

All the Atlantic Mountains Shook

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[See table of contents](#)

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CRITIQUES

All the Atlantic Mountains Shook

Peter Linebaugh

Off the coast of Ireland
As our ship passed by
We saw a line of fishing ships
Etched against the sky

Off the coast of England
As we rode the foam
We saw an Indian merchantman
Coming home.

"Seascape"
Langston Hughes

Time the destroyer is time the preserver,
Like the river with its cargo of dead Negroes, cows, and chicken coops,
The bitter apple and the bite in the apple.

"Dry Salvages"
T.S. Eliot

I HAVE CALLED THIS ESSAY "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook" because I wish to suggest profound and hemispheric events that originate beneath the surface of things and which are not confined to any particular nation but arise from all four corners of the Atlantic — North and South America, Europe, and Africa. Appearing at the beginning of book two of William Blake's poem, "Jerusalem," it is a phrase of the revolutionary two decades ending the eighteenth and beginning the nineteenth centuries when those events were adumbrated in social practice. In his prophetic poem, "America," etched in 1793, the year that the British military made an armed bid to crush Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Dominican slave rebellion, Blake envisioned an Atlantic utopia:

On those vast shady hills between America & Albion's shore,
Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea, call'd atlantean hills,
Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world,
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
Rears it immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God.

Peter Linebaugh, "All The Atlantic Mountains Shook," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (Autumn 1982), 87-121.

Blake interprets the American, French, and Dominican revolutions by referring to the ancient myth of Atlantis. That myth has had various meanings. In Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Atlantis represented a huge island whose demiurgic and patriarchal society the Athenians had conquered in pre-Solonic times. Almost two millennia later at the beginning of the seventeenth century Francis Bacon represented Atlantis as a ceremonial, patriarchal laboratory, a kind of Los Alamos, where the exploration of nature was described in the imagery of conquest and rape. Blake rejected the implications of both these versions. The belief that the earth once had a different arrangement of continents and oceans became the basis for imagining, not a legendary or future conquest, but of an anti-imperialist peaceable kingdom.

Blake's knowledge of social contradiction was expressed in utterances wherein geography, history, morality, sexual generation, and mythology were strikingly mixed in what might be called an interdisciplinary discourse that simultaneously challenged imperialism and empiricism. A few lines later the poem "America" continued:

Must the generous tremble & leave his joy to the idle, to the pestilence,
That mock him? Who commanded this? what God? what Angel?
To keep the gen'rous from experience till the ungenerous
Are unrestrain'd performers of the energies of nature;
Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science
That men get rich by; & the sandy desert is giv'n to the strong?

The "Atlantic Mountains" provided a mythological suggestion of the unity and universality of a humanity divided by oppression, by science as a means of conquest, and by the "laws" of political economy. Bacon's "New Atlantis," by contrast, represented an oppressor's synthesis of Christianity and Platonic lore whose purpose was the creation of a society for "the Enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the Effecting of all Things possible."¹ The "meaner sort" played no role and the women kissed the hem of the garments of the men. Bacon, the empiricist of imperialism, and Blake, the prophet of classless humanity, were class as well as philosophic foes. Bacon was a high and mighty Lord Chancellor of England, William Blake a low and humble artisan, who nonetheless could write, "The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman and not a man: he is a Lord Chancellor." Bacon's "Atlantis" received prompt realization in the foundation of the Royal Society (1660), the pinnacle of scientific cosmopolitanism in the Age of Mercantilism. Blake's visions of Atlantic destruction and redemption were the product of the Age of Revolution and have since belonged to an arcane tradition that has had its connections, however, with strands of "proletarian internationalism."

¹ Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, edited by G.C. Moore Smith (Cambridge 1929), 35. The Ecology Movement and William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (Boston 1972) have offered the profoundest criticism of Bacon.

I

Thompson and Hobsbawm

ONE OF THESE BLAKEAN STRANDS wound its way through the Communist Party History Group that met in England during the late 1940s and early 1950s to which both Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm belonged. Two of the most important productions of this group included Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and Hobsbawm's essay on "The Seventeenth Century Crisis."² By discussing that essay and comparing it with the first chapter of *The Making*, I can both define the problem that I wish to address and suggest some of the conditions for its solution without having to unravel the obscurities of Blake's Atlanticism or the opposing conception delineated in Bacon's "New Atlantis." If this seems an unnecessarily indirect procedure as it may seem given the mammoth, not to say epic, nature of the themes involved, it at least has the advantage of placing the problem within a recognizable historiographical tradition which in its time shook the historiography of the English-speaking world.

In "Members Unlimited," the first chapter of *The Making of the English Working Class*, the organization and principles of the London Corresponding Society (1792), traditionally called the first independent working-class political organization in Britain, are described and linked with a debate almost 150 years earlier. Then, in 1647, the elected representatives of the rank and file soldiery confronted the "Grandeess" of Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army in an extraordinary debate about the theory and practice of democracy.

For really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government. . . . I should doubt whether he was an Englishman or no, that should doubt of these things.³

Thompson in pointing out the similarity between these two confrontations — "It is the old debate continued," he wrote, "the same aspirations, fears and tensions are there" — was himself contributing to a venerable tradition which finds in the Levellers' experience the beginning of modern democracy. There is a parallelism between such an invocation practised since at least Chartist times and the seventeenth century practice of invoking the "Norman Yoke" which attributed the origin of oppression and bondage to the invasion of William the Bastard in 1066. The parallelism expresses an impulse not so much of the English "love of tradition," though there certainly can be nativist connotations to it, as of a persistent class-conscious and extra-academic pride in the history of previous struggle.

² E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," *Past and Present*, 5 and 6 (1954) and reprinted in Trevor Aston, *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660* (London 1965).

³ A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty being the Army Debates from the Clarke Manuscripts* (London 1951), 53.

Of course, the parallel cannot be taken very far. What I wish to call attention to are two consequences of this particular way of posing the problem. First, is the question of internationalism. Second, the question of tradition and continuity. The point of making the comparison across 150 years was to set out from the beginning the independent nature of the English debate from that of the French Revolution. Doubtless, this chapter and the following ones succeeded in this goal; the success, however, was not without its costs the chief of which was the relative neglect of the international, especially the Atlantic, context of growth and development of the English working class. That problem, as I shall show, is closely related to the problem of continuity. It is a huge leap, this 150 years, from the Putney Heath mass meetings of haggard and determined soldiers to the Strand tavern of the Corresponding Society and the hopeful world of the London artisan. In making the leap Thompson does not ignore the intervening years. When the debate resumed in the 1790s, it did so "in a new context, with new language and arguments, and a changed balance of forces," he wrote.

To explain the "new language and arguments" he examines the complexities of three traditions: that of Dissent, that of the "free-born Englishman," and that of the eighteenth-century mob. While each of these has stimulated a considerable later investigation, I think that in outline his account of these traditions still stands.⁴ They do not, however, explain the "changed balance of forces." Since that would require an investigation into material life and the mode of production, to leave the investigation after considering only the religious, political, and "subpolitical" traditions is clearly inadequate to the problem. Moreover, these do not explain, nor are they intended to, the duration of the pause between Putney and the L.C.S.

Of course history is more than a discussion or a debate. "The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature."⁵

It is interesting that from quite another framework altogether, Eric Hobsbawm found himself wrestling with a similar problem of delayed or arrested development in his article, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century." But where Thompson was concerned about the transmission of tradition, Hobsbawm was concerned about economic development; where Thompson applied his vision with unwavering concentration on English experience, Hobsbawm's ranged far and wide across the Channel and the oceans; where Thompson's touchstone lay in the past with the Putney debates, Hobsbawm's lay in the future in the notion of the "Industrial Revolution." While each wrote with different implicit assumptions about historical change, they converged on this problem of arrested development.

"Why did the expansion of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not

⁴ The first two of these traditions has received less attention than the third which in E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* (London 1975) and Doug Hay, et al., *Albion's Fatal Tree* (London 1975), and John Brewer, ed., *An Ungovernable People* (London 1980) has been well served. These contributions must modify the traditions at least as they were adumbrated in *The Making*.

⁵ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (Moscow 1968), 31.

lead straight into the epoch of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Industrial Revolution?" Hobsbawm asked. "What, in other words were the obstacles to capitalist development?" To the larger question he answers with an exploration of the contradictions within the home, the European, and the international markets. These inhibited the development of the social division of labour, the opportunities for mass production, and the expansion of "supra-local exchanges." In eastern Europe a large number of food producers actually withdrew from the economy of money. The diminution of the supply of American bullion signalled an end to the period of colonial plunder and aggravated a price depression of prolonged consequence within Europe. The advance of technical innovation was halted. "Once the decline had begun, of course, an additional factor increased the difficulties of manufacture: the rise in labour costs."

At that point the working class, the producers of social wealth, the lower orders, the proletariat (it is not necessary to be pedantic in our choice of words) enters the "crisis of the seventeenth century," not — be it noted — as the obstacle to "capitalist development," but as a cost, and merely an incidental one at that. In a way this manner of entrance has some consistency to it, because the underlying model of development is one that places the sphere of circulation (trade, commerce, and exchange) ahead of the sphere of production in explaining change.⁶ Thus, the seventeenth-century crisis was a crisis of circulation.

