

The Irish in the Caribbean as an Online Post Historical Phenomenon

Inaugural-Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie
der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

vorgelegt von

Robert Allen Johnson II M.A.

aus

El Paso, Texas

2025

This work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Referent: Prof. Dr. Michael Hochgeschwender

Korreferent: Prof. Dr. Christof Mauch

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 26 Juni 2025

Figures

Figure 1 Interest in the Term “Irish Slaves” 2004-2024	2
Figure 2 The DIKW Order	6
Figure 3 “When was the last time?” From Facebook by Shane Carrick on March 9, 2016	47
Figure 4 “Breaker boys working in Ewen Breaker of Pennsylvania Coal Co.” Hine, 1911	48
Figure 5 Interpolated meme using Hines’ Photo	49
Figure 6 Young oyster shuckers, Port Royal, S.C.	50
Figure 7 “That’s none of my business” Posted by Nick Sacco on Word Press in 2015	51
Figure 8 USA TODAY, Fact Check, Works Cited	79
Figure 9 Facebook Fact Check Window, January 2025	81
Figure 10 Eirinn Flood, Unattributed	173
Figure 11 Elizabeth Eckford, Will Counts	173
Figure 12 Ardoyne Mural to mark Holy Cross Dispute of 2001. Unattributed	174

Contents

I. Introduction	1
A. Context: 2000 - 2014	1
B. Context: 2015 - 2020	2
1. What is meant by visibility?	3
2. Defining Visibility	3
C. Theoretical Compatibility	4
D. The Problem with the Truth.....	4
E. Theories that are proximate to our issues.....	6
1. Disinformation and Misinformation.....	7
2. Post-Truth	8
3. Critical Discourse Analysis	9
4. Media and Digital Culture	9
F. Theorists that are in tune with this paper	9
G. The Internet/Web/Social Media makes going around old gatekeepers possible.	10
H. The Grassroots cycle.....	11
I. Positioning the Heuristics	12
J. Why is this issue significant in both historical and digital contexts?	14
K. Research Questions and Objectives.....	15
1. Research Questions	15
2. Objectives	16
L. Contents	16
II. The Relevant Historical Background:.....	18
A. The Cromwellian conquest and forced transportation of the Irish to the Caribbean...	18

B. The roots of the Irish slavery folk memory.	19
C. The differences between Irish Forced Labour and African slavery.....	22
1. Duration as the Main Difference	22
D. From the Caribbean to the Millennium	23
E. Holding on to the past.	24
F. The Popular History That Set the Stage	26
G. The Situation on the Ground in the United States in the Visibility Period.....	27
H. The Visibility Discourse	29
2. A Flawed Discourse.	31
I. The Role of Social Media in the Visibility Discourse	34
1. Introduction: The Internet as a Historical Battleground	34
2. Facebook: A Passive Circulator	34
3. Twitter: From Discussion Forum to Ideological Wrestling Rink.....	35
4. Reddit and Wikipedia: Digital Gatekeepers	35
5. The Platform Effect: The Shift from Truth to Use	36
6. Conclusion: A Digital Battlefield, Not a Historical Debate	36
III. The Gateway Article.....	38
A. Introduction	38
B. Authorship	38
C. Move to a more visible site.....	39
D. Attacking Reparations	39
E. The Difficulty of Fixing Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation	40
F. Invoking Brandolini's law.....	41
G. A Judgement	42

IV. Memes	44
A. Introducing and Defining Memes	44
1. Objections to the term	44
2. Facets of Memes	44
B. Graphic Memes as Misinformation	46
1. Source Attribution and Content.....	46
2. A Digital Molotov Cocktail.....	52
C. Conclusion – Memes, Truth, and Historical Distortion.....	52
V. The Press and the Activism	53
A. Hogan, Reilly and McAtackney	53
1. Liam Hogan and the Dichotomy	53
2. The Dangers of the Dichotomy	56
3. The Danger of Dissent (Grenham)	57
4. The Open Letter of 2016	58
B. Media Examples	59
1. New York Times (2017).....	59
2. Christian Science Monitor in 2018.....	65
C. Conclusion – The Press and the Activism	69
VI. Fact-checkers – Liminal Journalism.....	71
A. Introduction	71
1. Quantitative Standards.....	71
2. Repetition	72
B. 23.09.2016 - Snopes.....	72
1. A lack of depth	72

2. Anachronism.....	73
3. Snopes gets Post-Historical	74
C. 16.03.2017 AP Fact Check	75
1. Introduction	75
2. A Familiar Pattern	76
3. Conclusion	77
D. 18.06.2020 USA Today	77
1. The Dichotomy - Servants and Slaves.....	77
2. A bibliography of the pattern and the Visibility Period	78
3. Objectively checking facts?.....	80
E. 06.06.2020 Reuters	81
1. A Graphic Meme	82
2. Time Period, Location, and the Consequences of Anachronism.....	83
3. Broad Mischaracterisations	83
F. 07.07.2020 AFP Canada.....	85
1. Conflating slavery with indentured servitude.....	85
2. More Powerful than the English.....	85
3. More than 100,000 Irish children sold as slaves in the 1650s.....	86
4. African slaves were more expensive than Irish	88
G. Conclusion: Rating = Mixed.....	89
VII. The Academics and Special Guests	92
A. Introduction	92
1. Contents	92

B. 01.01.2017 Handler and Reilly in 2017 “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados.”	92
1. Introduction	92
2. Undercutting their own premise.	93
3. Is there a lack of evidence?.....	94
4. Heredity	96
5. The Rights of the Englishman	97
6. Were there national delineations?.....	98
7. What the Law Says	100
8. The Pattern re-emerges: The System of forced labour	106
9. Conclusion	108
C. 07.07.2017 Donoghue and “The Curse of Cromwell”	110
1. Donoghue himself	110
2. Irish captives as Nationalist Propaganda	110
3. Slippery Slopes	111
4. Liarnising Hogan	112
5. A Deviation from the typical pattern.....	114
6. Severity of Treatment	115
7. Donoghue’s Deviation.....	116
8. Conclusion	118
D. 09.13.2017 Ted McCormick gets Petty	118
1. Chain of Events and Importance	118
2. Daniel McCormick notes Donoghue’s error	119
3. The Articles of Slavery	120

4. No other case made.....	122
5. Never read the comments.	123
6. Ontological Impasse?	128
7. Conclusion	129
E. 03.10.2019 The Trinity Conference Speech with Dr. Anthea Butler.....	130
1. Introduction.	130
2. What's covered?	131
3. What's wrong with the article is also what's right with it.....	132
4. White Cargo and the Victim Industrial Complex	133
5. The Visibility Period on Twitter begins at 2014	135
6. To what is that attributed?	135
7. Why should they get involved?	137
8. The 2% of History in the box.	138
9. A Few Notes before concluding	140
10. In conclusion.	142
VIII. Two Papers in 2022: Seeing Past the Visibility Discourse	145
A. Ending on a comparative note	145
1. Brown	145
2. Zacek	145
B. 2022 - Brown - Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620–1660.....	146
1. Who is Brown & What is his method?	146
2. Brown's Methodology: Search the Archival Sources	147
3. Brown's goal is Historical	148
C. How Brown challenges the pattern	149

1. Rejecting the Pattern.....	149
2. Eliminating the visibility discourse	150
3. Strengths & Weaknesses	151
D. A Necessary Boredom	151
E. Key Findings (Irish in Barbados, forced transport, lack of indentures, mortality rates)	152
1. The Interregnum	152
2. Takeaways	157
3. “Irish” Capital at work.....	159
F. Why Brown’s Work Matters	162
1. How it reframes the Irish slavery discourse.	162
2. What it tells us about history vs. visibility discourse.	163
3. Why “boring” is Essential.	164
G. Conclusion	165
IX. 2022 - Natalie Zacek “How the Irish became black.”	167
A. Zacek argues that Irish indentured servants were not enslaved in the way that Africans were.	167
1. The Distinction is not a stronger argument.	168
2. Racialisation and Heredity	169
3. Deciding status through potentiality or hope?	170
C. Zacek argues that the Irish Did Not See Themselves as Comparable to Black People:	171
D. Zacek also argues the "Irish slaves" narrative is a recent invention	177
E. Ignoring Caribbean and Atlantic History	178
1. Apples and Oranges.....	180

2. Riva Berleant-Schiller	180
3. Truth vs. Usefulness	183
F. Ideological protectionism eventually veers into absurdity.....	184
G. Conclusion	188
H. Comparing Brown and Zacek.....	189
1. The Role of Historical Sources.....	189
2. Method vs. Ideology	190
3. Political Implications.....	190
4. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times	190
X. Conclusion: On the Uses of the Irish in the Caribbean	192
A. The Post-Historical Shift	192
B. Findings	194
C. What Are the Limitations of the Study	194
D. The Fluid Identity of the Irish in the Caribbean	194
E. Visibility Discourse.....	195
F. Answering the Research Questions.....	197
Bibliography	201

Dieses Werk ist meiner Mutter Areti, meiner Frau Anna und unseren Kindern Amelia, Abigail und Ava gewidmet. Es gibt keine Danksagungen, außer an meine Frau, die die ganze Zeit über allen Widerständen und erstaunlichen Widrigkeiten standgehalten hat, und an den lieben Gott, für den alles Lob und alle Dankbarkeit reserviert sind.

Αναπαυθείτε εν ειρήνη· η χαρά και ο πόνος σας δεν λησμονήθηκαν.

(Rest in peace. Your Joy and your Pain are not Forgotten.)

Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Einleitung

Diese Dissertation argumentiert, dass sowohl die Vorstellung der Iren als Sklaven in der Karibik als auch der sogenannte Sichtbarkeitsdiskurs (wie weiter unten definiert) historisch verzerrte Darstellungen aufrechterhalten. Diese Verzerrungen entstehen durch die Instrumentalisierung von Geschichte im Internet. Die Dynamiken digitaler Medien verstärken und verbreiten diese Verzerrungen. Historische Erzählungen werden nicht nur weitergegeben, sondern für bestimmte Zwecke geformt und genutzt, wodurch sie epistemologische und ontologische Methoden ergänzen oder sogar ersetzen.

Ein Meme ist eine übertragbare oder ansteckende Idee, die sich in jedem Medium verbreiten kann, aber besonders in digitalen Räumen floriert. Das Internet-Meme über irische Sklaverei gewann in der Hochphase der Sichtbarkeit (2015–2020) erheblich an Bedeutung. Diese Meme sind ein herausragendes Beispiel für verzerrte historische Narrative in digitalen Medien. Ihre Entwicklung und Verbreitung in einem sich rasant verändernden Informationsumfeld könnten auch Aufschluss über andere historische Phänomene geben.

A. Kontext: 2000–2014

Die irische Diaspora besitzt ein starkes kollektives Gedächtnis der Unterdrückung. Diese Erinnerung umfasst unterschiedliche Formen von Leid und sogar Versklavung. Einige dieser Überzeugungen beruhen auf realen historischen Ereignissen, andere sind ahistorisch. Zwischen 2000 und 2014 führte eine Welle der Aufmerksamkeit durch Bücher, Memes und Webseiten zu einer Wiederbelebung eines weitgehend vergessenen Themas. Dieses erneute Interesse an den Iren in der Karibik ignorierte jedoch weitgehend den historischen Forschungsstand und bevorzugte stattdessen emotional ansprechende, aber faktisch ungenaue Narrative.

Das emotionale Gewicht von Exil, Opferrolle und historischem Trauma prägte sowohl die Argumente der Befürworter als auch die Reaktionen der Kritiker. Diese emotionale

Investition in historische Erzählungen beeinflusst, welche Stimmen gehört werden und wie Beweise interpretiert werden.

Ein besonders viraler Beitrag von John Martin mit dem Titel "*The Irish Slave Trade – The Forgotten White Slaves*" wurde zu einem Grundpfeiler des Internet-Memes über irische Sklaverei. Dieser Artikel und ähnliche Darstellungen stellten die irische Vertragsknechtschaft als gleichwertig mit der afrikanischen Chattel-Sklaverei dar, oft mit politischen Implikationen für gegenwärtige Debatten in den USA. Die starke Teilbarkeit und emotionale Wirkung dieser Narrative sorgten für ihre weite Verbreitung und machten sie zu einem Schlüsselaspekt wiederkehrender Debatten.

B. Kontext: 2015–2020

Die zweite Welle der Aufmerksamkeit begann im Jahr 2015. In dieser Phase stieß das Irish-Slavery-Meme aufgrund seiner zunehmenden Verbreitung und Sichtbarkeit auf wachsenden Widerstand im Internet. Aktivisten, Journalisten, Faktenprüfer und einige Akademiker reagierten auf die Verzerrungen des Memes mit Artikeln, Blogbeiträgen und Kommentaren in sozialen Medien. Doch auch ihre Reaktionen scheiterten oft daran, sich kritisch mit der historischen Evidenz auseinanderzusetzen, was zu fehlerhaften Gegenargumenten führte. Diese vereinfachte Gegenreaktion verstärkte die Polarisierung, die durch eine Mischung aus Fehlinformationen und konkurrierenden Narrativen geprägt war.

Obwohl ein komplexer Bestand an historischen Beweisen vorliegt, war der öffentliche Diskurs von selektiver Darstellung und narrativer Kontrolle geprägt.

Der Begriff *Sichtbarkeitsperiode* (2015–2020) bezieht sich auf den Anstieg der Online-Diskussionen über *Irish Slavery*, ausgelöst durch virale Verbreitung, algorithmische Verstärkung und eine verstärkte Berichterstattung in den Mainstream-Medien. Dies lässt sich anhand von Google-Trends-Daten und der verstärkten Interventionen von Faktenprüfern nachvollziehen.

