ships moored in Kingston harbour. The men were:

> … pent up between the decks in small vessels, where they had not room to sit upright; they wallowed in filth, myriad maggots were hatched in the putrefaction of their sores, which had no other dressing than that of being washed by themselves in their own allowance of brandy; and nothing was heard but groans, lamentations and the language of despair, invoking death to deliver them from their miseries … the naked bodies of their fellow-soldiers and comrades floating up and down the harbour, affording prey to the carrion crows and sharks, which tore them in pieces without interruption, and contributing their stench to the mortality that prevailed.[27]

Most of the men had come from the mother country, and so had no immunity to the malaria and yellow fever that stalked the unseasoned in the Jamaican lowlands. The fact that an eighteenth-century seaman was more likely to die from tropical fevers than from wounds in battle indicates the degree to which the Royal Navy was an avaricious consumer of manpower.[28] This was also the case in the East Indies—in some ways, a repetition, with a difference, of the kinds of problems facing ships in the Atlantic world—where in India and Sumatra sailors and soldiers also fell to tropical fevers at an alarming rate.[29]

Perhaps because of the precarious nature of their plight, sailors were avid consumers of the pleasures to be had in the here-and-now when in port. Jack Tar on shore tended to be the reckless, drunken and carefree adventurer, as portrayed by the prints and plays of the day, flush with cash and ready to carouse in taverns and pleasure gardens with his mistresses on each arm—merchants of sin, as the opening quotation from Shadwell's naval romance, *Fair Quaker of Deal*, suggests. But they were also potentially dangerous: crowded into London and colonial and provincial towns waiting for their pay or share of prize money, the sailors' revelry could turn

criminal on a penny. Local newspapers across the empire tracked the rise in crime, insecurity and violence that accompanied demobilisations, such as after the Peace of Aix-la-Chappelle (1748), when sailors rioted over non-payment of wages and prize money, and engaged in a series of 'vibrant' acts (to quote Horace Walpole) that ranged from the expected drunken carousing with louts and women to the daring organisation of gangs to rob homes, break fellow tars out of prison or steal their corpses from the gallows.[30] The hardships, trials and tests of shipboard life are well-documented in the journals, diaries and papers left behind by officers and sailors, as well as Admiralty records: from the terror stirred among the populace by the appearance of the press gang—'no young man could safely go to London', William Darter of Reading reported of the years of the American and French wars—to the draconian punishments for slight offences that could make sailors claim their lot was worse than that of slaves. Such documents also reveal complex codes of masculine camaraderie arising from the ship and its mess, which may have rivalled the more conceptual allegiances to nation or navy.[31] What remains to be tracked, however, are the ways in which, amidst the death and daring of naval service, love could still be a strategy of survival, not only to while away hours lost at port, waiting for the trade winds, but also to distract and enrich their lives and those around them.

Here, in the first instance, it is easier to return to the officer class, the members of which left more records than their subordinates about their efforts to capture love and fortune while at sea. From Kingston, Ontario to Kingston, Jamaica and many ports in between, as well as in Cape Town and Jamestown, St Helena in the South Atlantic, officers in port mingled with local white elites, attending their balls and breakfasts, romancing their women and otherwise engaging in a European-style social life as a privileged minority in what were frequently slave societies. The avidity for entertaining naval officers and midshipman, of course, was a passion that also seized polite society in the British Isles, where the comings and goings of Royal Navy ships in wartime were naturalised by novelists such as Jane Austen, whose brothers, and many of whose characters, made their careers in the service.[32] Certainly the electric excitement felt by Austen's characters when the army or navy were in town was equally evinced in provincial and colonial gatherings, where young ladies and their ambitious chaperones showed off their charms at dinners, breakfasts, balls and assemblies. Lady Maria Nugent, an American descended from Scots and Irish stock, wife of the lieutenant-governor of Jamaica, General George Nugent, documented

in her diary the frequent visits to and from naval and military officers, who in turn enlivened the assemblies in Spanish Town and Kingston. She would send her carriage to Port Royal for them to come to the governor's residence at King's House for feasts and dancing or, alternately, dine aboard men-of-war with her husband and attendants.[33]