If Hobsbawm in this article is averse to considering the producer, living labour, in any way other than as a "cost" to manufacture, the same cannot be said of his consideration of the way in which the producer is combined with the tools or instrument of labour, and the nature-derived materials of production. True, he does not enter into the technical, social, and political consequences of these combinations; yet when he writes that "the major achievement of the seventeenth century crisis is the creation of a new form of colonialism," he is emphasizing the decisive importance of the plantation. Considered also is the putting-out system; again, not with regard to the characteristics of the working people thus organized, but rather as a successful dissolvant of the corporate organization of guild production and of those rural relations which had effectually blocked the infiltration of commodity exchange, what Winstanley called "the crafty Art of Buying and Selling."

Summing up, we can see two approaches represented by Thompson and Hobsbawm to the problems of first, the working class, and second, the apparent pause in English development in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. Thompson considered the English people as the bearers of an oppositional tradition, stored up within themselves, modified by social practice, goaded by new forms of oppression, which re-emerged in the 1790s. Although

⁶ C.S.E. Pamphlet No. 6, *The Labour Process & Class Strategies* (London 1976) contains articles elaborating a viewpoint that enables some integration of the various concepts of "the working class" found in economics, labour history, and political economy.

it is hardly given any social or material determinants, its historic importance is (as it were) expressed in Blakean leaps of the popular intellectual tradition whose power is undeniable but whose actual situation within the materiality of international life is left vague. Hobsbawm's view of labour is presented indirectly. If for Thompson the proletarian body is presented as speech and mind, for Hobsbawm it is expressed as stomach and hand. Labour to him forms, first, a potential market and so its unity appears as "demand." Second, it appears as a factor of production, but even here the general framework imposes its own limitations upon how that "factor" is considered. Despite this, the framework at least leads us to production and invites us to consider the unity that trade or commerce brings about between widely different modes of production. While he offers the possibility of an Atlantic perspective to an English problem, there is a metropolitan and Baconian objectivism to his conception of living labour such that, as Walter Rodney has pointed out, he marginalizes the massive exploitation of Africans and American Indians.⁷ As to the delay in development, Hobsbawm thinks that "the stormy pace of economic development towards the end of the seventeenth century 'ought' to have brought about industrial revolution much sooner," but he eschews an explanation of the time-lag. Thompson mentions a number of contingencies arising from the corruption and venalities encouraged by the ruling and propertied classes.

In the remainder of this essay I shall discuss the relationship between the evolving radical traditions that were largely English to the developing modes of production that were largely Atlantic. In so doing, I shall propose that just as the accumulation of international capital depends on the exploitation of Atlantic labour, so "pauses" or "arrests" in the process of accumulation are the results of the many-sided oppositions of living labour brewing within and among the modes of production. Furthermore, the interruption of the discussion begun so promisingly at Putney took a form in which the forces creating that discussion were pulverized and scattered to the four winds. These carried them far and wide. They regained their strength in wholly new circumstances and returned in a kind of Atlantic dialectical movement whose appearance might be described in the words William Morris wrote of the Peasant's Revolt:⁸

Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes, turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.

Before returning to the battle and the origin of the discussion of working-class democracy within the English Revolution, "I must," as Critias said to Timaeus, "crave indulgence on the score of the magnitude of the subject."

⁷ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London 1972), 101.

⁸ William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* (London 1886-87).

II

Beyond the Putney Debates

"A SPONTANEOUS OUTBREAK OF DEMOCRACY," Professor Brailsford called the debates.⁹ Besides the theoretical arguments, there was the painstaking organizing work of the Levellers behind them. The elected representatives of the soldiers, "Agitators," they were called, provided the world with a new kind of leadership. The meeting itself was called to demand arrears in pay. Agitators and soldiers, furthermore, refused to go to Ireland until their demands were met and the question of the government of England settled. Those great debates thus arose in the context of a pay dispute, a possible mutiny (made actual two years later), and the first faint whiff of an anti-imperialist struggle. This unheard of power, first, to elect representatives, second, to force a debate with the Grandees, third, to collect pay, and fourth, to refuse service in Ireland, was shortlived, two years long, but long enough to provide a haunting memory to many generations of the English military establishment.

It was unsuccessful in taking state power: the chopping block and the gallows remained the property of the grandees, so it has been said that the democratic forces were immature: a coalition of confused groups, led by the radical petty bourgeoisie. And as C.B. Macpherson has shown the political or Parliamentary vision of the Levellers was far less embracing than might be supposed, because the franchise they advocated fell very short of universal suffrage.¹⁰ However, why should we measure the importance of a popular movement by the *étatiste* criterion of its ability to govern? If these discoveries tended to minimize the democratic importance of the popular movement in one direction, the publication of Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down* tended to expand it in another. This showed how the Seekers and the Ranters, the "true" Levellers as well as the regular Levellers, the Muggletonians and Grindletonians, the preachers and prophets, the dreamers and activists actually belonged to a wide movement that questioned all kinds of authority: of the law, of the King, of scripture, of property, of patriarchy. One of the "errors" identified by Thomas Edwards in his *Gangraena: Or, a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time* (1646) was communism, the belief that "All the earth is the Saints, and there ought to be a community of goods, and the Saints should share in the Lands and Estates of Gentlemen, and rich men."¹¹ The Antinomian tradition was identifiable and widespread without being confined to a particular sect. It asserted that first, god had no other

⁹ H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London 1961).

¹⁰ *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London 1962).

¹¹ Part I, 153.

existence but in each and all created things, second, the moral and ceremonial law is the result of a curse that has been lifted, and third, the destruction of Babylon and the building of Jerusalem is at hand.¹² At its most far-out, among the Ranters for instance, the movement expressed a naive communism and plebeian materialism that advocated "wanton kisses" and "swearing i'th light, gloriously."

Moreover, the antinomian movement meant business. In opposing both the inward and outward bondages these men and women tried to put their ideas into practice in many communitarian experiments of which the Digger experiment on St. George's Hill is the most celebrated. The etymology of the words "Digger" and "Leveller" indicates that in the late sixteenth century these were designations for a direct, anti-capitalist, practice: the former dug up hedges, the latter levelled fences. They belonged to a movement that should not be interpreted (as it was by the historiography of the Second International) as being divided between an "economic" and a "political" wing. It is important to recognize that both their practices and words suggest another measure of popular power besides "the conquest of state power," namely, the ability to refuse the servility inherent in wage labour. Why go "with cap in hand and bended knee to gentlemen and farmers, begging and entreating to work with them for 8d. or 10d. a day"? asked a Digger poet. "He that had no land was to work for those, for small wages, that called the land theirs; and thereby some are lifted up into the chair of tyranny and others trod under the foot-stool of misery, as if the earth were made for a few; not for all men," said Winstanley. "Israel shall neither take hire, nor give hire." Pottage for the freeborn Englishman was to be had then and there, and it could no more wait for economic development than for the millennium.¹³

The tradition was much richer than we thought. The men and women of the Revolution grew more roses for the bouquet of liberty than those which an older tradition in historiography pinned to their lapels. And now we are in a position to say something of the cultivators of those growing things. The social groups which thrust forward the spokespersons and leadership of the radical movement consisted of the masterless, who have been divided into these groups: 1) vagabonds and sturdy rogues, 2) the mass of the London proletariat, 3) the sectaries who might have been small property holders, 4) the itinerant population of small traders, 5) the cottagers and squatters of commons and wastes. In addition to this sort of classification, we may add others of region — the "dark corners of the land" in the west and north — and of ecology — the

¹² A.L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake* (London 1958), 34.

¹³ Christopher Hill, "Pottage for Freeborn Englishman: Attitudes to Wage Labour in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in C.H. Feinstein, ed., *Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth: Essays Presented to Maurice Dobb* (London 1967). Gerrard Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform* (London 1652), re-printed in George Sabine, ed., *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (London 1941).

wealden and pasture areas whose communities preserved their independence long after those in arable zones had succumbed.¹⁴ Recently, it has been shown that even the most general and apparently abstract of denominations such as the "people" and the "poor" have particular, concrete meanings. In the seventeenth century each of them denominated distinct and antagonistic social forces, the former being associated with the yeomanry, tradesman, and artificers and the latter with a larger mass of those expropriated from all forms of property.¹⁵ Our argument need not depend on the precise definition of the stratifications within these groups. We are interested in their fluidity and the social dynamics that set them in motion. Besides masterlessness, what characterized these groups was their mobility, their freedom, and their footlooseness.

Now, what I think needs adding to the view that we have thus far — leaders preaching, publishing, petitioning the radical traditions *here*, carefully defined social groupings hearing and receiving the antinomian traditions *there* — is the reciprocal nature of the interaction. This would allow us to examine independently of the fate of specific intellectual traditions, such as the Familists and Anabaptists and behind them the Lollards, the experiences of the volatile masses that gave birth to them, in the first place.

III

Autolycus and the Contradiction of Primary Accumulation

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION consists in the meeting of two kinds of commodity owners: on the one hand, the possessor of the means of production and the means of subsistence, and on the other, free labourers, the sellers of their own labour-power. It thus presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property by which they can realize their labour. In the sixteenth century primary accumulation consisted in the divorce of the producer from the means of production: "their expropriation," wrote Marx, "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire." The process was accomplished by the abolition of private armies and feudal retainers, by the closing of the monasteries, by the rooting out of itinerant friars, pardoners, and beggars the result of the medieval system of charity, and finally, the enclosure of arable lands, the eviction of small holders, and the

¹⁴ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London 1972).