Das Irish-Slavery-Meme gewann an Sichtbarkeit durch eine Konvergenz verschiedener Faktoren, darunter politische Spannungen, virale Mechanismen sozialer Medien und das allgemeine öffentliche Interesse an historischen Verzerrungen. Ob das Phänomen durch

seine Viralisierung allein oder durch bereits bestehende politische Spannungen ausgelöst wurde, bleibt unklar. Entscheidend ist, dass dieses Narrativ für eine gewisse Zeit durch Algorithmen in den öffentlichen Diskurs gedrängt wurde, sodass es für viele Nutzer unausweichlich sichtbar war.

C. Definition von Sichtbarkeit

Online-Sichtbarkeit funktioniert nicht wie physische Präsenz. Dass etwas im Internet existiert, bedeutet nicht automatisch, dass man es sieht. Digitale Räume sind flüchtig, und nichts ist "da", es sei denn, man sucht aktiv danach oder der Algorithmus stellt es einem zur Verfügung.

Wie wird ein obskures Narrativ plötzlich hochgradig sichtbar? Ganz einfach: Durch algorithmische Verbreitung, virale Trends und massenhaftes Teilen. Informationen bekommen eine Eigendynamik, gewinnen an Bedeutung und erscheinen plötzlich überall, ob man aktiv danach gesucht hat oder nicht. Genau das geschah mit dem Irish-Slavery-Meme während der Sichtbarkeitsperiode. Es wurde immer wieder in den Mittelpunkt gestellt, bis es auch für Nutzer, die es nie gesucht hatten, unübersehbar wurde.

Doch Sichtbarkeit ist vergänglich. Das Internet bewegt sich weiter. Die Inhalte bleiben zwar erhalten, doch ohne gezielte Suche verschwinden sie aus dem Blickfeld, weil der Algorithmus sie nicht mehr ausspielt. Die Sichtbarkeitsperiode bedeutet daher nicht eine konstante Online-Präsenz oder Verfügbarkeit, sondern beschreibt, wie Algorithmen, öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit und virale Effekte das Irish-Slavery-Meme für einen begrenzten Zeitraum in den Fokus der Debatte rückten.

D. Theoretische Anschlussfähigkeit

Es ist schwierig, diese Arbeit in bestehende theoretische Diskurse einzuordnen. Anstatt sich auf umfassende philosophische Behauptungen über *Post-Truth* zu konzentrieren, legt diese Dissertation den Fokus auf Geschichte – darauf, wie bestimmte historische Narrative verbreitet, aufgegriffen und für politische sowie soziale Zwecke genutzt werden.

Während die Epistemologie fragt, „Wie wissen wir das?“ und die Ontologie klärt, „Was ist das?“, fragt das dominierende Narrativ in diesem Fall: „Wofür kann diese Geschichte genutzt werden?“ Das Problem ist nicht nur Fehlinformation oder Verzerrung historischer Narrative, sondern dass historische Behauptungen nach ihrem Einfluss bewertet werden, nicht nach ihrer Genauigkeit.

Genau das geschah während der Sichtbarkeitsperiode mit dem Irish-Slavery-Meme. Die Debatte drehte sich nicht mehr um die Frage, ob es wahr war, sondern darum, wer es für welche Zwecke nutzen konnte.

Hier setzt meine Analyse an: Nicht ob die Wahrheit „tot“ ist, sondern wie sie aktiv an den Rand gedrängt wird, um Platz für *Nutzwert* in modernen Debatten zu machen.

Die Wahrheit existiert. Wir sind nur schlecht darin, sie zu finden – und noch schlechter darin, uns auf sie zu einigen (vgl. Baudrillards Konzept des Hyperspace). Die Wahrheit ist nicht verschwunden oder verändert worden. Das Problem liegt darin, dass sie so fragmentiert, unübersichtlich und politisiert ist, dass Menschen sie entweder nicht erkennen oder sich weigern, sie zu akzeptieren.

E. Das Problem mit der Wahrheit

Der Postmodernismus hat den Skeptizismus gegenüber der Wahrheit nicht erfunden, sondern nur beschleunigt und in den Mainstream gebracht. Historische Narrative dienten schon lange nationalen und ideologischen Zwecken, wie es in der historistischen Historiografie des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts zu beobachten war. Diese beanspruchte Objektivität, war jedoch tief ideologisch geprägt. Während Skeptizismus nichts Neues ist, haben postmoderne Denker ihn verbreitet und populär gemacht und so von einer akademischen Debatte zu einer weitverbreiteten kulturellen Haltung entwickelt.

Es handelt sich dabei längst nicht mehr um eine rein intellektuelle Diskussion. Marxistische und katholische Traditionen bestanden beide einst darauf, dass die Wahrheit existiere und es wert sei, nach ihr zu streben. Papst Johannes Paul II. widmete 1993 eine Enzyklika der „Pracht der Wahrheit“. Kardinal John Henry Newman hatte bereits über ein Jahrhundert zuvor die Wahrheit als zentralen Wert diskutiert und verkörpert. Der marxistische

Arbeiterhistoriker Willie Thompson setzte diesen Gedanken 2000 fort, als er schrieb: „Ich glaube, dass überprüfbares Wissen möglich ist, wenn auch meist vorläufig und immer unvollständig.“ Zwei Generationen von Akademikern haben seit den 1960er Jahren in einem postmodernen Umfeld operiert, in dem Wahrheit zunehmend hinterfragt wird.

Die Vorstellung einer objektiven Realität ist sowohl aus dem öffentlichen als auch aus dem akademischen Bewusstsein weitgehend verschwunden. Das Ergebnis? Skepsis ist zur Standardhaltung geworden – oft, ohne dass diese überhaupt hinterfragt wird.

Deshalb leidet die heutige Geschichtsdebatte nicht nur unter schlechter Forschung, sondern unter einem Zustand, in dem „historische Wahrheit“ kaum noch als Argument funktioniert. Es liegt nicht daran, dass Menschen sich aktiv mit postmoderner Kritik beschäftigen – sie erwarten schlicht nicht mehr, dass Geschichte auf Wahrheit basieren muss.

Dies führt an absurde Orte, etwa in die Welt der Verschwörungstheorien, in der Menschen die Realität zugunsten einer „anderen Wahrheit“ ablehnen. Doch es geht hier nicht um Verschwörungen, sondern um die Frage, wie Wahrheit aktiv an den Rand gedrängt wird, um in modernen Diskursen der Nützlichkeit zu weichen.

F. Theorien, die unserer Problematik nahekommen

Es gibt eine Vielzahl wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten zu Desinformation und Wahrheit, doch wurde hier bewusst darauf geachtet, keine Theorien, die für Nachrichtenmedien oder andere Kommunikationsformen gedacht sind, unkritisch auf die Geschichtswissenschaft zu übertragen. Informationsmanagement und Kommunikationswissenschaften beschreiben den Prozess der Wissensproduktion oft als hierarchisch geordnete Pyramide oder als Prozess von Daten, Information, Wissen und schließlich Weisheit.

Dies ist lediglich eine Veranschaulichung. Sie verdeutlicht jedoch die strukturelle Trennung zwischen Journalismus und Geschichtswissenschaft, die mehr als nur oberflächlich ist. Beide Disziplinen arbeiten mit Daten und Informationen, doch Journalismus ist nicht dazu verpflichtet, daraus Wissen oder Weisheit zu generieren. Die Geschichtswissenschaft hingegen schon.

Journalisten werden nicht darauf trainiert, eine langfristige analytische Einordnung vorzunehmen. Historiker hingegen scheitern oft genau an diesem Anspruch. Dies zeigt sich in bestimmten Formen der Geschichtskritik, die sich auf reine Listen von Fakten beschränkt – eine Herangehensweise, die von Denkern wie Hayden White oder Roland Barthes kritisiert wurde.

Auch neuere Entwicklungen innerhalb der amerikanischen Universitätslandschaft wurden bewusst nicht übernommen, da diese durch sprachliche und morphologische Veränderungen eine spezifische Prägung erhalten haben, die sich nicht ohne Weiteres auf andere Kontexte übertragen lässt.

1. Desinformation und Fehlinformation

Claire Wardle und Hossein Derakhshan (2017) sowie danah boyd und Alice Marwick (2018) haben sich intensiv mit Desinformation beschäftigt. Ihre Unterscheidungen sind nützlich, um verschiedene Arten von irreführender Information zu klassifizieren. Diese Arbeit nutzt Derakhshans Konzept der „Malinformation“ – also der gezielten Verwendung von wahren, aber irreführend präsentierten Informationen –, übernimmt jedoch nicht das gesamte Konzept der „Informationsstörung“, da der Fokus dieser Arbeit nicht auf modernen Nachrichtenmedien liegt.

Marwick et al. betrachten Desinformation aus einer Perspektive, die stark von den aktuellen Kulturkriegen in den USA geprägt ist. Während sie eine historische Perspektive betonen und fordern, Geschichte stärker in ihre Analysen einzubeziehen, bleiben ihre Ansätze letztlich an eine spezifische US-amerikanische Debatte über Rasse, Macht und Ungleichheit gebunden. Dies schränkt ihre Anwendbarkeit auf diese Studie ein.

Anstatt alle Erkenntnisse durch eine vorgegebene ideologische Linse zu interpretieren, untersucht diese Arbeit kritisch, wie unterschiedliche Narrative entstehen, miteinander konkurrieren und sich im Laufe der Zeit verändern.

2. Post-Truth

Lee McIntyre (2018) beschreibt das sogenannte „Post-Truth“-Zeitalter, in dem Emotionen oder Identität oft wichtiger sind als Fakten. Dies kann erklären, warum Diskussionen über

„Irish Slavery“ oft hitzig und faktenarm verlaufen. Doch könnte man argumentieren, dass Emotionen gegenüber Fakten schon immer eine Gefahr dargestellt haben oder sogar die Norm waren.

Starke Gefühle können Fakten überlagern. Die bisherige Forschung zeigt, dass dies nicht nur durch neue Informationsumgebungen, Postmodernismus oder Post-Truth-Dynamiken geschieht – oft handelt es sich schlicht um menschliches Versagen. Historiker und Laienhistoriker machen Fehler.

McIntyre fokussiert sich besonders auf Wissenschaftsleugnung, was die Diskussion jedoch von historischen Themen wie der Karibik oder dem Atlantischen Raum entfernt. Zudem verweist McIntyre auf eine Vergangenheit, in der „die Wissenschaft für die Autorität ihrer Methode respektiert wurde“. Doch Fälle wie State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes, die Kontroversen um Charles Darwin oder James Franklins Widerstand gegen Impfungen zeigen, dass das Verhältnis zwischen Wissenschaft und Autorität weit komplexer ist, als McIntyre es darstellt.

Sein Ansatz bleibt stark in einer amerikanischen Diskurslandschaft verwurzelt, die nicht zwangsläufig auf eine Analyse von Geschichte im digitalen Zeitalter übertragbar ist.

3. Kritische Diskursanalyse

Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk und Ruth Wodak untersuchen, wie Sprache Machtverhältnisse prägt. In der Diskursanalyse gilt: Kein Text ist neutral – er unterstützt oder widerspricht bestimmten Sichtweisen.

Meine Masterarbeit aus dem Jahr 2015 war eine diskursive Analyse über die Iren in der Karibik. Allerdings war sie keine kritische Diskursanalyse, da ich die Prämisse, dass Machtverhältnisse alle Erzählungen bestimmen, nicht uneingeschränkt teile. Diese Arbeit geht in eine andere Richtung: Sie analysiert den Sichtbarkeitsdiskurs, jedoch nicht in der Tiefe oder mit der ideologischen Ausrichtung einer reinen diskursiven Studie.

4. Medien und digitale Kultur

Viele talentiertere Forscher als ich haben sich eingehend mit der digitalen Welt befasst:

Manuel Castells, Henry Jenkins, Zizi Papacharissi, Danah Boyd und Axel Bruns untersuchen Online-Kulturen auf einer Metaebene.

Ich interessiere mich für die Rolle von Webseiten als Medien für Geschichte, jedoch nicht für eine tiefgehende Analyse der digitalen Kultur auf deren Niveau. Castells Konzept der Netzwerkgesellschaft spielte in einer früheren Fassung dieser Arbeit eine zentrale Rolle, ebenso wie Jenkins Theorie der partizipativen Kultur. Bruns bleibt weiterhin eine Referenz, doch die gesamte Disziplin der digitalen Medienkompetenz ist für diese Arbeit von nachgeordneter Bedeutung.

G. Theoretiker, die dieser Arbeit näherstehen

Es gibt eine Vielzahl von Theorien, Randstudien und Konzepten, die sich entweder mit den hier behandelten Themen überschneiden oder damit in Verbindung stehen: Gatekeeping, Expertise, die Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie und Selektivität, Allgegenwärtigkeit sowie Hyperspace. Doch keines dieser Konzepte allein reicht aus, um als theoretische Grundlage für diese Dissertation zu dienen.

De Groot, der sich auf Dutton stützt, stellt fest, dass Wissensgatekeeper ihre Praxis anpassen oder einfach ignoriert werden müssen. Eli Pariser prägte den Begriff der Filterblase und betonte, dass die neuen maschinellen Gatekeeper nicht nur unsichtbar, sondern implizit auch unglaublich mächtig seien.