Such shows of loyalty and munificence allowed sailors and officers to demonstrate their own sense of purpose and social status, while also assuaging the loneliness and hardships of seaborne battle and postings. But they also allowed the cabin-fevered and sex-starved officers and midshipmen to pursue carnal pleasures, particularly in the West Indies and South Atlantic, where the legendary sexual charms of black and brown women became so eagerly sought out that, in Jamaica at least, balls were organised to facilitate the process. Prince William, the future William IV, posted to the West Indies during the War of American Independence, displayed a royal enthusiasm for pursing 'les Dames des Couleurs', from whom he contracted a dose of venereal disease, as he reported to his brother, the Prince of Wales.[34] Even Nelson got caught up in the various bids for romance that swirled around the gatherings of local and naval society in the Caribbean sugar islands. Our opening quote suggests the volume of men and opportunities that existed for making advantageous matches with a rich widow or enticing young heiress. Nelson himself fell in and out of love with several young ladies during his Caribbean tours, before falling for Frances Nisbet of Nevis, a young, pretty widow who seemed likely to inherit a fortune from her uncle's sugar estates, and who had a son Nelson particularly adored. 'She [Fanny] is a pretty and sensible woman and may have a great deal of money if her uncle Mr. Herbert thinks proper', the Prince reported to Lord Hood.[35] Even on the tiny island of St Helena, where, unusually for a slave society, the white women outnumbered the men (who were invariably snatched up to work for the East India Company abroad, at Sumatra, Calcutta or Bombay), local girls were ruthless in their determination to acquire a potentially rich and well-positioned husband, preferably on his way home to England.[36] St Helena had become legendary among sailors as a site of libidinous pleasures, but it also offered, increasingly, a more refined sociability. Captain Cook, perhaps the most esteemed Royal Navy officer before Nelson, remarked on the 'celebrated beauties of St. Helena: they have fine persons, an easy and genteel deportment and a bloom of Colour unusual in a hot climate', he reported—thus confirming connoisseurship of women to be a necessary credential of a naval officer on a world cruise.[37] Being

masters of a global empire had its advantages, spurring identifications and alliances that tied the overseas provinces and their protectors ever more closely to the mother country, and vice versa, as the imperial provinces yielded various forms of succour—money, position, sex and love, as well as travel—to Britons on the make.

Before closing, it is important to note that rather different kinds of 'self-sacrificing love' were exhibited towards the British navy much lower down the social scale, including among the most abject members of the empire: the enslaved. After Rodney's island-saving defeat of the French in 1782, Jamaican slaves vied to get their hands on sailors' gear or uniforms, signalling local patriotisms and aspirations for freedom, but also a desire to be recognised as fully-fledged subjects of the king. Indeed, in the context of the visual dominance of military spectacle during the American and French wars, and the truncated social hierarchy of bondage, 'national' identities could be trumped in favour of naval affiliations of any kind, as altered or discarded British, Dutch and French military and naval uniforms were sported by blacks and coloureds, enslaved and freed people, across the Atlantic in this period, from the American colonies to Surinam and St Helena. Such choice of dress did more than signal a false or aspirational freedom: it also thrust the wearer into the symbolic centre of militarised slave societies, becoming 'at once the distillation and typification of its corporate experience'.[38] The Maroons of Jamaica were masters of this type of performance since their 'pacification' of 1739, after which their threatening mimesis of army and navy officers was enacted both in their tasks of rounding up runaways and protecting the island during invasion scares, and in their propensities to wear ruffled shirts and admirals' coats and hats. Each worked to mark their difference within and support for the plantocratic regime, while also bringing into focus the more insalubrious aspects of the imperial-garrison state that wielded British authority.

Enslaved women also got in on the act, only to take the appropriation of naval symbolism in new directions. During the French Revolutionary Wars, the Set Girls, dancing troupes of enslaved women organised according to class, caste, colour and nation (the English Sets competing with the French Set Girls arriving from Saint Domingue), donned feminised versions of military coats and admirals' hats in their street performances, accompanied by enslaved musicians who played military tunes on fifes and fiddles. While they certainly intended to solicit or express loyalty, their performances also suggested the close and intimate ways that the navy had been imbricated into slavery and its everyday life, as the seaborne institution that

defended forced African exile to the New World in turn used the victims of that trade to nurse, groom, pamper, feed and otherwise take care of its personnel when in port. Indeed, like sailors, who were also prone to break out into dance and song when stressed, bored or grieved, the Set Girls, draped in patriotic colours and costumes, may have reminded residents that love of country had a price, one that was paid for through the blood, guts and labour of two distinctive sets of people, conjoined by the relentless and often murderous demands of mercantile capitalism: sailors and slaves.

Notes

1. Quoted in Nicholas Harris Nicolas, ed., *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, 7 vols. (London, 1846), vol. 1, p. 123.
2. To take but two examples, see Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire* (Manchester, 2014) and Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester, 2009).
3. Jonathan Scott, *When the Waves Ruled Britannia: Geography and Political Identities, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 2011); J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1983); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England* (Cambridge, 1995).
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), p. 141.
5. For which, see Kathleen Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire: Theatre, Culture and Modernity in the British Provinces* (Cambridge, 2016).
6. Sir Everard Fawkener, quoted in N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* (New York, 2004), p. 236.
7. The depiction of his social status, however, definitively changed over time: from the 1705 edition of Charles Shadwell's *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, a naval comedy, we can track through various editions the transformation of the rough-and-ready sailor bragging about 'whores' and conquest to the more vainglorious and gentlemanly figures of the 1780s and 1790s. See the various editions: 1710, 1773, 1791.
8. Sarah Kinkel, 'The King's Pirates? Naval Enforcement of Imperial Authority, 1740–76,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71 (2014), 4. See also her 'Disorder, Discipline and Naval Reform in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain,' *English Historical Review* 128 (2013), 1451–82. Alternately, the lead-up to the War of Jenkins's Ear showed colonists demanding a *more* aggressive navy, to be used against the Spanish.