¹⁵ See Christopher Hill, "Parliament and People in the Seventeenth Century England," *Past & Present*, 92 (August 1981) and Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics 1621-1629* (Oxford 1979). C.L.R. James has written "Now one of the chief errors of thought is to continue to think in one set of forms, categories, ideas, etc., when the object, the content, has moved on, has created or laid the premises for an extension, a development of thought" and again "it is from conforming to finite categories in thought and action that all deception originates." *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (London 1980), 17, 16.

displacement of rural tenants led most directly and profoundly to capitalist production.¹⁶

"The concept of the free labourer contains the pauper," Marx wrote.

It is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that he is a pauper: virtual pauper. According to his economic conditions he is merely living labour capacity, hence equipped with the necessities of life. Necessity on all sides, without the objectivities necessary to realize himself as labour capacity. If the capitalist has no use for his surplus labour, then the worker may not perform his necessary labour; not produce his necessities.

Thus, the proletarian and the pauper are but two sides of the process of expropriation or "primary accumulation." While it is necessary to repeat this and to leave open the question of the relationship between the types of struggle arising between these two moments of the free labourer's existence, here we must note that Marx's approach is to criticize political economy and this has its limitations. Chief among these limits are the ideological fetters of political economy that chain the understanding of living labour to the wall of capitalist development. Thus, the pauper or "surplus population" is understood either as the passive recipient of alms ("if he does obtain [the necessities of life], it is only because alms are thrown at him from revenue") or as comprising, to quote C.H. George, the "swollen streams of human misery."¹⁷ In the sixteenth century, however, there is a powerful history of proletarian self-activity that cannot be understood within the limits of these largely passive notions.

Unable to find profitable employment, without land, credit or occupation, this early proletariat was thrust upon the roads and ways where it was subject to the merciless cruelty of as severe and terrifying a labour and criminal code as had yet appeared in modern history. This was the period of the criminalization of all forms of necessary labour outside of the ambit of producing surplus-value. In the sixteenth century the major statutes against robbery, burglary, and stealing were created. They corresponded to the new capitalist conception of property. At the same time the English ruling class attempted to teach an exemplary lesson by means of the pedagogy of racism and genocide. A nomadic, roaming people, the Gypsies offered an example of living without land or master. They brought Morris dancing to England, and they provided an image of freedom. Menace, sharp practice, and an idea of wandering brotherhood are suggested by three Romany words, "cosh," "gyp," and "pal." The laws against the Gypsies were terrible: forfeiture of goods and chattels, banishment, and no legal defense. By an Act of Mary, to remain in England longer

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Dona Torr, vol. 1, chapter 26, "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation."

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (New York 1973), 604. C.H. George, "The Origins of Capitalism," *Marxist Perspectives*, 3 (1980), 77.

than a month became a capital offense. An Act of Queen Elizabeth enlarged the earlier laws to include those who "in a certain counterfeit speech or behavior" disguise themselves as Egyptians, illustrating the profoundest fear of dissimulation.

Can you go to prison?
 Can you gather sticks?
 Can you sit under a hedge?
 Can you play a fiddle?
 Well done, Gypsy man!
 Hit him in his face —
 So help me, dear father!
 You can fight well.

This comes from a somewhat later period but in showing us some of what the Romany knew in order to survive, it can show what others might learn from them.¹⁸



An Unexpropriated Romany Man Holding Rabbit Snares, Worcestershire, Winter 1979

¹⁸ *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* and Jean Clébert, *The Gypsies*, translated by Charles Duff (London 1967).

The laws against vagabondage provide us with a Foucault-like index of the growing attack on the corporal person. Under Henry VIII a vagabond could be whipped, have the ears cut off, and hanged; under Edward VI branding the chest with the letter 'V' and enslavement for two years; under Elizabeth I whipping, banishment to galley service, and the House of Correction. The criminal code elaborated under Edward VI was scarcely less vicious against the propertyless and what Autolycus called "snappers up of unconsidered trifles." The Statute of Artificers and the Poor Law, likewise, were huge efforts to legislate taking hire.¹⁹

Cruel, comprehensive, and pitiless as this legislation was, howsoever many were hanged each year (the magnitude was in the hundreds), or howsoever many masterless men were rounded up in the Privy Searches that periodically terrorized the population (the magnitude was in the thousands), the proletariat retained its independence, its intractability, and its wits. We can see this in the coney-catching pamphlets of Thomas Dekker and Robert Greene. It infuriated that Kentish squire, Thomas Harman, whose *Caveat for Common Cursitors*, provides, in spite of itself, so many instances of daily victories which intelligence won over brute authority (similar in that respect to the signifying monkey and trickster of slave tradition). In the glossaries of cant or thieves' talk we are given a veritable *dramatis personae* of those rejecting wage-labour: the Abraham-man, the palliards, clapperdudgeons, whipjacks, dummerers, files, dunakers, cursitors, Roberds-men, swadlers, prigs, anglers, fraters, rufflers, bawdy-baskets, autem-morts, walking morts, doxies, and dells. At the head of them all was the uprightman of whom Harmon wrote, "Of these ranging rabblement of rascals, some be serving-men, artificers, and labouring men traded up in husbandry. These, not minding to get their living with the sweat of their face, but casting off all pain, will wander, after their wicked manner, through most shires of this realm." A.L. Beier's study of vagrants confirms what is suggested here, namely, that this wandering population consisted of men who mostly had had settled occupation. In addition to servants and labourers, he notes that prominence of clothworkers and victuallers.²⁰ The flow between intermittent employments (these were greatly enlarged with the growth of the putting-out system) and the life of the road was so swift and fluid, that the attempt proves vain which fixes a man or woman in one or other social category in that fast-moving and turbulent stream.

¹⁹ For this and the following paragraph I am indebted to A.V. Judges, ed. *The Elizabethan Underworld: A Collection of Tudor and Early Stuart Tracts and Ballads* (London 1965) and its excellent introduction. Gamini Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London 1977) can be useful too.

²⁰ A.L. Beier, "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England," *Past and Present*, 64 (1974).

"My father named by Autolycus, who being, as I am, litter'd under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. With die and drab I purchas'd this caparison, and my revenue is the silly cheat." He was an outsider to the family and status relations that were being tested in *The Winter's Tale* (1611?). He makes his appearance, energetic, subversive, and antipathetical to wished for order of the Renaissance. His god is Mercury, the ancient god of the road and patron of thieves and merchants. Without a fixed place in the imagined social hierarchy, Autolycus wanders through the play in a variety of guises, entering and leaving it buying and selling. Like his contemporary, Nicholas Jennings, he was a master of disguise, and I think that to the many arts of survival and getting by, we should add the power of seeming to be what you are not as among the characteristics of the thick, scarred, and calloused hide of the English proletariat. That these might cause explosive social contradiction, possibly turning the world upside down, is suggested by Merlin's prophecy which the Fool utters in *King Lear* (1607):

When every case in law is right;
No Squire in debt, nor no poor knight;
When slanders do not live in tongues;
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
When usurers tell their gold i' the field;
And bawds and whores do churches build;
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion.

The ruling class had its plans for avoiding this sorcerer's "confusion"; it even planned to put its finger on that slippery fellow, the sturdy rogue and vagabond.



Nicholas Jennings in Two Roles

"O, what is this rogue and vagabond?" asks the sociologist. "In the typology of occupation is he to be excluded altogether?" suggests the new social historian. "Is he not merely the ancestor of the reactionary lumpenproletariat?" hints the Marxist. When Sir John Popham, Chief Justice of the King's Bench between 1592 and 1607, grandee of Somerset, and terror to all uprightmen, came to consider this question, as an author of the Beggar's Act of 1597, he could not have done better for the lover of classification. He listed thirty different types.

They fall into five main groups. First, there are the chapmen, the tinkers, and pedlars, the men and women whose little transactions provided the commerce of the proletarian micro-economy. Second, were the discharged or wounded, or pretended discharged and wounded, soldiers and sailors, whose labours provided the basis of the expansionist macro-economy. Third, were the remnants of the surviving substructure of feudal benevolence, the procurers, the proctors, the pardoners. The entertainers of the day, the jugglers, fencers, minstrels, keepers of dancing bears, athletes, and players of interludes made up the fourth group. Fifth, in mentioning those feigning knowledge of a "crafty Scyence" like palmistry or physiognomy, or the fortune-tellers, or "persons calling themselves Schoollers," he designated those who supplied the intellectual and philosophical wants of the people whose ideas Dame Frances Yates and Keith Thomas have taught us to treat respectfully. Finally, Popham's preamble named,

all wandring persons and comon Labourers being persons able in bodye using loytering and refusing to worke for such reasonable wages as is taxed or comonly given in such Parts where such persons do or shall happen to dwell or abide. not having lvyng otherwyse to mayteyne themselves.

Thus, falling within the statutory meaning of "sturdy rogue and beggar" are all those rejecting wage-labour as well as those whose activities comprised the culture, tradition, and autonomous self-understanding of this volatile, questioning, and unsteady proletariat. To the *ideological* opposition to wage-labour, here is the sign of the *experience* of opposition. It provided the soil in which the more arcane traditions, such as antinomianism, could find a warm environment during the winter of Tudor repression.

The first-time offender against the Beggar Act was to be stripped and whipped until his back became bloody. Second-time offenders were to be banished from the realm, beginning the English policy of transportation. It ought not to be surprising to learn that John Popham had a prominent interest in the Virginia Company or that the next generation of his family played a decisive part as Puritan grantees in the West Country.²¹

²¹ Judges, *Elizabethan Underworld*, 507 and David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (London 1973).