Jean Baudrillard argumentierte zwischen den 1970er und Mitte der 1990er Jahre, dass sich die Gesellschaft zu schnell verändere und dadurch unsere Beziehung zur Realität verzerrt werde. Er bezeichnete diesen Zustand als Hyperrealität, in der Simulationen der Realität realer werden als die Realität selbst. Die Räume, in denen sich diese Simulationen abspielen, nannte er Hyperspace. Bemerkenswert ist, dass Baudrillard das Konzept des Hyperspace bereits 1976 einführte – noch bevor Star Wars den Begriff populär machte.

H. Das Internet/Web/Soziale Medien ermöglichen das Umgehen alter Gatekeeper

Gatekeeper können nun durch Desktop-Publishing-Operationen und die Nutzung des Internets und des Webs für die One-to-Many-Kommunikation umgangen werden, wie es viele Websites demonstrieren, die von einem oder wenigen Journalisten betrieben werden.

Dutton irrte sich nicht mit dieser Aussage – möglicherweise unterschätzte er sogar, wie zutreffend sie sein würde. Die durch Technologie verursachte Disruption betrifft nicht nur wirtschaftlich instabile, sondern auch stabile Systeme und ist besonders schädlich für die Autorität von Akademikern und anderen Fachleuten – kurz: Experten.

Das gegenwärtige (2025) Überangebot an Informationen ist so groß, dass es weder vollständig konsumiert noch vollständig überblickt werden kann. Doch schon 1971 – wenn nicht noch früher – prägte einer der Pioniere der Künstlichen Intelligenz und der amerikanischen Informatik, Herbert A. Simon, den Begriff der Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie. Er stellte fest:

Was Information verbraucht, ist offensichtlich: Sie verbraucht die Aufmerksamkeit ihrer Empfänger. Eine Fülle an Informationen erzeugt daher eine Armut an Aufmerksamkeit und erfordert eine effiziente Verteilung dieser Aufmerksamkeit auf die überwältigende Anzahl von Informationsquellen, die sie beanspruchen könnten.

Angesichts der immensen Informationsmengen, die Simon bereits vor Jahrzehnten beschrieb, sowie der begrenzten Aufmerksamkeit, über die wir verfügen, sind Experten, die uns helfen, Informationen zu filtern, heute wichtiger denn je.

Der Graswurzelzyklus

Ein großer Teil der Inhalte auf sozialen Medien, sei es auf Plattformen von großen Unternehmen wie Facebook oder hybriden Indie-/Unternehmensstrukturen wie Reddit, wird auf einer Graswurzelebene produziert. Diese Inhalte werden dann oft von den Plattformen vereinnahmt, um Werbung zu verkaufen oder Nutzer und Aufrufe zu generieren, wodurch der Wert der Seiten als Werbeplattformen gesteigert wird. Diese doppelte Rolle des Nutzers als Produzent und Konsument wurde als "Producership" oder "Prosumption" beschrieben.

Dadurch verschwimmen die Grenzen zwischen unabhängig produzierten Inhalten und professionellen, von Unternehmen gesteuerten Popkulturproduktionen. Diese Unschärfe ist kein Zufall, sondern eine bewusste Verschleierung. Statt sich mit der Frage zu beschäftigen „Was will man mir sagen?“, rückt immer mehr die Frage in den Vordergrund: „Was will man mir verkaufen?“ Der Nutzer ist nicht mehr nur ein Konsument, sondern wird selbst zur Zielscheibe für Werbung – genauso wie der Content-Produzent.

Der Begriff „Prosumer“ beschreibt jemanden, der Inhalte für Webseiten sowohl konsumiert als auch produziert. Die Betreiber dieser Seiten nutzen diese Inhalte und die von Nutzern gesammelten Daten, um diese an größere Unternehmen und Werbefirmen weiterzuverkaufen, die dann wiederum den Nutzer als Ziel für neue Produkte und Dienstleistungen anvisieren. In gewisser Weise wird nicht unser physischer Körper verkauft, sondern das Wissen über unsere Vorlieben, Gespräche, Geheimnisse und digitalen Aktivitäten.

Diese Prosumer-Dynamik bedeutet, dass historische Narrative nicht mehr nur passiv aufgenommen, sondern aktiv von Nutzern mitgestaltet, umgeformt, neu interpretiert und für den Online-Diskurs instrumentalisiert werden.

J. Positionierung der Heuristik

Bestehende Theorien befassen sich mit verschiedenen Aspekten der heutigen Informationsproblematik, wie Intentionen (Fehl-/Desinformation), Emotionen vs. Fakten (Post-Wahrheit), verborgene Macht in Sprache (kritische Diskursanalyse) und Online-Kultur (Medienwissenschaften). Wie in meiner Masterarbeit werde ich die Beweise kritisch bewerten. Diesmal setze ich jedoch auch ein heuristisches Instrument ein, das die Epistemologie und Ontologie ergänzt, um zu zeigen, wann die Erzählung zu weit gegangen ist.

Ophelialogie ersetzt nicht die Wahrheitsfindung oder Kategorisierung. Es ist nur ein Werkzeug. Während die Epistemologie fragt: „Wie wissen wir das?“ und die Ontologie fragt: „Was ist das?“, fügt die Ophelialogie hinzu: „Was wurde mit dieser Behauptung gemacht und mit welchem Effekt?“ Dabei geht es nicht darum, die Wahrheit abzulehnen,

sondern zu erkennen, dass historische Erzählungen oft mehr nach ihrem Nutzen als nach ihrer Genauigkeit bewertet werden.

Die Stärke dieses Konzepts als Werkzeug wird gerade dann deutlich, wenn es den Übergang von historischer (und damit epistemologischer und ontologischer) Genauigkeit hin zum Nutzenwert (posthistorischen Zustand) aufzeigt.

So funktioniert die Formulierung als konzeptionelles Werkzeug:

- Historisch (Epistemologisch/Ontologisch): Erzählungen, die auf Beweisen, Kategorisierungen und Unterscheidungen von Eigenschaften basieren.
- Ophelialogisch (Analytisch): Beschreibt, wie Erzählungen auf einem Spektrum von Genauigkeit bis Nützlichkeit verlaufen.
- Post-Historisch (Nutzenorientiert): Der endgültige Zustand, in dem historische Genauigkeit vollständig durch den zeitgenössischen Gebrauchswert in emotionalen, kulturellen oder politischen Kontexten ersetzt wird.

Dies platziert unsere Heuristic klar als ein analytisches Werkzeug, nicht als das Endstadium selbst, und hebt genau hervor, wie und warum der Übergang geschieht.

Die Messgröße wird daher besonders kraftvoll, weil:

- Sie identifiziert und erklärt, wie der Diskurs von Genauigkeit abgewichen ist.
- Sie diesen Übergang klar und neutral aufzeigt.
- Sie den Prüfer außerhalb des „posthistorischen“ Zustands positioniert, anstatt ihn zu befürworten.

Dieser Schritt ist nicht so drastisch, wie es zunächst erscheinen mag. Jacques Barzun hat darauf hingewiesen, dass die Macht der Geschichte, ihr Wert und ihre Autorität gerade daraus resultieren, wie Amerikaner sie nutzen. Sie haben sie verwendet, um Politik, Kultur usw. zu argumentieren. Barzun erklärte dies in *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*:

„Wiederum, wenn die letzten fünf Jahrhunderte das Schauspiel einer einzigen Kultur präsentieren, dann auch deshalb, weil das beharrliche Gedächtnis, unterstützt durch die

Praxis der obsessiven Aufzeichnung, dies ermöglicht hat. Unsere besondere Haltung zur Geschichte, unsere Gewohnheit, aus ihr zu argumentieren, verwandelt Ereignisse in Ideen, die mit Macht aufgeladen sind.“

Der Unterschied könnte darin liegen, dass in Barzuns Formulierung die Wahrheit im Hintergrund eher singular ist. In einem Feld, in dem alles wahr sein kann oder nichts wahr ist, wird der Wahrheitswert fast zwangsläufig immer vom Nutzwert übertroffen.

Der Begriff „Ophelialogie“ stammt vom griechischen Wort ὠφελία (ōphelia), was „Nützlichkeit“ oder „Nutzen“ bedeutet. Er wird hier verwendet, um eine nutzenorientierte Bewertung von Informationen zu kennzeichnen, bei der die praktische oder politische Auswirkung einer Behauptung ihren faktischen Wahrheitsgehalt übertreffen kann. Dieser Ansatz bietet einen klareren Blick darauf, wie Geschichte in der modernen Diskurslandschaft aktiv umfunktioniert wird, anstatt nur aufgezeichnet zu werden.

Indem wir untersuchen, wie die irische Geschichte zitiert wird, um sozialen oder politischen Kapital zu gewinnen, können wir sehen, wie die Wahrheit oft dem strategischen Zweck weicht. Während ein posthistorischer Wendepunkt sich mit der Post-Wahrheits-Theorie überschneidet, liegt der Schwerpunkt hier speziell auf der Instrumentalisierung der Geschichte – wie Behauptungen bestehen bleiben, an Bedeutung gewinnen oder für praktische Zwecke umgestaltet werden. Und es ist kein Feld oder eine Theorie, sondern lediglich die klare Beschreibung der Richtung, in die sich der Diskurs bewegt.

K. Warum ist dieses Thema sowohl in historischen als auch in digitalen Kontexten von Bedeutung?

Amerikaner haben schon immer Geschichte als Argument genutzt. Jetzt geschieht das weltweit über das Internet. Diskussionen und historische Darstellungen werden in einem bisher nie dagewesenen Maßstab und mit einer beispiellosen Geschwindigkeit verbreitet.

Ein großer Teil der Sichtbarkeitsperiode von 2015–2020 spielte sich online ab. Der Artikel *The Forgotten Slaves* von John Martin wurde online veröffentlicht. Geschichtsforen und Wikipedia sind Teil der neuen sozialen Medienlandschaft. Wie Barzun betonte, zieht

Geschichte ihre Macht aus ihrer Verwendung – und das Internet verstärkt diese Funktionalität erheblich.

Das Internet transformiert historische Narrative in Werkzeuge der Überzeugung, die auf einer nie zuvor dagewesenen Ebene eingesetzt werden. Die soziale Internetlandschaft dient dabei sowohl als Marktplatz als auch als Schlachtfeld für Ideen, wo historische Erzählungen konsumiert, aber auch aktiv geschaffen und umgestaltet werden.

Diese Entwicklung darf nicht unterschätzt werden, denn Märkte beeinflussen Millionen von Menschen – und diese Millionen beeinflussen wiederum den Markt in einem dynamischen Kreislauf. Demokratische Politik kann selbst als Markt betrachtet werden. Online-Kommunikation bietet Zugriff auf Hunderte Millionen vernetzter Konsumenten und Wähler.

Ideologischer Konflikt ist kein neues Phänomen, doch die Geschwindigkeit und das Ausmaß des Internets machen ihn besonders allgegenwärtig. Vereinfachung und Polarisierung sind ebenfalls keine neuen Entwicklungen, doch die strukturellen Eigenschaften des Internets begünstigen diese Trends in einer Weise, die möglicherweise unvereinbar mit professionellen historischen Standards ist.

Die Bedeutung dieser Dynamik für freie Gesellschaften ist erheblich und rechtfertigt eine eingehende Untersuchung.

L. Forschungsfragen und Ziele

Forschungsfragen

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit folgenden Forschungsfragen:

- Wie genau sind die Behauptungen über die irische Sklaverei?
- Wie hat das soziale Internet den historischen Diskurs verändert?
- Was zeigt die Evidenz über die Verwendung dieser Narrative in modernen gesellschaftlichen Debatten?

Diese Fragen untersuchen das übergeordnete Problem der Instrumentalisierung historischer Narrative und deren Verzerrung des historischen Verständnisses. Durch die Analyse der Behauptungen über irische Sklaverei trägt diese Untersuchung zu einem besseren Verständnis der irischen Zwangsarbeit und ihrer Rolle innerhalb der atlantischen Geschichte der Zwangsarbeit bei. Darüber hinaus beschäftigen sich diese Fragen mit der Rolle digitaler Plattformen in der Neugestaltung des historischen Diskurses. Sie zeigen, wie soziale Medien und Internetkultur vereinfachte oder polarisierende Narrative verstärken.

Diese Untersuchung geht auch der Frage nach, wie strukturelle Faktoren und menschliche Motivationen die Bewertung des Effekts eines Narrativs (seinen ophelialogischen Wert) gegenüber seiner faktischen Genauigkeit, insbesondere in Online-Diskursen, beeinflussen. Diese Fragen bilden die Grundlage der Untersuchung und lenken die Dissertation auf drei zentrale Ziele.

Die Ziele sind:

- Klärung der historischen Faktenlage
- Analyse des Sichtbarkeitsdiskurses
- Nachzeichnung der Entwicklung des Nutzwerts dieser Geschichte

Durch eine sorgfältige Analyse der Quellen zeigt diese Arbeit nicht nur, was die Iren in der Karibik nicht waren, sondern auch, was sie waren – eine vielschichtige Realität. Die Analyse zeigt, dass das Internet-Sklaverei-Meme eine Form der Malinformation darstellt, bei der Wahrheit und Verzerrung gezielt für manipulative Zwecke genutzt werden. Darüber hinaus lassen sich konsistente Fehler in den Reaktionen der Diskursteilnehmer nachweisen, unabhängig vom Medium oder vom jeweiligen Autor.