9. Duncan Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm: Naval Administration in the West Indies, 1739–1748* (Liverpool, 1993), p. 36.
10. Nicholas Rogers, *Mayhem: Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain, 1748–53* (New Haven, CT, 2012), p. 17 and *passim*.
11. Daniel Baugh, *Naval Administration, 1715–50* (London, 1977), pp. 131–2.
12. Quoted in G. J. Marcus, *A Naval History of England: The Formative Centuries* (Boston, 1961), p. 254.
13. Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 140–65.
14. Kinkel, 'Disorder, Discipline and Naval Reform', *passim*.
15. Wilson, *Sense of the People*, p. 154, n. 43.
16. Ibid., p. 181.
17. Meetings of 'Planters and Merchants' were held in the taverns of Spanish Town and Kingston, and the Jamaica Committee in London met at the London Tavern to press the ministry for additional troops, supplies and money to pay bounties to volunteers. See *Royal Gazette*, 23 March, 1–8 April 1780.
18. O. F. Christie, ed., *The Diary of the Rev. William Jones, 1777–1821* (s.l., 1928), p. 39.
19. Norwich and Norfolk Record Office, Neville MS, MC7/417, Misc. letters and papers, Philip Martineau to SN, 30 March 1779.
20. Holly Snyder, 'Customs of an Unruly Race: The Political Context of Jamaican Jewry, 1670–1831', in Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester and Barbaro Matinez-Ruiz, eds., *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and his Worlds* (New Haven, CT, 2007), p. 153.
21. Rodney was heavily criticised in the metropolitan press. Kingston newspapers were more circumspect, but some ventured criticisms of his treatment of all 'fair traders', Jew and non-Jew alike. His subordinate, Vice-Admiral Hood, thought he could have done more to pursue the French at the Saintes. See, for example, *Jamaica Mercury and Kingston Weekly Advertiser*, 2 October 1779; *Royal Gazette*, 28 November–5 December 1789.
22. Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2006), p. 28.
23. *The Sun*, 19 June 1794; *London Chronicle*, 2–4 March 1797; *Morning Chronicle*, 19 December 1797, 21 December 1797.
24. Horatio Nelson to Frances Nelson, 11 August 1798, in George P. B. Naish, ed., *Nelson's Letters to his Wife and other Documents, 1785–1831* (London, 1958), p. 399.
25. The National Archives, Kew (TNA), CO 30/20/20/4, 55.
26. William Stanley Braithwaite, ed., *The Book of Georgian Verse* (London, 1909), p. 36.
27. In 1741 alone, Ogle and Vernon lost 18% of their complements to death, 5% to sickness and 4% to desertion. See Crewe, *Yellow Jack*, p. 78; Tobias

Smollett, 'An Account of the Expedition to Cartagena', in *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Robert Anderson, vol. 4 (Edinburgh, 1800), p. 444.

28. J. R. MacNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 52–7.
29. Kathleen Wilson, 'Rethinking the Colonial State: Families, Gender and Governmentality in British Frontiers,' *American Historical Review* 116 (2011), 1294–1322.
30. Rogers, *Mayhem*, pp. 35–88; W. S. Lewis, ed., *Yale Edition of the Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 48 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1937–83), vol. 20, p. 106.
31. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston, 2000); Greg Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (Cambridge, 1995); Quintin Colville, 'Life Afloat', in Quintin Colville and James Davey, eds., *Nelson, Navy and Nation: The British People and the Royal Navy* (London, 2013). Quote from W. S. Darter, *Reminiscences of Reading* (Reading, 1888), p. 35.
32. *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* all mark these passings. In *Persuasion*, the character of Sir Walter Elliot objects to the navy 'as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of'. Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. R. W. Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 5 vols. (London, 1933), p. 19. But Austen herself valued the navy, ranking it just below the clergy as a gentleman's profession. See Juliet MacMaster, 'Class', *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 121.
33. See the chapter by Siân Williams above, and *Lady Nugent's Journal*, ed. Philip Wright (Kingston, 2002), *passim*.
34. Quoted in Edgar Allen, *Nelson: Love and Fame* (New Haven, CT, 2003), p. 80.
35. Ibid, p. 81.
36. Wilson, 'Re-thinking the Colonial State'.
37. *The Journals of Captain James Cook: The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole (Cambridge, 1961), 20 May 1775, p. 664. For masculine connoisseurship of women aboard the Cook voyages, see Wilson, *Island Race*, Chap. 5.
38. This and what follows is based on Kathleen Wilson, 'The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (2009), 73–82.

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J. McAleer, C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750–1820*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50765-5