IV

The Atlantic Diaspora

THE TRADITIONS OPPOSING THE INWARD BONDAGES of the Protestant work ethic as well as the outward bondages of wage-labour were dispersed across the Atlantic in a white face, just as a century later, modified by fresh experience they would return in black face to help re-vivify the movement in England. The dispersal of the active part of the English proletariat should be seen as double-sided: as the riddance of danger, "the fewell and matter of insurrection," and as the basis of a new mode of production, the plantation. Robert Johnson in 1609 expressed the relationship in these words:

Two people are especially required herein, people to make the plantation, and money. . . . For the first, we need no doubt, our land abounding with swarms of idle persons, which having no means of labour to relieve their misery, do likewise swarm in lewd and naughty practices, so that if we seek not some ways for their foreign employment, we must provide shortly more prisons and corrections for their bad conditions.²²

Usually, the diaspora is divided into two sorts of people: those who were in some sense political exiles which would include the revolutionary sectaries, the Quakers, the Monmouth Rebels, the veterans of the New Model Army, the Irish, and the Scottish covenanters, and a larger "unpolitical" mass of people who departed as indentured servants or as transported felons.²³ The distinction was made by the Chesapeake planters and it has been rigidly maintained by historians. I wish to argue that the Agitator, the Ranter, and the Rogue did not have such a mutually opposing social existence. In fact they shared common experiences in their enemies like Popham, Cromwell, or Ireton, in their travelling on the highways of the country, in the hand-to-mouth existence of the London suburbs, and in their voyage across the Atlantic.

A study of the seventeenth-century migrants to the Chesapeake shows that, like sixteenth-century vagrants and migrants, most were single, young, and male. They tended to come from areas where the cloth trade was depressed or where agriculture had changed to throw off the young, or from London, or the areas of deforestation. The same study says these indentured servants were from the "middle ranks" of society, but the evidence for this is unpersuasive.²⁴ The "data base" of this study (the term is appropriate given the abstracted empiricism of the approach) consists of seventeenth-century Bristol indentures. These describe the sort of people who were far from the "middle ranks," if by that term is meant either the tradesmen whose existence predated the

²² *Nova Britannia* (1609).

²³ Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776* (New York 1947).

²⁴ James Horn, "Servant Emigration to the Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century," in Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays in Anglo-American Society* (New York 1979).

nineteenth-century "middle class," that is the bourgeoisie, or the wealthier end of that complex hierarchy of crafts that indisputably constituted one of the structures of the social division of labour. They were, on the contrary, "propertyless wage-earners and piece workers" (according to Dr. Buchanan Sharp's study of the same area) whose experience prior to emigration was that of rioting against enclosures, high food prices, and the expropriation of common rights, and participation in the Western Rising and the "Club" movement of the Civil War.²⁵ Perhaps it would be anachronistic to take the "sturdy rogue and vagabond" with his Tudor caparisons into the plainer life of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the "indentured servant" ought to become the new concrete universal of the English proletariat as he at least (very few were women) was a climber of the "Atlantean hills." Neither term, however, can be construed to mean the "middle rank."²⁶



Tom Idle Goes to Sea, An Excerpt from William Hogarth

²⁵ Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660* (Berkeley 1980), 3, 158.

²⁶ There are few words with as many meanings in the history of class description than the words "labourer," "skilled," "unskilled," and "middle rank." This is not the place to puzzle through them. However, it should be noted that the most recent American discussion of the class experience of indentured servitude is characterized by its total failure to discuss the historical meanings of these terms or the tendentious quality of their ideological undertones. The failure to do this provides a late example of what C. Wright Mills called "methodological inhibition." Lying behind David Galenson's usages of the terms, for example, is a rigid model of "human capital." See "British Servants and the Colonial Indenture System in the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Southern History*, 44 (1978).

The bourgeoisie, led by Oliver Cromwell, inspired by a Calvinist god, and motivated by greed and conquest, defeated the Leveller movement and the rest. Consequently, he was hated by many of the poor, a fact he knew and acknowledged: on one of his progresses through the city he said of the mob to his companion, "they would be more noisy and more joyful too, if you and I were going to be hanged." His was a god of work and of conquest: of Jamaica, of Scotland, and, as shall not be forgotten, of Ireland. From Dublin in 1649 he wrote after the surrender of a hundred-odd Irish soldiers that he had the officers "knocked on the head, and every tenth man of the soldiers killed, and the rest shipped for Barbadoes."²⁷ William Petty, who followed in the train of the English marauders with his surveying equipment (so that there would be no complaints when it came time to slice up the baloney), later estimated that between 1651 and 1654 40,000 Irish people were transported.

"To frie the kingdom of the burden of many strong and idle beggars, Egiptians, common and notorious whores and thieves and other dissolute and louse persons" was the purpose of the first Scottish Act of transportation. Nelson Algren in *A Walk on the Wild Side* sums up the experience of Scottish migration:

Keep the troublemakers down was the cry. Duke and baron, lord and laird, city merchant, church and state, landowners both small and great, had formed a united front for the good work. When a Linkhorn had finally taken bush parole, fleeing his Scottish bondage for the brave new world, word went on ahead: Watch for a wild boy of no particular clan, ready for anything, always armed. Prefers fighting to toil, drink to fighting, chasing women to booze or battle: may attempt all three concurrently.

The first free Linkhorn stepped onto the Old Dominion shore and was clamped fast into the bondage of cropping on shares. Sometimes it didn't seem quite fair.

Through old Virginia's tobacco-scented summers the Linkhorns had done little cropping and less sharing. So long as there lay a continent of game to be had for the taking, they cropped no man's shares for long.

Fierce craving boys, they craved neither slaves nor land. If a man could out-fiddle the man who owned a thousand acres, he was the better man though he owned no more than a cabin and a jug.

"Fierce, craving boys," indentured servants, banished ranters, and Irish rebels: not the stuff for that malleable labour market of late mercantilist dream. Let us consider what else happened to them on the western side of the Atlantic. Henry Whistler in 1654 wrote of Barbadoes, "This Island is the dunghill whereon England doth cast forth its rubbish: rogues and whores and such like people are those which are generally brought here."²⁸ Perrot, the bearded ranter who refused to doff his hat to the Almighty, ended up in Barbadoes. The street preacher and pantheistic materialist, Joseph Salmon, went there in a Zen-like search for "nothing." In the early stages anyway the Irish took the lead in

²⁷ Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London 1970).

²⁸ A.E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*.

forming maroon colonies with the African slaves. The radical hero of the servant class was Cornelius Bryan, an Irishman, mutineer, plotter, and speaker of profanities against the planters.²⁹

On the eastern shore of Virginia, the years following the Revolution saw an intensification of labour (even introducing night work in the tobacco cultivation) among the ex-convicts, the New Model Army veterans, the Irish, and the sectaries. Doug Deal has written that the "physical violence, verbal abuse, work slowdowns, sabotage, and running away by servants all became much more common after 1660." Several areas existed where Quakers, renegades, nonconformists, adventurers, servants, and slaves, both sexes and all races, could drink, smoke, carouse, fight, and make music. In 1666 an African slave and an English servant ran away from their respective plantations. Before leaving his, the slave made sure, if he took nothing else, to take his master's fiddle. The Gloucester County plot of 1663 and Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 "convinced the planter class that it could no longer afford to continue to import large numbers of labourers from the British Isles," it has recently been concluded.³⁰ As late as 1683 it was reported by a young squire that "Carolina and Pennsylvania are the refuge of the sectaries, and are in such repute, that men are more easily induced to be transported thither than to the Islands."³¹

Among the "lobster backs" of the New Model Army that captured Jamaica there were radicals. Some of these stayed on joining the intensely egalitarian (and cruel) buccaneers who had established among themselves and the areas they influenced like Tortuga, northern Hispaniola, and the Mosquito Coast (Nicaragua), an autonomous and mutualist tradition. After Henry Morgan sold out to work for Charles II and the Duke of York, the zone of these freebooters moved north and east to the Carolinas and Bahamas. Until the cycle of repression initiated by Walpole in the early years of his administration put an end to them, the men and women (Mary Read, Ann Bonney) who sailed "Under the Banner of King Death" created a social existence that was, as Marcus Rediker has convincingly shown, collectivist, egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, comparing itself to Robin Hood, and venerating the memory of the Revolution.³² Christopher Hill hears echoes of Milton and Winstanley in Defoe's *A General History . . . of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (1724) which

²⁹ Hilary McD. Beckles, "Rebels and Reactionaries: The Political Response of White Labourers to Planter-Class Hegemony in Seventeenth Century Barbados," *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 15 (1981); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.

³⁰ Joseph Douglas Deal III, "Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen and Africans on the Eastern Shore During the Seventeenth Century," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1981.

³¹ J.C. Jeaffreson, *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century* (1879), II, 61.

³² Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America* (1678), Steve Gooch, *The Women Pirates. Ann Bonney and Mary Read* (London 1978), Marcus Rediker, "'Under the Banner of King Death': The Social World of Anglo-American Pirates: 1716-1726," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. series, 38 (1981).

besides emitting those sounds was dead-set against the slave-trade.³³ In 1720 some pirates who had sailed on the *Flying Dragon* settled in Madagascar. James Plantin was one of these. It was reported that he lived at a place which he had "given the name of Ranter Bay."³⁴

Of course, not all of the trans-Atlantic British, Irish, and Scottish migrants were revolutionary sectaries and schismatics. However, *some* were and others *had been*. The organizational form and ideological coherence that had flourished in determinate historical forms in England during the Revolution (or before it) could not be maintained as such in the "New Worlds." Those, like the Quakers, who did preserve a semblance of organizational continuity did so partly at a cost of distancing themselves both from their revolutionary heritage and from mass experience of the new kinds of labour. Others, such as the early Seekers and (most notoriously) the Ranters eschewed organization and prided themselves on their mole-like burrowing within the soil of mobile labour. As early as 1646 a hostile observer had written, "they have many depths, wiles and methods which I know note, nor can finde out; there are many windings and turnings of the serpent, crooked goings, in and out, off and on, here and there, which I cannot trace."³⁵ Some of the "turnings of the serpent" can be traced, if not directly, then indirectly. Quakers for instance remained in dialogue with their early progenitors, the Ranters and the Seekers. John Burnyeat travelled in Virginia in 1672 where he had a dispute with a "fifth-monarchy-man." In 1680, Joan Vokins, a Quaker who travelled in England, Ireland, America, and the West Indies, found herself troubled by the Ranters at general meetings in Oysterbay and Rhode Island.³⁶

Even if it was a hostile relationship, we can see that the antinomian tradition persisted in an active and self-conscious way. It also continued, albeit in a subdued and marginal form, within the Quakers. John Hepburn in *The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule* (1715) listed a number of "excellent souls" who "came out of Old England, that have kept their Integrity." They detested the planters who bedizened "their Carkasses with poslt and powdered Hair, with *Ruffles*, and *Top-Knots*, *Ribbands* and *Lace*." George Keith was disowned by the Friends for writing *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes* (1693). Benjamin Lay, the cave-dwelling vegetarian, became an abolitionist. He appeared at a Philadelphia Quaker meeting wearing military uniform and a sword beneath his somber Quaker garb. He carried a hollowed-out Bible in which he concealed a bladder of pokeberry juice. He rose during the meeting, casting off his outer

³³ Christopher Hill, "Robinson Crusoe," *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians*, 10 (1980).

³⁴ Public Record Office, "Information of Clement Downing, 1724," High Court of Admiralty, 1/55 f. 79. Ranter Bay is again mentioned in the "Information of Charles Collins," H.C.A. 1/55, f. 77.

³⁵ Thomas Edwards, *Gungruena* (1646), 41.

³⁶ John Whiting, *Persecution Exposed, in some Memoirs Relating to the Sufferings of John Whiting, and Many others of the People called Quakers* (1714), 426-7.

clothes, and stated that "it would be as justifiable in the sight of the Almighty if you should thrust a sword through their [slave's] hearts as I do through this book." Whereupon he pierced the book with his sword spilling the red liquid all over the astonished Friends. He had once been a common sailor and had learned first-hand about the slave trade. In *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocents in Bondage, Apostates* (1737) he ranted against the "Covetous, Covetous, the Covetous Earthly minded Idolater."³⁷

Thus, the defeated, the victims, Irish Tories, Scottish covenanters, Quakers, sectaries, Ranters, Seekers, and radicals — an antagonistic conglomeration of widely different linguistic, geographic, and cultural origin — found themselves sharing an experience of valiant resistance to the English Adventurers and Grandees who had flung them to the edge of the map. There they shared an experience of survival in a strange ecology, a new kind of cooperation on the plantation, as well as the possibility of creating a life where in Winstanley's words "There shall be no Tyrant Kings, Lords of Manors, Tything Priests, oppressing Lawyers, exacting Landlords, nor any such like pricking bryar in all this holy Mountain of the Lord God our Righteousness and Peace."³⁸ It was the combination of a male environment, violence, egalitarian adventure, absence of ideological discourse, and abounding hope which attracted both Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs to this period.³⁹

V

"The Most Magnificent Drama" and Pidgin English

THE ATLANTIC DIASPORA was no more successful in producing a stable basis of capitalist accumulation, or a solution to the "Seventeenth Century Crisis," than was the bloody code against the Tudor vagabonds whose nomadic and roguish unavailability for wage-labour was a decisive and generally unmentioned cause of the crisis in the first place. The English Revolution, despite the defeats of the radicals and the victory of the militant bourgeoisie, demonstrated some limits to the exploitation of people and the land. Those were its most lasting and universal victories. English capitalism was thereafter driven elsewhere for people whose labour it could exploit (Ireland, Africa), and for land whose resources it could ravish (Ireland, America). Indeed, the two wings of the English bourgeoisie were ready to bury the hatchet when it came to this. While Cromwell was busy on one side of the Atlantic capturing Jamaica, his erstwhile

³⁷ Many of the texts of the early Quaker opposition to slavery are reprinted in Roger Burns, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Anti-Slavery Crusade of Revolutionary America 1688-1788* (New York 1977).

³⁸ Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform* (1652).

³⁹ *Moody Street Irregulars: A Jack Kerouac Newsletter*. Burroughs' *City of the Red Night* sees in the piracies of Captain Misson the perfect anticipation of the radical ratic viewpoint of 1848.

opponent at the Battle of Marsten Moor, Prince Rupert, was busy on the other side of the Atlantic in Gambia inquiring into slavery.

Upon the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, Prince Rupert helped direct his cousin's (Charles II's) money into the slave trade; he helped charter the Royal Adventurers a few months after Charles II landed in England; and he helped beat the Dutch at sea, thus securing the African coast. The King's brother, the Duke of York, put his mark upon the trade by requiring that the slaves be branded with a "D.Y." upon their foreheads. The "cabal" invested heavily. So did John Locke. George Downing was a key figure in the early days. In 1645 he wrote of the Barbadoes planters, hungrily, "they have bought this year no lesse than a thousand Negroes, and the more they buye, the better able they are to buye." This second graduate of Harvard and ship's chaplain served Charles II by an embassy to the Hague whose purpose was to provoke a war for the slave trade. His treachery and servility were rewarded with a knighthood and his avarice led him to the speculative building of a Whitehall street that still bears his name. These are only sordid indications about the closet politics leading to this trade. Let us leave the capitalist side of the history.⁴⁰

"The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the newfound Eldorado of the West," wrote W.E.B. DuBois. "It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution. Yet we are blind and led by the blind. We discern in it no part of our labor movement."⁴¹ They are words worth pondering: what is "our labor movement?" Labour history can no longer be written as the unilateral success of trade unions, political parties, and the socialist movement. Nor, can it be written as only a saga of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it is present in the sixteenth century with the birth of the capitalist mode of production.

What partly distinguishes capitalism from earlier social formations ("savage," "barbaric," "rude" according to the classification of the Enlightenment; "ancient," "oriental," and "feudal" according to the classification of Karl Marx) is that it is continuously impelled to revolutionize the mode of producing material life. By the end of the seventeenth century we may distinguish four ways by which capital sought to organize the exploitation of human labour in its combination with the materials and tools of production.⁴² These were first, the plantation, in many ways the most important mercantilist achievement; second, petty production such as the yeoman farmer or fortunate artisan

⁴⁰ K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London 1957), ch. 2, and also the vivid documents collected in Michael Craton *et al.*, eds., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Black Slaves and the British Empire* (London 1976).

⁴¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York 1935), 757.

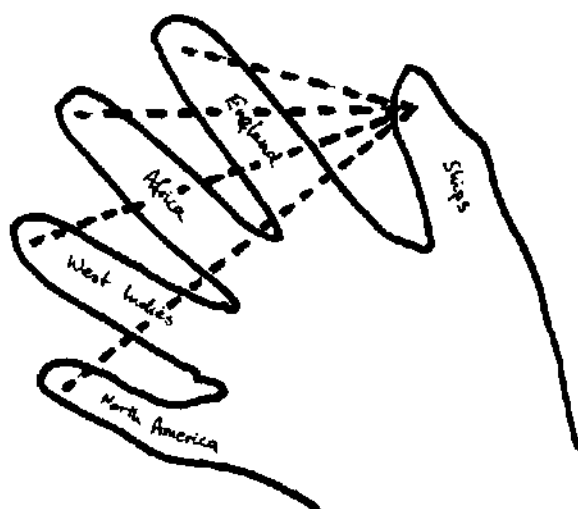
⁴² Phillip Corrigan, "Feudal Relics or Capitalist Monuments? Notes on the Sociology of Unfree Labour," *Sociology*, 11 (1977).

enjoyed; third, the putting-out system which had begun to evolve into manufacture; and the mode of production which at the level of circulation united the others, namely the ship. As modes of production I wish to consider them not as sources of wealth or means of value-creation, nor as stages of economic growth, and still less as means of satisfying human wants. I consider them only as a framework of human interaction, a framework both conducting and moulding human experience. They thus cease to be the technical infrastructure of economics and become instead "the public realm" of working-class self-activity. Each of them organized human labour differently. Thus the plantation provided the first site in modern history of mass cooperation. Petty production remained the setting of resourcefulness and independent individualism. Manufacture and the putting-out system created the fragmented, detail labourer whose "idleness" became the bane of the eighteenth-century political economist. The ship whose milieu of action made it both universal and *sui generis* provided the place where the articulation of disciplinary rules and the ratio of variable to constant capital (men to equipment) forbode the factory of the future.

"Long before the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century which ushered in the factory system," one scholar has written, "the seamen had been working under many of the same characteristic features which have now become so well known in connection with factory production; and even though their settings were so different as to obscure or to hide the likeness, in essentials they were the same."⁴³ The large capital outlay, the division of labour, the regimentation and repetition, the close supervision, the working in groups, and the removal from home are the characteristics sailing had with the factory. The ships' holds carried the congealed labour of the plantations, the manufactories, and the work-shops to their new destinations. The rolling and pitching deck was the uncertain stage upon which the international sea-faring proletariat told its stories to one another and sought for itself its historic role.