M. Inhalt

Kapitel II stellt den historischen Hintergrund der Iren in der Karibik dar. Es untersucht die gewaltsame Deportation unter Cromwell, die Bedingungen, unter denen die Iren lebten, und wie sich ihre Identität im Exil entwickelte. Außerdem wird das Konzept der Volksüberlieferung behandelt und analysiert, wie es spätere Narrative beeinflusste.

Kapitel III zeichnet nach, wie das Narrativ der irischen Sklaverei im Laufe der Zeit entstand. Es untersucht, wie nationalistische Geschichtsschreibung, populärwissenschaftliche Bücher und frühe Internetquellen zu einer bestimmten Darstellung der Ereignisse beitrugen, die später das Internet-Meme prägte.

Kapitel IV verlagert den Fokus auf die Gegenwart und den Aufstieg des Internet-Sklaverei-Memes. Es analysiert, wie das Meme historische Fakten rahmte, warum es bei bestimmten Zielgruppen Anklang fand und wie es politisch aufgeladen wurde.

Kapitel V konzentriert sich auf die Sichtbarkeitsperiode (2015–2020), in der das Meme intensiv diskutiert wurde. Es wird untersucht, wie Online-Debatten entlang ideologischer Linien verliefen und dabei häufig die historische Realität verzerrten.

Kapitel VI analysiert, wie digitale Plattformen die Verbreitung und Unterdrückung des Memes beeinflussten. Es wird betrachtet, wie Facebook, Twitter, Reddit und Wikipedia bestimmte Narrative verstärkten, während sie andere herausfilterten. Zudem wird analysiert, wie Algorithmen beeinflussen, welche Inhalte Nutzer zu sehen bekommen.

Kapitel VII untersucht, wie Journalisten und Faktenprüfer auf das Meme reagierten. Dabei wird der Umgang von Snopes, USA Today und anderen Medienhäusern mit der Debatte analysiert. Gleichzeitig werden die eigenen historischen Ungenauigkeiten und ideologischen Verzerrungen dieser Plattformen kritisch hinterfragt.

Kapitel VIII befasst sich mit der akademischen Reaktion auf das Meme. Es wird untersucht, wie Historiker sich in die Debatte einbrachten, welche Rolle Personen wie Liam Hogan spielten und wie Dr. Anthea Butlers Vortrag von 2019 eine Verschiebung hin zu einem post-historischen Denken widerspiegelte.

Kapitel IX vergleicht zwei akademische Arbeiten aus dem Jahr 2022. David Browns Forschung korrigiert Mythen durch archivbasierte Beweisführung, während Natalie Zaceks Artikel den Sichtbarkeitsdiskurs verstärkt und Geschichte aus ideologischen Gründen verzerrt. Dieses Kapitel hebt den Gegensatz zwischen evidenzbasierter Geschichtsschreibung und zweckorientierten Narrativen hervor.

Kapitel X fasst die zentralen Ergebnisse dieser Dissertation zusammen. Es analysiert, wie sowohl der öffentliche Diskurs als auch die akademischen Reaktionen in verschiedener Weise unzureichend waren. Es kritisiert die Grenzen des Sichtbarkeitsdiskurses, die Priorisierung von Narrativen gegenüber Fakten und die Auswirkungen auf die Geschichtswissenschaft im digitalen Zeitalter. Abschließend werden Möglichkeiten diskutiert, wie historische Verzerrungen in Online-Räumen herausgefordert werden können.

Das Internet ermöglicht es jedem, nahezu alles zu behaupten – ohne nennenswerte Konsequenzen. Die sozialen Kosten für die Verbreitung von Fehlinformationen sind nahezu auf null gesunken. Das stellt einen fundamentalen Wandel dar. Es ist Teil dessen, was man als post-historische Wende bezeichnen könnte, zumindest im digitalen Raum. Diese Entwicklung überschneidet sich mit dem Konzept der Post-Truth-Ära, gehört aber nicht ausschließlich dazu. Kurzfristig zeigt sich klar, welche Kraft dominanter ist: Die schnellere, einfachere Option setzt sich durch. Das ist ein Ungleichgewicht, das Verzerrung über Sorgfalt belohnt. Diese Schiefelage macht es nicht unmöglich, Geschichte online zu betreiben, aber sie erschwert es erheblich.

Letztlich zeigt dieser Fall eine zerstörerische Wechselwirkung: digitale Echokammern, historische Vereinfachung und die post-historische Verschiebung verstärken sich gegenseitig. Das Irish-Slavery-Meme hat zwar Aufmerksamkeit auf frühneuzeitliche Zwangsarbeit gelenkt, doch es hat große Teile der historischen Realität in polarisierte Debatten ertränkt. Wissenschaftler, Pädagogen und Plattformmoderatoren müssen über rein reaktive Haltungen hinausgehen und eine durchdachte, kontextreiche Auseinandersetzung anbieten, die sowohl archivgestützte Tiefe als auch kritische Nuancierung bewahrt. Ein solcher Ansatz kann langfristig post-historischen Verzerrungen entgegenwirken, ohne dabei die Hoffnung aufzugeben, dass fundierte und gut vermittelte Geschichtsschreibung weiterhin Resonanz findet.

Trotz der enormen Herausforderungen durch Geschwindigkeit, Reichweite und ideologische Intensität gibt es weiterhin Raum für Historiker, die darauf bestehen, dass

Wahrheit, Kontext und Komplexität keine optionalen Bestandteile des öffentlichen Diskurses sind.

Am Ende geht es in dieser Debatte nicht nur um das Irish-Slavery-Meme, sondern um die grundlegende Frage, wie Geschichte im digitalen Zeitalter verarbeitet wird. Sie wird weniger durch Fakten als durch Funktion bestimmt. Wenn Genauigkeit mit Viralität nicht konkurrieren kann, müssen Historiker neue Wege finden, um die historische Methode und die Wahrheit in einem Raum zu verteidigen, der nicht länger selbstverständlich davon ausgeht, dass sie eine Rolle spielt.

I. Introduction

This thesis argues that the idea of the Irish as slaves in the Caribbean and the visibility discourse (defined below) maintain or expand historical distortions due to the instrumentalisation of history online. These distortions are spread and amplified by the dynamics of the Internet. Narratives are shaped for use, rather than by the evidence, supplanting traditional methods of epistemology and ontology. One method among many for information transfer in this manner is the meme.

A meme is a transferable or contagious idea that, while capable of traveling through any medium, thrives particularly in digital spaces. The Internet meme of Irish slavery gained traction during a high visibility period in 2015-2020. These memes are a striking example of distorted historical narratives. What happens to them in the changing landscape of a rapidly disrupted informational environment could be telling for other historical phenomena.

A. Context: 2000 - 2014

The Irish in the diaspora have a strong folk memory of oppression.¹ The memory includes many different degrees of suffering and even enslavement. Some of these beliefs are founded on legitimate occurrences² and some are ahistorical.³ A wave of attention from 2000 to 2014 was driven by books, memes, and web pages that reignited a moribund topic.⁴ This marked a resurgence of interest in the Irish in the Caribbean. This resurgence largely

¹ Catherine M. Eagan, “Still “Black” and “Proud”: Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 41.

² David Brown, “Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Finola O’Kane and Ciaran O’Neill (Manchester University Press, 2022), 68.

³ Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion, and Nationalism in Ireland*, 1. publ (Belfast: The Queen's Univ. of Belfast The Inst. of Irish Studies, 1996), 217–18.

⁴ See Figure I, Google Trends (2022): Google Trends. Available online at <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=US&q=Irish%20slaves>, updated on 8/20/2022, checked on 8/20/2022.

ignored the historical record, favouring emotionally compelling but factually inaccurate narratives. The emotional weight or affect of exile, victimhood and historical trauma shapes both the arguments of proponents and critics. Emotional investment in historical narratives influences whose voices are heard and how evidence is interpreted. A viral piece by John Martin, "The Irish Slave Trade - the Forgotten “White” Slaves", became a cornerstone for the Internet slavery meme.⁵ This article and others presented Irish servitude as equivalent to African chattel slavery with political implications for America in the present. Its shareability and emotional appeal ensured widespread impact, making it a key artefact in waves of interest.

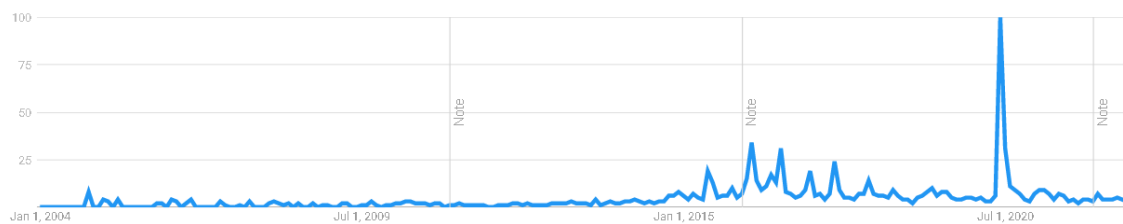


Figure 1 Interest in the Term “Irish Slaves” 2004-2024

B. Context: 2015 - 2020

The second wave of attention can be marked in 2015. There, the Irish slavery meme faced growing resistance online due to its success and increasing visibility. Activists, journalists, fact-checkers, and some academics responded to the meme’s distortions with editorials, blog posts, and social media commentary, yet their responses also failed to engage critically with the historical record, leading to flawed counterarguments. Those arguments are

⁵ John Martin, “The Irish Slave Trade – the Forgotten “White” Slaves - Global Research,” Global Research, 2008, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>.

examined in depth in Chapters V to IX. The backlash led to a polarising visibility period characterised by misinformation and competing narratives. Despite a complicated set of historical evidence, this discourse was marked by selectiveness in choosing evidence and efforts for narrative control during the visibility period.

1. What is meant by visibility?

“Visibility period” (2015–2020) refers to the surge in online discussion of “Irish Slavery,” driven by viral sharing, algorithmic amplification, and mainstream media coverage, as reflected in Google Trends data (Figure 1) and fact-checker interventions. The Irish Slavery meme gained visibility amid a convergence of factors such as political tensions, social media virality, and mainstream engagement with historical distortion. It remains unclear whether virality alone sparked the phenomenon or whether pre-existing political tensions primed the meme for visibility. What matters is that, for a brief period, algorithms pushed this narrative into the public sphere, making it inescapable and thus visible to many users. That online visibility eventually merged with offline visibility to create an integrated period of high awareness of the phenomenon in popular media.

2. Defining Visibility

Online visibility doesn’t work like physical presence. Just because something exists online doesn’t mean it’s visible. Digital spaces are real-time but isolated data stores, and nothing is “there” unless it’s indexed and thus advertised or the user already knows to look for it. This often occurs when the Internet serves up the location on display.

How do obscure narratives suddenly become highly visible? Simple: the Internet pushes them through algorithmic feeds, virality, and mass sharing. Information trends, it gains traction, and suddenly it’s everywhere, laid out in front of a user whether they sought it out or not. During the visibility period, the Irish Slavery meme was thus placed on the table for users to see, again and again, until it became noticeable even to those who had never looked for it before.

But visibility is temporary. The Internet moves on. The content is still there, but again, unless the user is seeking that information and it's indexed, it will be difficult to find. The algorithm has stopped serving it up. The "visibility period" does not just mean constant online presence or availability but also refers to how algorithms, interest, and virality temporarily forced the Irish Slavery meme into public discourse.

C. Theoretical Compatibility

In trying to place this work in the modern discourse, it's hard to find an exact fit. Rather than engaging in broad philosophical claims about post-truth, my work focuses on history on how certain historical narratives were adopted, spread, and used for social and political ends.

Epistemology asks "How do I know?" Ontology asks "What is this?" The dominant discourse in this phenomenon asks "What can this history be used for?" The problem isn't just misinformation or narrative distortion. It's that historical claims are valued and even constructed for their impact, not their accuracy. That's what happened during the visibility period with the Irish Slavery meme. The debate stopped being about whether it was true in any sense and became about who could use it, and for what purpose.

That's the issue, not whether truth is dead, but how it is actively side-lined in favour of use-value in modern discourse.

Truth exists. We're just bad at finding it and agreeing on it. This has been addressed, for example, in Baudrillard's concept of hyperspace. The truth has not disappeared or changed. The problem with historical truth especially, is that we as people, make it so fragmented, messy, and politically loaded that we either fail to recognise it or refuse to accept it.

D. The Problem with the Truth

Postmodernism didn't invent scepticism about truth, it accelerated and mainstreamed it. Historical narratives have long served national and ideological functions, as seen in 19th- and early 20th-century historicist historiography, which claimed objectivity while being deeply ideological.⁶ While scepticism is not new, postmodernist thinkers helped expand and popularise it, turning it from an academic debate into a widespread cultural stance.

It's no longer just a niche intellectual debate, for the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century it seemed that scepticism of everything had prevailed. Marxist and Catholic traditions both once insisted that truth existed, and was worth striving for. Pope John Paul devoted an encyclical letter to the splendour of truth in 1993.⁷ Cardinal John Newman had discussed and exemplified truth as a value more than a century before. Marxist labour historian Willie Thompson might have penned the gold standard for Marxist objectivity when he wrote in 2000, "I believe that verifiable knowledge is possible, though mostly provisional and always incomplete."⁸ But now generations of academics since the 1960s have operated in a postmodern space where truth was suspect. The idea of objective reality faded from public and especially intellectual consciousness. The result? Scepticism is now the default position, often assumed without argument.

That's why debates today don't just suffer from badly done history; they suffer from a world where "historical truth" barely functions as an argument. It's not that people engage in postmodern critique. It's that they no longer expect history to be grounded in any truth at all. That's the real shift that that goes to some very strange places, like conspiracy theory,

⁶ Donald H. Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (London: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 7.