Do not think of the form of cooperation among these Atlantic communities as the rigid "triangular trade" as if it were commodities doing the cooperating, or as if "Demand" in Africa called to England for worsteds, red caps and Brummagen ware, and the West Indies barked out "More tractable labour," while in England "Demand" said "Another sugar, please." Thinking that way hides "our labor movement" in the fetishism of commodities. Instead, imagine your hand as the ocean and the fingers the continents: the index finger is England, the middle finger Africa, the ring finger the West Indies, and the little finger North America. They cooperate to build a tremendous community. The thumb connects them all: it is the ship. It moves and oceans are crossed, diseases endured, danger overcome. From the cooperation of the people in these modes of production the triangle is produced, "an instance of program-

⁴³ Elmo Paul Hohman, *Seaman Ashore: A Study of the United Seamen's Service and of Merchant Seamen in Port* (New Haven 1952), 224. Here, as elsewhere, I have been deeply stimulated by Marcus Rediker's studies of eighteenth century sailing.



The Hand of 17th and 18th Century Cooperation

med accumulation of wealth such as the world has rarely seen," as C.L.R. James has written.⁴⁴

The ship carried congealed labour; it also carried living labour: ships of transported felons, of indentured servants, above all, of African slaves. The ship was not only the means of communications between continents, it was the first place where working people from the continents communicated. All the contradictions of social antagonism were concentrated within its timbers. Imperialism was the main one. Whatever high-points stood out in the sun of European imperialism, they always cast an African shadow: it was not just his cabin boy who was Black, Christopher Columbus' pilot, Pedro Nino, was an African. *The Mayflower* as soon as it discharged the famous Pilgrims sailed for the West Indies with a cargo of people from Africa.⁴⁵ Forced by the magnitude of its enterprises to bring huge and heterogeneous masses of men and women together aboard ship to face a deathly voyage to a cruel destination, European imperialism also created the conditions of the circulation of experience within the huge masses of labour that it had set in motion. People will talk.

The people packed in the slavers spoke many languages. In 1689, the year that the two factions of the English ruling class under the constitutional tutelage of John Locke learned to speak a common language, Richard Simson wrote of his experiences in the South Seas:

⁴⁴ C.L.R. James, "The Atlantic Slave Trade," in *The Future in the Present* (London 1977).

⁴⁵ Michael Cohn and Michael K.H. Platzer, *Black Men of the Sea* (New York 1978).

The means used by those who trade to Guinea, to keep the Negroes quiet, is to choose them from several parts of ye Country, of different Languages; so that they find they cannot act joyntly, when they are not in a Capacity of Consulting with one another, and this they cannot doe, in soe farr as they understand not one another.⁴⁶

To communicate they had to develop a language of their own, and as often as not this was the oppressor's language. The English was not Dr. Johnson's, it was Jack Tar's, and Jack Tar as Jesse Lemisch has said was a foul-mouthed speaker of the "very shambles of language." The mariner spoke "a dialect and manner peculiar to themselves," said a writer in the *Critical Review* (1757). Ned Ward in *Wooden World Dissected* asserted that the language of a ship's master was "all Heathen Greek to a Cobbler." A student of seventeenth-century ships' logs has shown in 60 densely worded pages how very different was maritime phonetics from that of the landsman.⁴⁷ What is perhaps most impressive about eighteenth-century sea glossaries is what is left out. In general they are technical and disciplinary manuals of instruction.⁴⁸ Sometimes though they are hints of other worlds like these:

quashee	a Negroe seaman
manany	someone who puts off work
Captain's cloak	the 36th article of war giving the captain powers of punishment in cases not expressly provided for
Fiddlers Green	paradise for seamen dying ashore

Professor Louis-Jean Calvet has made a study of "les langues véhiculaires," such as the Sabir of Mediterranean sailors, the Mandingo of West Africa, Swahili of East Africa, Quichua of the Andes, and others. From these studies, he concludes:

En effet, plutôt que de considérer la langue comme un instrument de communication, nous pouvons la considérer d'abord comme le produit d'un besoin de communication, c'est-à-dire comme la réponse à une situation dans laquelle des hommes ont un problème de communication et la réponse (en l'occurrence la langue) prend la forme d'un instrument de communication et la réponse linguistique à ce problème: il sont dialectiquement liés.⁴⁹

"The most magnificent drama of the last thousand years of human history" was not enacted with its strophes and prosody ready-made. It created a new speech. A combination of first, nautical English, second, the "sabir" of the Mediter-

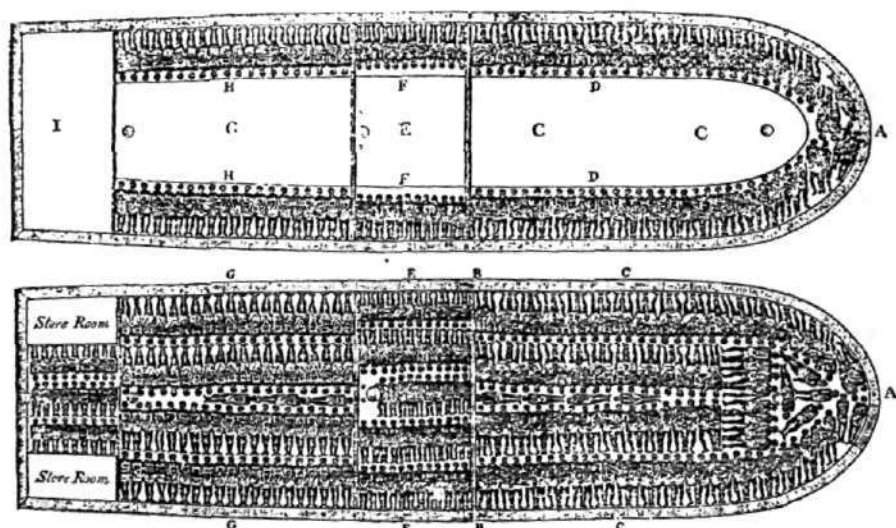
⁴⁶ British Library. "Richard Simons Voyage to the Straits of Magellan & S. Seas in the Year 1689," Sloane MSS. 86, f. 57.

⁴⁷ William Matthews, "Sailor's Pronunciation in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 59 (1935), 193-251.

⁴⁸ William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (1769).

⁴⁹ Louis-Jean Calvet, *Les Langues Véhiculaires* (Paris 1981), 74, 76.

anean, third, the hermetic-like cant talk of the "underworld," and fourth, West African grammatical construction, produced the "pidgin English" that became in the tumultuous years of the slave trade the language of the African coast.



A Language Lesson

Linguists describe pidgin as a "go-between" language, the product of a "multiple-language situation," characterized by "radical simplification." "Il est même né pour permettre une communication jusque-là impossible," Calvet has written. It was a language whose expressive power arose less from its lexical range than from the musical qualities of stress and pitch. Some African contributions to maritime and then 'standard' English include "caboodle," "kick the bucket," and "Davy Jones' locker."⁵⁰ Where people had to understand each other pidgin English was the lingua franca of the sea and of the frontier. Inasmuch as all who came to the New World did so after months at sea, pidgin or its maritime and popular cognates became the medium of transmission for expressing the new social realities. By the mid-eighteenth century there were pidgin speaking communities in Philadelphia, New York, and Halifax. In 1722 Philip Ashton was asked by some pirates "in their proper Dialect... If I would sign their Articles."⁵¹ Pidgin became an instrument, like the drum or the fiddle, of communication among the oppressed: scorned and not easily understood by "polite" Society.

⁵⁰ J.L. Dillard, *All-American English* (New York 1975), which develops the thesis of "maritime languages" and their relation to the process of "pidginization." See also, Francis Grose, *A Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1787).

⁵¹ Rediker, "Under the Banner of King Death."

It has been estimated that by the end of the eighteenth century fully a quarter of the complement of the Royal Navy consisted of men of African origin, an astonishing figure and yet not considered implausible by Professor Walvin.⁵² The ship, if not the breeding ground of rebels, became a meeting place where various traditions were jammed together, an extraordinary forcing house of internationalism. African, Briton, quashee, American (not to mention Portuguese, Iazar, and Spanish) would have cooperated, for their lives depended on it, in the rigging and on the decks, in the fo'c'sle and the mess. What interpretation would they have supplied to these rousing lines?

When Britain first at Heav'n's command
 Arose from out the azure main
 Arose, arose from out the azure main
 This was the charter, the charter of the land,
 And guardian angels sang this strain
 Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves
 Britons never never never shall be slaves.

Shipboard cooperation plus the libertarian, anti-slavery ideology of such songs provided the background to the many instances of trans-continental, multi-racial struggles of the maritime proletariat. In 1747 white and black mariners battled the press-gang in Boston for three days, and again in 1767-68.⁵³ The first battle of the American War of Independence was led by just such a quashee, Crispus Attucks. He stood at the head of "a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and molattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tarrs," wrote John Adams. Olaudah Equiano, a Padmore-like figure of the eighteenth century, derived his own extraordinary abilities doubtless from his language and musical talents. In Africa he heard many tongues. It was the same in Jamaica, but there on Sunday afternoons the slaves of different languages met to communicate by dance and music. In the "Wilkes & Liberty" days of London he studied the French horn! In the Bahamas the "melodious sound of the catguts" brought him together with the free blacks. He was a lucky man in that during the Middle Passage he was able to handle the quadrant and to learn some English. Later fellow mariners like Richard Baker, an American, and Daniel Queen, an Englishman, taught him a trade and the language of Milton.⁵⁴ From them he learned something of what it meant to be "freeborn," for he was soon objecting to every untried punishment on the grounds that it was not meted by "judge and jury."

⁵² James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945* (1973), 15-52.

⁵³ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25 (1968), 371-407.

⁵⁴ Peter Linebaugh, "Spouse C.L.R. James had met E.P. Thompson in 1792," *Urgent Tasks: Journal of the Revolutionary Left*, 22 (1981).

VI

The Boomerang

"JUDGE AND JURY," "No Standing Army," the law expressed in English not Latin: these were some of the abiding political achievements of the English Revolution and the party of the Levellers, just as restrictions upon unfettered capitalist use of the land and limitations upon the rate of exploitation of the "free-born Englishman" were material achievements of the broader movement from which the Levellers arose. The more radical tradition that had partly been responsible for these latter accomplishments did not recover easily from the Atlantic diaspora or the repression of the Restoration. A quietistic turning to the Kingdom Within was one path, that might occasionally spawn the odd fish, like Benjamin Lay. An aggressive interpretation of the doctrine of the Elect that turned it into the self-justification of capitalist entrepreneurs or into the niggardly doctrines of Ben Franklin's "Poor Richard" was another. Even the Quaker's "inner light" found its outer, objective correlative in the glint of gold. Against these we must place a third — the submersion of the communitarian and antinomian traditions within the rivulets of local communities and within the long, heaving swells of the Atlantic. There these traditions were not entirely dormant. Further research is likely to show that the sleep was a light, winking sleep.⁵⁵

We see it among the Spitalfields weavers when they rose against the engine-loom in 1675 or in the support they gave to the concentration of anabaptist meeting places in Spitalfields. We see it in Bedlam (likely place!) where Ned Ward heard an inmate "holding forth with as much vehemence against Kingly government, as a brother of Commonwealth doctrine rails against plurality of livings." We see it in taverns: in Aldersgate Ned Ward heard a tavern politician, "a rattle-headed prattle-box set up to reform the Church, new-model the Government, and calumniate the best of Princes."⁵⁶ We see it in Newgate chapel during the sermons for the condemned when the malefactors sometimes set up a Ranter-like counter-theater of laughter, profanity, and song. We see it in "a tavern near Newgate" as the second act of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) opens: "Why are the laws levelled against us? Are we more dishonest than the rest of mankind?" asks Jemmy Twitcher. Mat of the Mint replies, "We retrench the superfluities of mankind. The world is avaricious and I hate avarice." It might be heard on the streets from a ballad-monger. This from Queen Anne's reign:

⁵⁵ Raymond Williams has criticized his own earlier work (*Culture and Society*) because it omitted discussion of the Civil War. In 1979 he wrote "I suspect that there are in fact very deep underground continuities from the period of defeat in the later 17th century to the re-emergence of radicalism in the 1770s and 1780s." See *Politics and Letters* (London 1979), 131.

⁵⁶ *The London Spy: The Vanities and Vices of the Town Exposed to View* (1927 edition), 54.

But Property must be,
 Save the Queen, Save the Queen,
 Allow'd in each Degree,
 Save the Queen, Save the Queen:
 And some were there that saw,
 Who have sworn to mend this flaw,
 By force of Common Law;
 Save the Queen, Save the Queen.

These words, Christopher Hill has suggested, might be sung to the tune of 'The Digger's Song.' Very often the tradition was associated with the heroes of the underworld. Jack Sheppard, the great gaol-breaker, was compared to a Leveller. Dick Turpin, the highwayman, inspired a large number of expressions of militant hatred of oppression.⁵⁷

Doubtless, a sharp eye could see the thin filament of this tradition elsewhere. Like the red "Rogue's thread" that ran through the cordage and sailcloth of H.M. Naval Stores, it was more a mark of identification than of power. We should, also, guard against dis-embodiment or de-contextualizing these survivals for they lived only to the extent that they allowed themselves to be modified in the changing productive arrangements of life. Because the transformation of material and social relations attendant upon these changes in production, principally the wage, is the subject of a story I am telling elsewhere, here we may sum them up in words of Tom Paine, the Edmund Hillary of the Atlantic mountains: "When the rich plunder the poor of his rights, it becomes an example to the poor to plunder the rich of his property."⁵⁸ Tom Paine was born in a Quaker family. He worked as a stay-maker, first in a rural, proto-industrial

⁵⁷ "The Digger Song" is republished in Roy Palmer, *A Ballad History of England from 1588 to the Present Day* (London 1979), 22.

Your houses they pull down, stand up now, stand up now,
 Your houses they pull down, stand up now.
 Your houses they pull down to fright poor men in town,
 But the gentry must come down, and the poor shall wear the crown.
 Stand up now, Diggers all.

Their self-wille is their law, stand up now, stand up now,
 Their self-will is their law, stand up now.
 Since tyranny came in they count it now no sin
 To make a gaole a gin, to sterve poor men therein.
 Stand up now, stand up now.

For a longer discussion of the relationship between famous criminals and the levelling traditions, see Peter Linebaugh, *Crime and Labour in 18th Century London* (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Tom Paine, *The Rights of Man*.

setting, then in a London manufactory whose workers had struck against the fourteen hour day, to escape which he tried unsuccessfully to sign aboard the Terrible privateer, Captain Death, and then successfully aboard the King of Prussia, "A maritime life is a kind of partial emigration," he wrote later. It was the ship, therefore, that mediated his transformation from an urban craftsman in London to a world-shaking trans-continental revolutionary in America.⁵⁹

It is true that London was an industrial city, the centre of a huge textile industry and hundreds of crafts. Primarily, however, its huge eighteenth-century growth was the result of its function as a port. As the port expanded so did its river and maritime populations. Smollett, Didbin, and Marryat suggest that it was the richest of the Atlantic pidgin communities. Certainly, it contained a larger black population than any city outside of Africa. Wherever you looked you saw black faces. At Bartholomew Fair Ned Ward shows us two female rope dancers: one Irish, another African. Oil paintings show the ubiquity of the African servant in the households of the aristocrats. A black man would "walk up Ladder Lane and down Hempen Alley" about once every decade. Isaac George, a New England mariner, son of a Guinea man, made more than ten Atlantic crossings before he was hanged at Tyburn for robbing a surgeon of his implements.⁶⁰ The black population was about 20,000, or something less, by the 1760s when it was able to set Granville Sharpe in motion. It was concentrated in maritime and servile occupations. Black communities existed in Paddington, Whitechapel, and St. Giles'-in-the-Fields.

Always, it was a reminder of liberty, and if Hogarth is anyone to go by, the association was with English liberty and mass revolt: in the eighth plate of *Industry and Idleness* he shows an African serving man caught between the dagger of Wat Tyler's assassin (Sir William Walworth) and the gluttonous appetites of London vicars, lawyers, and physicians. It is an apt, if portentous, image of the first of four phases in the history of the London black population. "Apt," because he is isolated; "portentous" because the reference to the leader of the Peasant's Revolt reminds us of William Morris' comment, and some chickens yet to come home to roost. The first period was a period of integration. It is expressed powerfully in the *Letters* of Sancho who was born in the Middle Passage, became butler to the Duchess of Montagu whose service he was forced to leave because having developed a "convexity of belly exceeding Falstaff" he could no longer stand. A fearful man, an exquisite flatterer, withdrawn from the affairs of the street, he had proposed various humanitarian schemes such as that to increase employment in the shipyards by reducing the Civil List, but his heart was in books where he shared the latitudinarian broad-spirited ineffectuality of Parson Adams or Uncle Toby.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Alyce Barry, "Thomas Paine, Privateersman," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 101 (1977), 460.

⁶⁰ The Ordinary of Newgate's *Account*, 19 July 1738.

⁶¹ *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (1782).

Walworth's Dagger

The second phase of the history was that of consolidation and the beginning of what has been called "proto-pan-Africanism." A Fantee man, Ottobah Cugoano, was the first ex-slave and African to call for the total abolition of the slave trade. He was instrumental in the formation of the London African Association and a leader of the abortive expedition to Sierra Leone, the first of the "Back-to-Africa" movements. His *Thoughts and Sentiments* (1787) contains the thundering language of the revolutionary Puritan preachers as well as abiding statements of pan-Africanism. In this he developed an Atlantic perspective upon the unfolding of revolutionary events, an oceanic perspective that may be compared to that of W.E.B. DuBois who saw a connection between the abolition of American slavery and the Paris Commune of 1871. As part of his answer to the scribblers hired by the West India interest, Cugoano referred to a well-known print of the time called "The World Turned Upside Down." It depicted a pig roasting a cook, a horse saddling a rider, and the like. "It would be a most delectable sight," said he, "when thieves and robbers get the upper side of the world to see them turned down. The complicated banditries of pirates, thieves, robbers, oppressors and enslavers of men are those cooks and men that would be roasted and saddled. . . . It certainly would be no unpleasant sight to see them well-roasted, saddled and bridled too; and no matter by whom, whether he terms them pigs, horses or asses."⁶² It was a venerable, working-class theme.

⁶² Cugoano's book is republished in Francis D. Adams and Barry Sanders, *Three Black Writers in Eighteenth Century England* (Belmont, Ca. 1971).