⁷ Ioannes Paulus, "Veritatis Splendor (6 August 1993) | John Paul II," https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

⁸ Willie Thompson, *What Happened to History?* (London: Pluto, 2000), 9.

where people reject the truth in favour of “the truth.” However, we are not focusing on conspiracies.

The issue here is not whether truth is dead, but how it is actively side-lined in favour of usefulness in modern discourse.

E. Theories that are proximate to our issues

There is abundant scholarly work on disinformation and truth, but theoretical work meant for news or other media has not been superimposed over history, which is my primary focus. Information management and communications sciences sometimes describe the process of knowledge production with a hierarchically and cumulatively arranged pyramid or process of Data, Information, Knowledge and then Wisdom.⁹

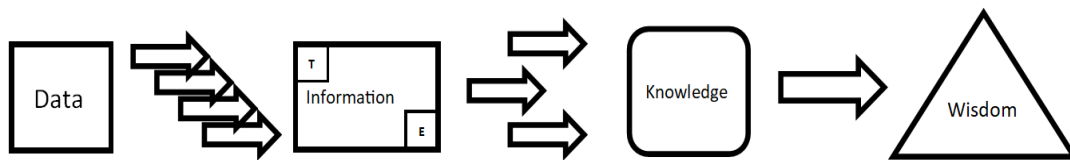


Figure 2 The DIKW Order

This is only a representation. It can though illustrate a structural divide between Journalism and History that is more than cosmetic. Both deal in data and information, but journalism is not tasked with turning those into knowledge or wisdom. History is. Scholarship is. Success in this isn't addressed here. Journalists aren't trained to create knowledge. Historians often fail at it. Although both need data and information, what should come of it is a vastly

⁹ Rowley, Jennifer. “The Wisdom Hierarchy: Representations of the DIKW Hierarchy.” *Journal of Information Science* 33, no. 2 (2007): 163–80; Zins, Chaim. “Conceptual Approaches for Defining Data, Information, and Knowledge.” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 4 (2007): 479–93.

different end product. This is exemplified in critiques of history that are closer to lists of information, for example from Hayden White¹⁰ or Roland Barthes.¹¹ Appropriate to mentions of both of those scholars, there are a number of theories that seem like they might be proximate to this paper, but have not been used. This is germane because the social internet has further mixed or compressed journalism, and other information reliant fields like history, activism and politics. Those fields intersected before, but as with all its functions, especially the devaluation of expertise, popular access to information and platforming capabilities, the internet has accelerated those intersections to a point of overlay.

1. Disinformation and Misinformation

Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017), as well as Danah Boyd and Alice Marwick (2018), deal in disinformation. Their distinctions are useful for classifying types of misleading information. Derakhshan's concept of malinformation is especially important.¹² But their syndrome of information disorder is not a perfect fit for reasons of scope. It does also partially not overcome the prior-art test. It's a long held common-sense maxim that the best lies have a kernel of truth to them. Their focus is primarily on present-day media and journalism, but their typologies are still relevant for understanding how misinformation operates over time.

Marwick et al., approach disinformation through a framework that is heavily embedded in contemporary American culture war dynamics. Their work is centred on present-day media.

¹⁰ Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343174>.

¹¹ Michael Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 153.

¹² Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Council of Europe, 2017), 7.

While they advocate for a historical perspective¹³, and for using history in their analysis, their approach is fundamentally tied to a predetermined narrative about race, power, and inequality, which limits its applicability to this study.

Rather than filtering all findings through a predetermined ideological lens, this study critically examines how different narratives emerge, compete, and change across historical contexts.

2. Post-Truth

Lee McIntyre (2018) talks about a “post-truth” era, where emotions or identity sometimes matter more than facts. This helps show why talk of “Irish Slavery” can become heated and less about evidence. It could be argued that emotions over facts has always been either a danger or the status quo. Strong feelings can override facts. And current events, although tempting, are not within the scope of this paper. Lee McIntyre’s version of Post Truth, for instance, is very concerned about science denial.¹⁴ That topic takes us further from history in a Caribbean or an Atlantic World context. This paper is concerned about the denial of evidence, and it being completely disregarded in a historical sense. Concerning historical truth and American History, McIntyre refers to a past where “science was respected for the authority of its method.”¹⁵ While this could mean the golden age of the late 20th century, *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, or the difficulties of Charles Darwin, or James Franklin’s resistance to vaccination, indicate a far more complicated relationship of science and authority that threads its way through western History alone. This approach of

¹³ Rachel Kuo and Alice Marwick, “Critical Disinformation Studies: History, Power, and Politics,” *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 2021, doi:10.37016/mr-2020-76, <https://misinfoeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/critical-disinformation-studies-history-power-and-politics/>.

¹⁴ Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

McIntyre focuses on a very American thread in current events, and culture war. Studying American history doesn't require adopting those intellectual norms.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak study how words shape power. In their discourse analysis no text is neutral. It either enforces or resists certain viewpoints. My 2015 master's thesis was a discursive analysis covering the Irish in the Caribbean. But it didn't subscribe to the power over everything paradigm. This paper also goes in a different direction. It does however analyse the visibility discourse, although not as deeply or as critically as a pure discursive paper. It's critical, but not Critical.

4. Media and Digital Culture

Many scholars have studied the online world. Manuel Castells, Henry Jenkins, and Zizi Papacharissi, danah boyd, and Axel Bruns study the online world as a thing in itself. The social internet as a medium for history is what is being studied here, but not at that level of analysis of those scholars. Castell's *Network Society* was central to the first iteration of this paper, as was Henry Jenkins' participatory culture and context. Bruns is still referenced herein. The overall field of digital literacy warrants a mention but remains peripheral.

F. Theorists that are in tune with this paper

There are certainly theories and peripheral studies and devices that either overlap these listed or are also related. Gatekeeping, expertise, the attention economy and selectivity, ubiquity, hyperspace. But even those are not to the point enough to be a sole theoretical grounding for this thesis. De Groot, working from Dutton, notes that "gatekeepers of

knowledge have to modify their practice or be simply ignored.”¹⁶ In coining the term “filter bubble” Eli Pariser noted that the new machine gatekeepers would not only be invisible, but by implication, incredibly powerful.¹⁷

Jean Baudrillard argued from the 1970s to the mid-1990s that society was moving too fast, distorting our relationship with reality. He called this state hyperreality, where simulations of reality become more "real" than the real itself. The spaces where these simulations play out are what he termed hyperspace. Notably, Baudrillard introduced the concept of hyperspace in 1976, before *Star Wars* popularised the term.¹⁸

G. The Internet/Web/Social Media makes going around old gatekeepers possible.

“gatekeepers can now be bypassed through desktop publishing operations and the use of the Internet and Web for one to- many communications, as demonstrated by many Websites run by one or a few journalists.”¹⁹

Dutton was not wrong here. Maybe he underestimated how right he would be. This situation vis-à-vis the disruption that the technology brings, regardless of whether the economic situation is stable or instable, is especially disruptive to the authority of academics and other professionals. Experts.

The current (2025) surplus of information is so great that it cannot be consumed or even overseen in its entirety. As far back as 1971, if not further, one of the fathers of artificial

¹⁶ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, Second edition (London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 91; William H. Dutton, “The Internet and Social Transformation: Reconfiguring Access,” in *Transforming Enterprise - the Economic and Social Implications of Information Technology*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Dutton et al. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019), 1.

¹⁷ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011. Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Cambridge England: Polity Press, 1994), 2ff., 111.

¹⁹ William Dutton “The Internet and Social Transformation: Reconfiguring Access”, *Transforming Enterprise: Economic and Social Implications of Information Technology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005, 341.

intelligence and American computer science, Herbert A. Simon, coined the “Attention Economy” noting,

“What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.”²⁰

Amid the sheer amount of information that Herbert Simon mentioned we would have to parse and the attention we need for it,²¹ experts to help us filter it all are more important than ever.

H. The Grassroots cycle

Much of the content on social media that outright corporate giants such as Facebook or indie/corporate hybrids such as Reddit²² carry is certainly grassroots produced. It is then co-opted to sell advertising or attract users and views in order to increase the sites’ value as advertising platforms. This dual user producer/consumer identity has been defined as produsage or presumption.²³ It is therefore hard to see in some cases where grass roots content production and top down professional pop culture production fielded by corporate interests collide. This blurred boundary is an obfuscation which is not an accident. But

²⁰ Herbert A. Simon (1971): Designing Organizations for An Information Rich World. in *Computers, communications, and the public interest.*, 37-72.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Reddit has an independent image, but was owned by Conde Nast, before being traded out to Advance Publications, and then re-established as an “independent” entity with Advance still maintaining the largest portion of stock. Please see “Reddit Myth Busters”, 6 August 2013, <https://redditblog.com/2013/08/06/reddit-myth-busters/#independent-reddit-inc> (last accessed 6 November 2018)

²³ Axel Bruns, “Produsage: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content” *Proceedings Creativity & Cognition*, 6, 2007

instead of examining narrative motives i.e., “What are you trying to tell me?” We are now faced with “What are you trying to sell me?” The user has now become a target for advertising and the content generator as well. A producer and consumer recognised in the neologism “prosumer” and its concomitant verb: prosumption or produsage.²⁴ A prosumer is someone who engages with and generates content for websites, whose owners use the content and especially the collected personal data on their users to sell to larger concerns and advertising companies which targets the consumer/producer making the product.²⁵ In a sense, we are being sold, not our physical persons, but the knowledge of our preferences, our conversations, our secrets, our “likes”, us. This prosumer dynamic means that historical narratives are not just passively received but actively co-produced by users, reshaped, repurposed, and instrumentalised for online discourse.

I. Positioning the Heuristics

Existing theories address different aspects of today’s information struggles intent (mis/disinformation), emotion vs. fact (post-truth), hidden power in language (critical discourse), and online culture (media studies). As in my master’s work, the evidence will be critically assessed. This time I’m also employing a heuristic device that supplements epistemology and ontology to show when the narrative has gone too far. I’ve named it ophelialogy. The heuristic is the ophelialogical point.

Ophelialogy does not replace truth-seeking or categorisation. It’s just a tool. Where epistemology asks, “How do we know this?” and ontology asks, “What is this?”, ophelialogy adds, “What was done with this claim, and to what effect?” This is not about dismissing truth, but recognising that historical narratives are often valued more for their

²⁴ Ibid.; Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 89.

²⁵ Ibid., 89; Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*, (Routledge, London, 2014), 246.

utility than their accuracy. The ophelialogical point marks where ontology and epistemology are left behind.

The term ophelialogy derives from the Greek *ὠφελία* (*ōphelia*), meaning “usefulness” or “benefit.” Its used here to highlight a use-driven valuation of information, where the practical or political impact of a claim can overshadow its factual accuracy. This approach provides a clearer view of how history is actively repurposed in modern discourse, rather than merely recorded.

The strength of this as a conceptual tool emerges precisely when it reveals the shift from historical (and thus epistemological and ontological) accuracy toward utility (post-historical condition).

Here's how the formulation works as a conceptual device:

- Historical (Epistemological/Ontological): Narratives grounded in evidence, categorisation, property distinctions.
- Ophelialogical (Analytical): Describes how narratives move along a spectrum from accuracy to usefulness.
- Post-Historical (Utility-Oriented): The final or an extreme state, where historical accuracy is fully supplanted by contemporary use-value in emotional, cultural, or political contexts.

This clearly places ophelialogy as an analytical tool rather than the end state itself highlighting precisely how and why the shift happens. The measurement becomes powerful precisely because:

- It identifies and explains how the discourse moved away from accuracy.
- It exposes that transition clearly and neutrally.
- It positions the examiner outside the "post-historical" condition rather than endorsing it.

Jacques Barzun has noted that History's power, value and authority, come because of how Americans use it. Its used it to argue politics, culture, etc. Barzun explained this in *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*,

“Again, if the last five centuries present the spectacle of single culture, it is also because of the tenacious memory, aided by the practice of obsessive record keeping. Our distinctive attitude toward history, our habit of arguing from it, turns events into ideas charged with power.”²⁶

The difference might be that in Barzun’s formulation, the truth in the background is more singular. In a field where everything can be true, or nothing is true, then the truth value will almost by default always be exceeded by the use value.

By examining how people cite this phenomena in Irish history to gain social or political capital, we can see how truth often takes a back seat to strategic aims. While ophelialogy overlaps with post-truth studies, its emphasis is specifically on the instrumentalisation of history: how claims persist, gain traction, or are reshaped for practical effect.

J. Why is this issue significant in both historical and digital contexts?

Americans have always argued from history. Now those arguments occur online worldwide. This takes those discussions and presentations to a scale and speed that hasn’t been experienced before.

Much if not most of the visibility period of 2015-2020 occurred online. “The Irish Slave Trade – The Forgotten ‘White’ Slaves” by John Martin was solely published online. History forums, and Wikipedia are all appendages of new social media. Barzun noted that history takes its power from how we use it. In his sense, it was what we use it for. Now though it’s more literal. This history takes its power from where its used and how.

The social Internet functions as both a marketplace and a battleground for ideas, where historical narratives are consumed and created as tools of persuasion. This intersection of

²⁶ Barzun, Jacques (2001): *From dawn to decadence*. First Perennial edition. New York [u.a.]: Perennial. xviii

history and the market-oriented aspects of the social Internet shapes not only how narratives are shared but also their impact on public discourse.

This shouldn't be underestimated, the reach of the social internet amplifies network penetration and speed. Markets impact millions of people. Those millions move the market in a dynamic cycle. Democratic politics could be seen as a market itself. Online communication allows access to hundreds of millions of networked consumers and voters.

Ideological conflict is timeless, the Internet's speed and scale make it uniquely pervasive. Oversimplification and polarisation in any discourse is not new. Those trends strongly match the milieu of the Internet, which structurally favours oversimplification and outrageousness to a degree that may not be compatible with professional historical standards. The stakes of this dynamic are significant for all free societies and warrant further investigation.

K. Research Questions and Objectives

1. Research Questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

- How accurate are the claims about Irish slavery?
- How has the social Internet reshaped historical discourse?
- What does the evidence reveal about the use of these narratives in modern cultural battles?

These questions address the broader issue of how historical narratives are instrumentalised and distort the historical record. By examining the claims about Irish slavery, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Irish servitude and its place within the Atlantic history of forced labour. Furthermore, these questions explore the role of digital platforms in reshaping historical discourse, revealing how social media and Internet culture amplify oversimplified or polarising narratives. This investigation also addresses how structural factors and human motivations shape the valuation of a narrative's effect (its ophelialogical

value or relation to that tipping point) over its accuracy, particularly in online discourse. These questions form the foundation of the investigation, guiding the thesis toward three key objectives.

2. Objectives

The objectives are:

- Clarify the historical record
- Analyse the visibility discourse
- Trace the use-value trajectory of this history

Through rigorous source analysis, the thesis shows not only what the Irish in the Caribbean weren't, but also what they were. What they were is complicated. Analysis revealed that the Internet Slavery Meme is malinformative, using truth and distortion for harmful purposes. There were also found to be consistent patterns of errors across respondents' interventions, regardless of medium or author.

L. Contents

Chapter II provides the historical background of the Irish in the Caribbean. It examines forced transportation under Cromwell, the legal status of servants and the Irish, and the evolution of Irish folk memory of slavery. It considers what shaped later distortions in the visibility discourse.

Chapter III introduces "The Slaves That Time Forgot," the 2008 article that acted as a gateway for misinformation on this subject. It traces how this article reframed older claims, misrepresented historical evidence, and gained traction before becoming widely circulated.

Chapter IV shifts to the modern era and the rise of the Internet Slavery Meme. It examines what a meme can be, how these memes framed history, why they may have resonated with certain audiences, and how they became politically charged.

Chapter V begins our examination of the visibility period (2015–2020), when the meme became widely discussed. This chapter explores how activists and journalists responded to the meme, focusing on efforts to debunk it and critiques how these interventions reinforced a rigid binary that shaped media narratives, often reducing the complexity of the historical record.

Chapter VI analyses how journalists as fact-checkers responded to the meme. It discusses the efforts of Snopes, USA Today, and other outlets to debunk the Memes, and whether they were successful or not.

Chapter VII explores the academic response to the meme. It looks at how historians engaged with the debate, discussing Handler and Reilly's paper, the conflict between John Donoghue and Ted McCormick, how Dr. Anthea Butler's 2019 lecture reflected a shift toward post-historical thinking.

Chapters VIII and IX compares two academic works from 2022. David Brown's research corrects myths using archival sources, while Natalie Zacek's article reinforces the visibility discourse and distorts history for ideological purposes. This chapter highlights the contrast between evidence-based history and agenda-driven narratives.

Chapter X brings together the key findings of this thesis. It examines how public discourse and academic responses both responded in similar and different ways. It critiques the limits of the visibility discourse, the prioritisation of usefulness over facts, and the implications for history in the digital age. Finally, it suggests ways to challenge historical distortion in online spaces.

II. The Relevant Historical Background:

A. The Cromwellian conquest and forced transportation of the Irish to the Caribbean.

The attempt at expanding in the English Caribbean was complicated by the ever present colonial problems of labour, and of labourers. The Puritans chose exile as an expedient political and economic solution to both.²⁷ The Stuart monarchs had also made use of exile and forced labour but not extensively. Although, documents do exist that show that thinkers within the Stuart Monarchy had been thinking of exile to the colonies as a means of alleviating their issues with the Irish since at least 1607 and again in 1622.²⁸

Starting in 1641, Puritan England completed its conquest of Ireland while emerging from its own civil war. During that time the Irish were attainted by numerous acts and warrants of the regime²⁹ and sent to the colonies as forced labour. Colonial economies had expanded. This accelerated their need for labour. The English Civil War had actually stopped the servant supply and most likely delayed the full switch to slave labour by interrupting the supply. Forced labour from the old world was a stop gap for that period. John Grenham has written of how the regime authorised mass transportations to the Caribbean.³⁰

Considering the state of the Irish-English relationship by the 1600s, it is surprising any Labour would willingly contract with the English at all. But, they did. Hilary McDonald-Beckles has written that Ireland had conditions such as “frequent food shortages, high unemployment, and English military disruption” which balanced the risk.³¹ This period is

²⁷ Aubrey Gwynn, “Cromwell's Policy of Transportation,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 19, no. 76 (1930): 607, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094684>.

²⁸ Gwynn, “Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies,” 157–58.

²⁹ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 56.

³⁰ John Grenham, “Irish Roots: Were There Irish Slaves in Barbados?,” *The Irish Times*, September 7, 2015, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/irish-roots-were-there-irish-slaves-in-barbados-1.2337597>.

³¹ McDonald-Beckles, “A “riotous and unruly lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” 504.

defined by both Stuart and Cromwellian policies of military and economic expansion. In the Interregnum this includes Settlement of Ireland in 1652 and the Act of Attainder of 1657, both of which reduced any Irish person in captivity to the status of felon or traitor, thus making them dead to the law. The 1641 Rebellion and then Civil War and Interregnum is the historical starting point for many kidnapping and slavery legends.

The status of felon or prisoner is integral to the foundational ideas of Atlantic slavery. In order to be acceptably enslaved under the *Siete Partidas*, from 1348 on, the classical routes to slavery were to be born to a slave, to sell one's self, to be taken a prisoner of war or rebellion, or to be an enemy of the faith. These laws or guidelines were the foundational rationale used in the enslavement of Africans for use in the New World. By the high point of the Interregnum, Catholic Irish not strictly and openly for Parliament match some if not many of these conditions.

Although the Irish have previous legends and a history of oppression before the colonisation of the new world, this is where their folk legends of enslavement in the Caribbean begin. Those legends persist until the 20th century.³² Brown writes that these prisoners met numerous conditions of enslavement

“...there was no real difference between what had occurred in the Irish countryside and what was taking place in African regions close to the European trading outposts.”³³

B. The roots of the Irish slavery folk memory.

The idea of transportation was not new. Throughout the 1620s, prisoners of war and other felons had been sent overseas. The archival research of David Brown shows that the

³² Aubrey Gwynn, “Cromwell's Policy of Transportation Part II,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 20, no. 78 (1931): 303, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094760>.

³³ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 66.

number of “felons” and “traitors” dying on Barbados rose sharply after the Irish were collectively attainted of treason in 1652.³⁴ The Irish occupied a liminal status during a period when colonial labour systems were transitioning from servitude to slavery.

The Act of Settlement of 1652, does not recreate them as an independent nation in a united kingdom, it agrees to not “extirpate” them if they submit “themselves to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, and living peaceably and obediently under their Government.”³⁵

Other roots or sources for legends of slavery stem from the terrible treatment of indentured and other servants throughout the colonies. Donoghue argues that, for some, their lack of autonomy and inability to escape indenture, economically or while still alive, qualifies their situation as economic slavery.³⁶ Hilary McDonald-Beckles argues they themselves saw their status as closer to slavery than freedom.³⁷ Handler and Reilly, though, wrote in 2017 that

“We argue that indentured European servants were not slaves, and that it is misleading, if not disingenuous, to identify them as such.”³⁸

From this vantage point Irish forced labour was not enslaved in the same way as Africans but they cannot be considered free either. Some were so unfree they couldn’t be considered anything but enslaved. The archival evidence from the Irish Military Archives studied by

³⁴ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 68.

³⁵ Parliament of the Commonwealth of England. “An Act for the Setling of Ireland.” <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp598-603>.

³⁶ John Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell: Revisiting the Irish Slavery Debate,” *History Ireland* 25, no. 4 (2017): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90014565>.

³⁷ Hilary McDonald-Beckles, “A “Riotous and Unruly Lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1990): 511, doi:10.2307/2937974, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2937974>.

³⁸ Jerome S. Handler and Matthew C. Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 91, 1-2 (2017): 37, doi:10.1163/22134360-09101056, https://brill.com/view/journals/nwig/91/1-2/article-p30_2.xml.

Brown, in conjunction with an analysis here of the full archival laws of Barbados, as well as the Minutes of the Council of Barbados studied by McDonald-Beckles, all show a different degree of enslavement than Africans, but enslavement nonetheless. This degree of nuance is strongly opposed by the visibility discourse's authors. This raises the question: Is Atlantic slavery the only legitimate form of slavery? The Internet meme implies all slavery is equivalent to Atlantic Slavery while the visibility discourse works hard to imply that no other enslavement is legitimately slavery at all.

According to Donoghue, the narratives of the Cromwellian exiles and the economically oppressed converged in the 19th century, shaping the modern Irish national identity, amid increasingly exaggerated numbers of enslaved Irish.³⁹ This historical foundation, rooted in both truth and distortion, provided fertile ground for the Irish slavery narrative to be repurposed and weaponised in digital spaces during the visibility period of 2015–2020.

In this dissertation, forced labour is examined on a continuum of degree rather than as distinct categories which are different in kind. African slavery represents the most extreme point on this continuum, characterised by absolute chattel status. The experiences of the Irish during the Cromwellian era occupy various points along this spectrum, ranging from relative freedom within captivity, to conditions so severely unfree that they can only reasonably be described as enslavement. Yet even in these severe cases, Irish experiences can differ materially from the conditions of African slavery, especially regarding their property status as chattels personal rather than chattels absolute, their temporary and contingent nature, and their legal and structural positioning. Understanding these differences in degree, not in kind, is essential to accurately analysing historical realities and their later distortions.

³⁹ Donoghue, "The Curse of Cromwell," 24.

C. The differences between Irish Forced Labour and African slavery.

In the frontier period, servants and slaves had the same duties, clearing land, building, harvesting crops, such as cotton, tobacco and eventually sugar.⁴⁰ They are on a timeline of development that sees servitude and then slavery as the main source of labour. They are not contemporaneous in the same forms, locations and numbers. Slaves were prohibitively more expensive than servants for the first 30 years of English colonisation.⁴¹ When the price of slaves dropped, and their enterprises had become more profitable, the Island Planters switched to African slave labour in what has been termed *the terrible transformation*.⁴² This switch to almost exclusively African labour in British colonies was set to occur prior to the English Civil war and was most likely delayed by that conflict. That indicates that the forced labour of the Irish of the Civil War and Interregnum period was liminal. It was a temporary state. The old ratio of labourers was a majority of servants to a minority of slaves. The newer ratio of vast slave majorities became the norm after the Caribbean frontier ended around the same time as the English Restoration. For the survivors this particular period of enslavement ends with the Restoration. Charles II granted reparations for their service and suffering “in his cause.”⁴³ Any Irish prisoner who survived and could prove they had served for 24 months or more was granted land and passage to Jamaica. This group of Irish in the Caribbean who had been taken to the Caribbean were certainly enslaved, and did receive reparations for it. They show that neither the Internet Meme, nor the interventions to it, are grounded in thorough research.

1. Duration as the Main Difference

⁴⁰ Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke England, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 37.

⁴¹ Hilary McDonald-Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 117.

⁴² PBS. “The Terrible Transformation: Africans in America/Part 1/Peter Wood on the Difference Between Being a Slave and a Servant.” Accessed July 22, 2024. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1i3024.html>.

⁴³ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 66–67.

Betty Wood noted in *The Origins of American Slavery* that the main difference between servitude and slavery was in the duration.⁴⁴ Nini Rodgers has written similarly that

“The greatest difference between slaves and servants was of course their future, for one it was a lifetime of bondage, for the other a temporary condition...”⁴⁵

But Rodgers also noted that for many, that the difference in potential futures is negated by the high casualty rate. The similarities, in the context of folk memory of all descendants, make the subject emotionally volatile and politically convenient, serving as a powerful tool online as the Irish Slavery Meme. This underscores the importance of examining how such narratives operate in the modern discourse.

Thus, while it remains historically inaccurate to equate directly the entirety of the experiences of Irish forced labour with African chattel slavery, it is equally misleading and reductionist to completely deny that Irish forced labour sometimes amounted to conditions of enslavement. Recognising the liminal, temporary, yet severe nature of this period clarifies historical realities obscured by oversimplified digital narratives.

D. From the Caribbean to the Millennium

Since the mid-19th century, the Irish have spread around the world with a massive diaspora. "Irish" still make up 10% of the United States' population. The first waves of settlers in Ontario were Irish, maintaining at least a plurality until Queen Victoria.⁴⁶ Irish impact is marked in hundreds of place names all over South Australia.⁴⁷ Some of those groups faced

⁴⁴ Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery*, 1. paperback ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

⁴⁵ Rodgers, *Ireland, slavery and anti-slavery*, 37.

⁴⁶ Akenson, *If the Irish ran the World*, 5.