Christopher Hill remarked in the conclusion to *The World Turned Upside Down* (1971) that "nothing ever wholly dies" and he noted that his title was a phrase that appeared occasionally among the eighteenth-century Shakers. Two hundred and one years ago when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown a tune of that name was played during the capitulation ceremonies:

If buttercups buzzed after the bee
 If boats were on land, churches on sea,
 If ponies rode men and grass ate the cows,
 And cats should be chased to holes by the mouse,
 If the mamas sold their babies to the gypsies for half a crown;
 Summer were spring, and t'other way round,
 Then all the world would be upside down.⁶³

Thomas Spence, the revolutionary agrarian communist, composed a broadside of that name in 1805.⁶⁴ Cugoana thus drew upon a profound tradition stretching back to Merlin's prophecy, to Lear's fool, to the Geneva Bible, and to the revolutionary writings of the English Civil War. If it was the defeat of one English army in the mutinies of 1649-50 which produced the circumstances which brought the ideas of democracy to the West Indies and America in the first place, it was these same ideas which 150 years later, first in North America and then in Santo Domingo, inspired those who brought about the defeat of two other British armies. Perhaps they consoled themselves with the sentiment that Goethe uttered to the defeated Prussian soldiers at Valmy (1792): "From this place, and from this day forth, commences a new era in the world's history; and you can all say that you were present at its birth."

The third phase is that of the Abolitionist movement in England. It was led by Equiano. I mean not only did he lead the English black community and he travelled all over to do this, but he was the wire-puller, the petitioner, the worrier who at least in the early stages encouraged Clark, the Quakers, and the L.C.S. His achievement is still sorely neglected by historians of the anti-slave trade movement. By 1768 the Black community was known for its militance, its refusal to support or accept slavery in any way, and its harbouring of international rebels; such anyway is the impression that the police leave. John Fielding wrote, "There is great reason to fear that those blacks who have been sent back to the Plantations . . . have been the occasion of those . . . recent insurrections in the . . . West Indies."⁶⁵ The political and social presence of a population of ex-slaves, experienced in the insurrectionary tradition of anti-

⁶³ Contemporary descriptions of the surrender are contained in Henry Steele Commager and Richard S. Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants* (New York 1958), II, 1209-49, in which there is also some discussion of the song. J. Bruce Glasier, the poet and socialist, wrote a song called "We'll Turn Things Upside Down" (1891).

⁶⁴ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 307.

⁶⁵ John Fielding, *Penal Laws* (1768).

slavery as well as the internationalism of several sea voyages, gave to the more well-known middle-class movement its ballast and sail.

The abolition of the slave trade (1807) was the crowning achievement of this movement. Of course, the victory belonged partly to the struggle of the "Black Jacobins" of Santo Domingo.⁶⁶ Together they presaged an end to slavery and the transformation of that triangulation of struggle that the Blacks in London especially had supported at the apex.

Forthwith, the London black community, or at least its political cadres, threw itself into the working-class reform movement of England. It offered its rich and secretive traditions of conspiracy and ability — for the black face, like Proteus, could act as a mask — to communicate with all kinds of people. Robert Wedderburn, a tailor, son of a West Indian slave, led London's radical Spenceans after Evans was jailed in 1817. He believed in the Hebrew law of the Jubilee and the commonality of land under Moses and Alfred. He opened his own chapel in Hopkins Street in 1819 and became known for the vehemence of his anti-Christianity. He was an activist among soldiers, sailors, and (significantly) the Irish labourers at Maudslay's engineering works in Lambeth. He was a leading tactician of the insurrectionary movement and was later associated with Carlisle and republicanism. William Davidson, a cabinet maker and former mariner, was also an ex-Watsonite. He was an expert in weaponry, organizing a depot in Spitalfields. He was one of those who plotted to assassinate the entire Cabinet while it was at dinner. For this the Jamaican was hanged on 1 May 1820, and with the other Cato Street conspirators he died "like a hero." Both men were "old Jacks" with connections to the radicalism of the 1790s, both to the L.C.S. and to the Irish rebels of 1798. Their relations with Toussaint L'Ouverture and the great war in Haiti need to be explored. We may conclude this sketch of the fourth phase of the London black history with a mention of William Cuffay, another Jamaican, an activist in the London tailor's strike of 1834, a leading London Chartist, an organizer of the Orange Tree conspiracy of 1848, for which he was transported to Botany Bay. The boomerang continued to hurtle around the globe.⁶⁷

The association between sailors and Black freedom fighters persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Denmark Vesey, the leader of the plot of 1822, had sailed in the Caribbean and had soaked up the experiences of the Haitian revolt. It was Irish sailors in Baltimore who first told the young ship's caulker, Frederick Douglass, about northern freedom. Stanley, a black sailor, gave Douglass his sailor's uniform and papers providing him with his disguise for his trip. Alone and desperate in New York it was to a fellow sailor

⁶⁶ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York 1963).

⁶⁷ On these revolutionists, see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963), and Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London 1979).

that he entrusted his plight.⁶⁸ In the 1920s the revolutionary newspaper, *The Negro Worker*, on which George Padmore worked, was passed from hand-to-hand by Black sailors in Hamburg, Marseilles, and African and North American ports.⁶⁹ The ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record.

VII

Some Conclusions

THOMPSON AND HOBSBAWM WITH THEIR COLLEAGUES in the Communist Party History Group posed the problem of a seventeenth-century arrest to the development that had begun so vigorously in the sixteenth-century. One of them presented the delay as the cessation of the English working-class discussion of democracy. The other presented it as the temporary failure of west European (especially English) capitalism to industrialize. In this essay I have tried to suggest that what from a European viewpoint might appear as a "delay" could from an Atlantic perspective appear as the oceanic generalization of the theory and practice of antinomian democracy. Moreover, the "crisis" of the seventeenth century was an index of the widespread refusal of wage-labour. The imperfectibilities of the "free labour market" became the driving force of Atlantic imperialism. When the countries on the limit of the empire exploded in slave revolts and revolution, the dispersed traditions returned and were re-awakened in London within whose alleys and courts dwelt a proletariat which by the 1790s was both Atlantic and international.

Throughout I have chosen to analyze the mode of production as the setting where the working class transforms capitalist accumulation and exploitation (the terms are inseparable) into its own terms of discussion and struggle. The obstacles in the way of this transformation, the twin ogres of war and starvation, I have not stressed. In this view there is no problem of "arrested development" or of a pause in an international discussion. That it had seemed so to the creative minds of the English C.P. History Group can be explained in a variety of ways which we cannot fully explain here beyond mentioning two considerations. First, it should be said that for the marxist intellectuals of the post-war period the dominant experience was the collapse of the popular-front, anti-fascist alliance. To them the question of proletarian internationalism appeared less as the self-activity of the anti-colonial masses than it did as the domination of the Moscow International which saw the anti-racist, anti-imperial movement only as an incident of the "national struggle." Second, during this period English marxist intellectuals accepted technicist models of "economic develop-

⁶⁸ Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, I, *The Early Years, 1817-1849* (New York 1950), 22-3.

⁶⁹ Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in Europe and Africa*, translated by Ann Keep (New York 1974), 335-6.

ment" which included a series of historical steps or stages whose inevitable progression was by no means closed to historical interrogation but which nevertheless were seen primarily as evolving structures that attacked, rather than caused, material scarcity.⁷⁰

The recent wave of municipal insurrection within England under the leadership of the descendants of West Indian slaves makes it more difficult to regard material scarcity as a condition of only an early stage of social evolution. Furthermore, it makes it difficult to accept a conception of working-class internationalism that depends only on the cooperation of geographically distinct national units. The 1981 revolt in Brixton invites us to search the past for alternative conceptions. Blake's atlanticism offers one that is still of interest because it fiercely opposes the elitist scientific view of Bacon whose schematic followers turned "generosity [into] a science/That men get rich by" and because the African and ex-slave experience infused his vision of human love.

One of his "Songs of Innocence" expressed the divinity of human life in the form of maternal instructions of friendship to African and English children. In the "Song of Liberty" that concluded *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* human liberation is described as the hope of a militant, revolutionary, and anti-imperialist birth. To be put into effect the hope awaits only the rising of Londoner, Jew, and African. To Blake the order of the oceans and the continents was not fixed by latitude and longitude. Nor was the order of the centuries fixed in a linear temporality. Still less, of course, did revolutionary redemption depend on the secular analysis of an invariable sequence of modes of production within a "world-system." Yet, his tremendous powers of dissociation of the disciplines of Enlightenment rationality produced a conception of the universality of human potential that harked back to "The Everlasting Gospel" of the English Revolution and that alone permitted expression of the particularities of trans-continental working-class cooperation which those other systems could not. In his Lambeth artisan's chamber Katherine Blake cooked at a fire and William Blake sat at his table before a window overlooking the Thames and the Surrey Hills.⁷¹ There he engraved the powerful images of enslaved African beauty that illustrated Captain J.G. Stedman's *History of the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. There he composed that remarkable prophecy some of whose chapters C.L.R. James and Walter Rodney have chronicled:⁷²

⁷⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (New York 1973), 252-5, indicates the close relationship that was held between capitalist accumulation and progress against material scarcity. The same author's essay on "The Historians' Group of the Communist Party," Maurice Cornforth, ed., *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London 1978), 21-49, illustrates the depth of C.P. sectarianism which neglected *The Black Jacobins* because of its "author's known Trotskyism."

⁷¹ "William Blake Bicentenary Supplement," *The New Reasoner*, I, (1957-58), x-xi.

⁷² "America," Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (London 1967), 203.

Let the slave grinding at the mill run into the field,
 Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
 Let the in chained soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
 Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years,
 Rise and look out; his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open;
 And let his wife and children return from the oppressor's scourge.
 They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream,
 Singing: "the Sun has left his blackness & has found a fresher morning,
 And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear and cloudless night;
 For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.

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