⁴⁷ Dymphna Lonergan, “Cultural Capital and Irish Place Names,” in *The Irish in South Australia: Aspects and Insights*, ed. Susan Arthure et al. (Mile End, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2019), 229.

religious or ethnic discrimination in their new homes. Scholars such as Akenson and Eagan document the strong Irish attachment to ancestry and often traumatic folk narratives.⁴⁸

In 1996 Liam Kennedy coined the term MOPE. It stands for Most Oppressed People Ever.⁴⁹ Kennedy makes a critique of Irish culture's inability to let go of their past injustices. He considers Ireland trapped by debilitating effects of decades of self-taught victimhood. The result of this dysfunction is aggressive self-righteousness and ethnic blindness.⁵⁰ Kennedy's goal is to have the Irish escape from thinking themselves victims of circumstance. This dovetails with Roddy Doyle's use of the Irish in his work as a people with an inferiority complex or a chip on each shoulder.⁵¹ Professor Richard Jensen noted the Irish "chip on their shoulder" in "No Irish need Apply."⁵² However, by the end of the 20th century the Irish had ceased materially to be a pariah people. Diane Negra wrote that "Irishness surged into a globally marketed identity under the aegis of the Celtic tiger."⁵³ Irish success in the Arts were part of a resurgence of all things Irish noted by the New York Times in 1996.⁵⁴

E. Holding on to the past.

⁴⁸ Akenson, *If the Irish ran the World*, 10; Eagan, "Still "Black" and "Proud": Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia," 41.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, Liam. *Colonialism, Religion, and Nationalism in Ireland*. 1. publ. Belfast: The Queen's Univ. of Belfast The Inst. of Irish Studies, 1996. 217-218

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Roddy Doyle, *Commitments* (Ulverscroft, 2013), 9.

⁵² Richard J. Jensen, "'No Irish Need Apply':- 36:2: A Myth of Victimization," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002), accessed July 8, 2024, <https://rjensen.people.uic.edu/no-irish.htm>.

⁵³ Diane Negra, ed., *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=1169347>, 1.

⁵⁴ Dinitia Smith, "The Irish Are Ascendant Again," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1996, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/03/movies/the-irish-are-ascendant-again.html>.

The Irish of the United States held strongly to their pariah traditions while also having escaped them.⁵⁵ Until the 1930's the 17th century remained in Ireland's folk memories. According to Gwynn,

“Certainly there are many Catholic families in Ireland to-day who count it among the proudest memories of their history that some representative of their name was thus sold in the West Indies.”⁵⁶.

With time, the Caribbean recedes into foggy legend and folk story.⁵⁷ By the year 2000 Nini Rodgers said that Caribbean Irish had become a vague legend and, “only echoes” remained.⁵⁸ This emotional resonance explains why distorted narratives of Irish enslavement persist and gain traction, especially among diaspora communities. The power of trauma-based identity narratives provides fertile ground for misinformation and myth-making. But the Irish in Ireland also are affected. Revisionism and resistance to old Republican centred narratives, including Irish exceptionalism are prominent in popular Irish history today. R.F. Foster concluded his 1983 essay on “History and the Irish Question”⁵⁹ wondering why revisionists keep having to fight folk memory. Foster stated that Irish scholars have gone so far as to dismiss most of the canon of Irish history as conceived by the generation of 1916.⁶⁰ As Foster put it, professional Irish historiography turned that corner in 1982 and popular Irish history was taking too far long to follow.⁶¹

It is entirely possible that the strength or emotional attachment that Kennedy has identified as the concept of the Most Oppressed people in the World, which in itself strongly shows a

⁵⁵ Eagan, “Still “Black” and “Proud”: Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia,” 41.

⁵⁶ Gwynn, Aubrey (1931): Cromwell's Policy of Transportation Part II. In *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 20 (78), 291–305. Available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094760>. 303

⁵⁷ Rodgers, *Ireland, slavery and anti-slavery*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 8, 10.

⁵⁹ Foster, R. F. (1983): History and the Irish Question. In *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 33, 170.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 191-192.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

nascent political aspect to the Irish identity, combined with Nyhan and Reifflers' backfire effect in the context of belief perseverance, could explain this inability of the academy in Ireland to overcome this folk memory. This though doesn't explain why despite the existence of discursive research, evidence and argument concerning, property, labour vs body, legal status, that there are repetitive inaccuracies and contradictions in the discourse from academics, concerning the Caribbean Irish.

These persistent inaccuracies highlight a broader analytical issue: a Post-Historical shift. That would be a stage at which historical narratives become primarily valued not for their accuracy, but for their utility. An example would be in contemporary cultural and political debates. The persistence of these inaccuracies and distortions is less a problem of scholarly omission and more indicative of narratives entering this post-historical phase. In this phase, historical accuracy becomes secondary, and narratives are primarily valued for their emotional, cultural, or political utility. This post-historical shift explains why, despite thorough evidence and research, inaccuracies persist, they serve contemporary needs more effectively than historical truth.

F. The Popular History That Set the Stage

Before the Internet era, popular books on Irish servitude in the Caribbean helped shape public awareness, setting the stage for the visibility period (2015–2020). Three widely read books: *To Hell or Barbados* (2000), *The Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl* (2003), and *White Cargo* (2007) framed Irish forced labour as an obscured or forgotten history. These books claimed to reveal hidden truths about Irish suffering in the New World, positioning the topic as a neglected chapter of colonial oppression.

While academic research on Irish servitude had existed for decades (e.g., Beckles, Akenson, Rodgers), these books popularised the narrative, making it more accessible to non-academic audiences. However, their sensationalist framing, misleading numbers, and

emotionally charged narratives contributed to misconceptions later exploited by the Irish Slavery Meme.

To Hell or Barbados in particular, became a cornerstone of post-2000 Internet discussions, frequently cited in viral posts and articles. The book's claims such as the "50,000 Irish slaves" figure and the existence of forced interracial breeding programs were historically dubious but widely accepted. *White Cargo* similarly implied that white indentured servitude was a form of de facto slavery but lacked engagement with serious academic historiography.

By the time mass social media engagement on the topic surged post-2015, the groundwork for misinformation and conflict had been laid. These books had created a widespread perception of historical suppression, which was later instrumentalised online. Their narrative structure of an emotionally powerful, victim-centred history allegedly ignored by elites made them ideal sources for Internet-driven myth-making.

G. The Situation on the Ground in the United States in the Visibility Period.

A new rising tide of racial consciousness including police shootings and active protests proceeded through the years of 2008 to 2016. With the formation of movements such as Black Lives Matter, the U.S. experienced of a style of social conflict not seen since the 1970s.⁶² By 2008, the United States was networked to the Internet and the cable news cycle with participation as a cultural norm. This added a level of universal visibility to the protests that was unprecedented.

⁶² "HUSL Library: A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement," accessed October 22, 2024, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM>.

Added to the visibility period was the anxiety of poor economic performance since the early 2000s⁶³ and a growing gap between rich, poor and the various middle classes.⁶⁴ The years of the visibility period see both the first Trump Presidency and the exit of the UK from the EU. These were not years of political calm.

The anxiety of the period creates a significant backdrop for understanding the academic failures regarding the treatment of historical narratives, particularly concerning the Irish and African experience. In the UK, exit from the European Union marked a decisive rightward shift that reflected and amplified existing social divisions. This trend was mirrored across Europe, where right-wing movements gained traction, capitalising on fears surrounding immigration and national identity.⁶⁵ This right resurgence also fuelled a resurgence of the centre-left, and increased cultural conflict as the recovered from the populist gains of the period.

In the US, the political and economic landscape during the visibility period intensified existing anxieties about race particularly in the wake of nationally covered incidents such as the riots in Ferguson, Mississippi, and other police killings which launched protests nationwide. The media's role in highlighting racial divisions contributed to a climate of tension that was both notable and, in some cases, exacerbated. This tumultuous environment fostered a perfect breeding ground for shallow political participation such as online activism. This is a type of activism which thrives in the fast-paced, short-attention-

⁶³ Nicola Mucci et al., "The Correlation Between Stress and Economic Crisis: A Systematic Review," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 12 (2016), doi:10.2147/NDT.S98525.

⁶⁴ Travis Mitchell, "Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality," *Pew Research Center*, January 9, 2020, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.

⁶⁵ Thomas Greven, "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and the United States," 1–4, accessed October 22, 2024, https://dc.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/RightwingPopulism.pdf.

span culture of the Social Internet. The Social Internet became marked by this shallow online participation.⁶⁶

Amid this chaos, the phenomenon of accelerated and networked DIY scholarship emerged, fuelled by the Internet's structure, which prioritised rapid consumption over deep analysis. The available information necessary for a comprehensive and professional response to historical discourse was accessible through direct engagement, study, or consultation. However, the overwhelming scale of information online creates an environment where attention is scarce, leading individuals and academics alike to favour quick, digestible content over thorough source analysis.

Furthermore, the self-assuredness that accompanies popular ideas online, which is visible in the respondents to the Internet Meme, often leads to a situation where even overwhelming evidence against a popular narrative struggles to gain traction. In a landscape increasingly shaped by anxiety and conflict, this intersection of factors cultivates a perfect space for misconceptions and misrepresentations, leaving academics to grapple with a crisis of engagement and understanding. Political and economic anxiety and a desire to participate could be strong motivational factors for good or bad faith construction and spreading image memes online.

H. The Visibility Discourse

A. The Rise of the Irish Slavery Meme from 2000-2014

Leading up to 2014, there is a continuing murmur of interest in the status of the Irish in the Caribbean. This period saw articles and memes which positioned the Irish as slaves in the way Africans were slaves following on the three books which are mentioned above in

⁶⁶ Eitan D. Hersch, "Political Hobbyism: A Theory of Mass Behavior: (Working Paper)," accessed July 13, 2024, https://www.eitanhersh.com/uploads/7/9/7/5/7975685/hersh_theory_of_hobbyism_v2.0.pdf.

section F of this chapter. This coincided with rising levels of racial tension as described in section G, directly prior. In 2014, sociologists Campbell and Manning noted a then ongoing change in American culture from a dignity culture, to a victimhood culture.⁶⁷ In such a culture, individuals and groups gain moral authority and influence by highlighting their victimisation, often leading to competitive claims of suffering. This could explain why the public was so receptive to the ideas of the Slavery Meme, and why the social capital of who was enslaved was suddenly so valuable.

One article by John Martin went viral by 2015, eventually reaching over a million users.⁶⁸ Social platforms like Google, Facebook, and Reddit were instrumental in spreading the meme and later in enabling respondents to resist its spread. This conflict ignited the visibility period. The articles and memes of this period equate the condition of Irish slaves and African slaves. The goal was to compete for political or social capital. In one example, graphic memes targeted the idea of reparations for slavery. This was a sensitive political issue in the United States in this period. The idea was that the Irish did not receive reparations for their slavery, why should African-Americans?

B. The Visibility Discourse 2015 - 2020

By 2015, interest in the slavery of the Irish as portrayed, had begun to rise visibly on the Internet, and was first contested and then arrested on most major media platforms by the reactions to the slavery Meme. The reaction is outlined in editorials, news articles, and by 2020, some academics. The reaction followed a pattern established early on online by activists such as Hogan and Reilly working on Twitter and Medium. What was created

⁶⁷ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," *Comparative Sociology* 13, no. 6 (2014): 695ff, doi:10.1163/15691330-12341332, https://brill.com/view/journals/coso/13/6/article-p692_2.xml.

⁶⁸ John Martin, "The Irish Slave Trade – the Forgotten "White" Slaves - Global Research," Global Research, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>.

through the period was a canon of articles which eventually served as each other's sources.⁶⁹ The pattern was so accepted by 2019, it was taken as a given. This was the moment where factual accuracy and historical categorisation was abandoned in favour of utility. This period exemplifies how historical narratives become tools for cultural and political conflict when detached from their factual foundations.

2. A Flawed Discourse.

A. Pro-meme arguments

The Internet Meme of Irish Slavery capitalises on broader decolonial ideas, manipulating historical truths to siphon social capital. Martin's article and its spin-offs exemplify malinformation, which is factually based content distorted to achieve harmful objectives.

The Slavery Meme served a complex set of messages: "The Irish were slaves first, treated worst, and you'll never hear them ask for a handout" or "They are trying to hide the truth about Irish slavery, etc.," "The Irish were slaves and didn't get reparations, why should anyone else get them?"

In its broad scope, the Meme misses the Irish who were actually enslaved. It also misses that those who survived were given reparations by the English Crown. While the Internet Meme's arguments rely on false equivalency and overgeneralisation, the counter- responses from academics and activists have been equally problematic in their oversimplifications and inaccuracies.

For example, Hogan and Reilly wrote that the laws of Barbados clearly delineated who was a slave and what that meant. They use that foundation to rule out the possibility of any European enslavement stating the laws clearly delineated slavery for Africans alone. Yet,

⁶⁹ Matthew Brown, "Fact Check: The Irish Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves," *USA TODAY*, June 18, 2020, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/18/fact-check-irish-were-indentured-servants-not-slaves/3198590001/>.

the laws of Barbados are not that explicit. For example, in the 1668 text the formulation is “negroes or other slaves.”⁷⁰ Jerome Handler also wrote a paper in 2016, showing that Barbadian law only implied differences between slaves and other labour.⁷¹ The respondents often state that indentured servants weren’t property or chattels. Both indentures and slaves were undeniably types of chattel according to English law. The respondents’ interventions are inaccurate enough to require correction themselves. One example is that the interventions are materially wrong about what chattels were and the Irish relation to the term.

B. Slaves and Indentures were Chattels

Slaves were property. This is true. So were indentures. They were both considered chattels. Chattel means a type of property. The term is often misused in the discourse. It’s 18th century American definition which was strongly influenced by English common law was that

“Chattel is a very comprehensive term in our law, and includes every species of property which is not real estate, or a freehold. The most leading division of personal property is into chattels real and chattels personal. Chattels real, are interests annexed to or concern the realty...”⁷² Property in chattels personal is either absolute or qualified. Absolute property denotes a full and complete title and dominion over it; but qualified property in chattels is an exception to the general right, and means a temporary or special interest, liable to be totally divested on the

⁷⁰ Barbados Assembly, *Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Island of Barbadoes from 1648, to 1718* (London: Printed by John Baskett printer to the Kings most excellent Majesty and by the assigns of Thomas Newcomb and Henry Hills deces'd, 721), 22.

⁷¹ Jerome S. Handler, “Custom and Law: The Status of Enslaved Africans in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 2 (2016), doi:10.1080/0144039X.2015.1123436

⁷² James Kent, *Commentaries on American Law*, Commentaries on American Law 2 (New York N.Y.: O. Halsted, 1827), 278.

happening of some particular event...”⁷³ “In these cases the possessor has only a property of a temporary or qualified natures which is to continue until the trust be performed or the goods be redeemed, and he is entitled to protect this property, while it continues in like manner as if he were absolute owner.”⁷⁴

Indentures were property of a different sort than slaves. There were distinctions in the English system between absolute and qualified ownership. Chattels could be sold, inherited, taxed, and lost while gambling. This applied to servants and slaves. As a *Wiedergutmachung* though, It has been argued that what was owned was only the labour of the servant. Nevertheless, masters controlled the servant when working, when not working, and when underway. Servants ceded control of the ability to contract business, and their reproductive rights. What’s left? A body must fulfil these contracts. Labour must be done, not simply enumerated. Patterson and John Donoghue both point out there is not a real life distinction here. Donoghue correctly note that

“Contracts did not cut sugar cane and weed tobacco fields; chattel workers did”⁷⁵

Patterson wrote long before the visibility period

“The distinction, often made, between selling their labour and selling their person makes no sense whatever in real human terms.”⁷⁶

In addition, we have discussed the property issue at length in our master’s thesis.⁷⁷

McDonald-Beckles as also pointed out indentures were also considered alienable property.⁷⁸ The distinction without difference that it was only their labour that was truly

⁷³ Ibid., 281.

⁷⁴ Kent, *Commentaries on American Law*, 283.

⁷⁵ Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell”

⁷⁶ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 9.

⁷⁷ Johnson II, “The Irish in the Caribbean,” 82–85.

⁷⁸ Hilary Beckles, “The Concept of “White Slavery” in the English Caribbean During the Early Seventeenth Century,” in, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995), 578.

owned made no difference in their lived experience, and making the labour available to their masters was not possible without total control of their bodies, which were part of the contract as implied. There are numerous examples which will be shown in the discourse of the visibility period where it's stated conclusively that indentures weren't chattels or that only slaves were chattels. Discussing colonisation without accurate reference to what chattel means in an 17th or 18th century legal sense, is a hallmark of the visibility discourse.

I. The Role of Social Media in the Visibility Discourse

1. Introduction: The Internet as a Historical Battleground

Social media platforms, each with distinct characteristics, became battlegrounds where historical accuracy was compromised in favour of narrative utility, amplifying distortions of Irish forced labour narratives and further polarising discourse.

The Internet played a central role in amplifying and distorting the Irish Slavery Meme, serving as both an accelerator and a battleground for competing narratives. The discourse unfolded across major social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Wikipedia), each shaping public perception in different ways. The spread of the meme, the pushback from fact-checkers and journalists, and the polarisation of historical debates were not driven by new historical evidence but by digital mechanisms that favoured shareability, simplification, and ideological alignment. These participants will be examined below.

2. Facebook: A Passive Circulator

Facebook functioned as a key distribution hub, allowing the Irish Slavery Meme to spread across public pages and private groups. Between 2015 and 2020, viral posts shared the Gateway Article by John Martin over 250,000 times, and private groups like "Irish Slavery and All Things Irish" grew in size.

Fact-checking interventions began in 2017, with posts receiving "False Information" labels, yet enforcement was inconsistent. This is shown in Chapter VI when discussion Fact

Checkers in more detail. While Facebook did not actively curate historical discourse, its neutral stance and group privacy settings enabled both misinformation and counter-narratives to coexist indefinitely. The meme's visibility declined after 2020, but historical discourse on the subject remained insulated within private communities.

3. Twitter: From Discussion Forum to Ideological Wrestling Rink

Twitter played a more dynamic role by acting as a real-time amplifier for both the Irish Slavery Meme and its rebuttals. Early engagement in 2015 saw widespread assertions that "Irish were slaves, too," often linked to political arguments against reparations. These assertions often went hand in hand with the memes that are discussed in Chapter IV.

By 2016-2017, fact-checking and journalistic interventions (such as Snopes and The New York Times) reframed the discussion, shifting the debate from historical accuracy to ideological positioning. By 2018-2019, bot and troll accounts had overtaken genuine engagement, weaponising the meme to provoke racial and political conflict rather than to engage with historical truth.

The "race to the bottom" phenomenon became evident, where Twitter users defending the pre-eminence of the African slavery narrative responded with absolute denials of any form of Irish enslavement, reducing historical nuance to rigid binaries. By 2020, Twitter had become a performance space for ideological combat rather than a platform for discussing historical inquiry.

4. Reddit and Wikipedia: Digital Gatekeepers

Reddit's r/AskHistorians and Wikipedia positioned themselves as authoritative sources, attempting to suppress the Irish Slavery Meme as "misinformation." The Forum r/AskHistorians, grew from 100,000 to 2.1 million users during the visibility period. Its

moderators created a FAQ response explicitly denying all Irish enslavement, adopting the binary position that “Irish were indentured, not enslaved.”⁷⁹

Wikipedia, in a 2019 revision, segmented the discourse by categorizing discussions of Irish servitude under separate topics, making direct comparisons to African slavery structurally impossible. The Wikipedia entry mirrored Reddit’s FAQ, reinforcing the idea that the only legitimate form of slavery was racialised, permanent, and hereditary, thereby dismissing any historical instances that complicated this framework.

5. The Platform Effect: The Shift from Truth to Use

The interplay of these platforms highlights an Post-Historical shift, where historical accuracy was no longer the priority narrative utility was. The Internet Meme distorted history to weaponise Irish suffering, while its respondents countered with equally flawed simplifications to preserve social capital.

- Facebook’s neutrality allowed misinformation to circulate freely, even as fact-checking efforts increased.
- Twitter turned historical discussion into ideological combat, reducing historical complexity into polarised soundbites.
- Reddit and Wikipedia transformed from open forums into digital gatekeepers, creating rigid boundaries around acceptable discourse.

By 2019, the visibility period had entered its post-historical phase, where the truth of the Irish experience mattered less than its usability in modern cultural debates.

6. Conclusion: A Digital Battlefield, Not a Historical Debate

⁷⁹ r/Ask Historians Wiki. “US_history - AskHistorians.” last modified August 15, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20141009014655/http://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/wiki/us_history

By 2019, the visibility period passed the tipping point, observed through our heuristic, where narratives of Irish slavery ceased to be about historical accuracy at all. Instead, the usability of these narratives in digital, ideological, and political debates fully eclipsed their historical authenticity.

Ultimately, the trajectory of the Irish Slavery Meme clearly reveals how history, mediated through the Social and Commercial Internet, moves into a post-historical condition, ceasing to be disciplined inquiry and becoming instead a tool for contemporary conflicts. This post-historical shift, revealed through the heuristic, explains at least in part, why inaccuracies persist. Narratives prioritised for their use-value rather than their accuracy effectively serve contemporary emotional and political needs.

III. The Gateway Article

A. Introduction

The online article “The Slaves That Time Forgot” is pivotal for analysing the spread of misinformation. The idea that Irish people faced oppression resembling slavery predates this article. Martin’s 2008 piece reshapes the idea, falsely equating Irish experiences directly with African slavery. These distortions, amplified digitally, exemplify how misinformation aligns strategically with ideological and political objectives. Martin transforms the general Irish Slavery Meme into the more specific Internet Slavery Meme, falsely suggesting Irish and African slaves were identical and even that the Irish experience came first.

“I don’t really need to go through all of the gory details, do I? After all, I know all too well the atrocities of the African slave trade. But, am I talking about African slavery?”⁸⁰

Memes emerging from this misrepresentation then exploited the narrative politically, particularly within an American context.

B. Authorship

John Martin’s bio on the same website describes him as a self-described “media consultant concerned about America’s future,” on OpEdNews in April 2008.⁸¹ Despite the article’s broad impact, Martin remains largely anonymous, with minimal biographical detail available. He authored several other politically polarised articles on the same site, but none

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ John Martin, “The Slaves That Time Forgot,” Op Ed News, accessed March 14, 2024, https://www.opednews.com/populum/page.php?f=life_a_john_mar_080411_the_slaves_that_time.htm.

achieved similar prominence. Despite the viral success of his article, he does not capitalize on it or re-appear in the discourse.

C. Move to a more visible site

In 2012, Martin's article was reposted on GlobalResearch.ca, a fringe and conspiracy peddling news site.⁸² GlobalResearch.ca is labelled by the U.S. State Department as a disseminator of conspiracy theories and Russian propaganda.⁸³ As a *Wiedergutmachung*, the Russian government has said the same of publications from the US State Department. By 2015, the reposted article went viral, achieving (at publishing time) over 252,000 Facebook shares, 11,600 retweets, and 627,000 shares on other platforms.⁸⁴

D. Attacking Reparations

Scholars like Jerome Handler⁸⁵, David Brown⁸⁶ and Natalie Zacek⁸⁷ noted that Martin's narrative undermines African-American claims for reparations.⁸⁸ Martin's distorted history highlights how narratives of oppression can be strategically weaponised. By positioning

⁸² Peter Knight, "Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States," *New German Critique* 35, no. 1 (2008): 167, doi:10.1215/0094033X-2007-024.

⁸³ United States Department of State, "GEC Special Report: Russia's Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda - United States Department of State," accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/russias-pillars-of-disinformation-and-propaganda-report/>;

⁸⁴ John Martin, "The Irish Slave Trade – the Forgotten 'White' Slaves | Global Research," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121127184855/https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>.

⁸⁵ Handler and Reilly, "Contesting 'White Slavery' in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados"

⁸⁶ Brown, "Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660"

⁸⁷ Natalie Zacek, "How the Irish Became Black: 321-336," in *Ireland, Slavery and the Caribbean: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Finola O'Kane and Ciaran O'Neill, Studies in imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

⁸⁸ Robert A. Johnson II, "The Irish as Caribbean Slaves?," *Imaginaires*, no. 22 (2020): 162; 159-176 Pages / *Imaginaires*, No. 22 (2019): How Popular Culture Travels, doi:10.34929/imaginaires.vi22.12, <https://imaginaires.univ-reims.fr/index.php/imaginaires/article/view/12>.

Irish experiences in direct competition with African suffering, this misinformation seeks to invalidate contemporary claims for social justice.

E. The Difficulty of Fixing Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation

When politics becomes entangled in an information-economic complex, history's importance grows further as a tool to control narratives and move markets. Publication of data and narratives is one way to move people. Wardle and Derakhshan wrote a report for the Council of Europe in 2017, where Malinformation was coined as a term. As opposed to mis or disinformation. Malinformation is information that's true, more or less, but released with the intent to harm (Derakhshan).⁸⁹

Wardle et al. also note (through Filloux) that the situation in 2017 was

“...nothing less than Moore's Law applied to the distribution of misinformation: an exponential growth of available technology coupled with a rapid collapse of costs.”⁹⁰

This is a metaphor, although apt in description, it has no meaning scientifically. Furthermore, although Filloux is quoted in their report to the Council of Europe, and he article implies the quote is from a published magazine, it's actually from a Blog entry on website medium.com. The report from Wardle or Derakhshan is by journalists for journalists and deals with news and social media in disinformation contexts. They work in real time and are incredibly current. But this is a history paper. They do not address history as a field, or individual scholarship.

⁸⁹ Wardle and Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, 10.

⁹⁰ Frederic Filloux, “You Can't Sell News for What It Costs to Make,” *The Walkley Magazine*, accessed March 6, 2025, <https://medium.com/the-walkley-magazine/you-cant-sell-news-for-what-it-costs-to-make-7a4def964ffa>.

Martin's article illustrates why misinformation and malinformation, partial truths manipulated to mislead, pose distinct challenges to historians. Wardle and Derakhshan's concept of malinformation helps historians recognise how truth can be selectively twisted. Historical scholarship demands exhaustive research, making rapid correction nearly impossible and giving misinformation a significant advantage.

In this digital age, where anything can be posted, the possibilities for misinformation are also near endless. This also invokes the spectre of malinformation. Half-truths posted or published to manipulate. Correcting misinformation is a thankless, often impossible task. To fully grasp the power of misinformation in Martin's article, it is essential to consider another metaphor that is masquerading as a law: Brandolini's Law.

F. Invoking Brandolini's law.

Brandolini's Law, introduced by Italian information scientist Alberto Brandolini, describes the phenomenon where the effort required to refute misinformation is an order of magnitude greater than that needed to produce it. Martin's article exemplifies this asymmetry; it presents historical inaccuracies that are easy to assert but laborious to refute.⁹¹ For example, Martin claims

The Irish slave trade began in 1625 when James II sold 30,000 Irish prisoners as slaves to the New World.⁹²

Deconstructing this sentence is straightforward, with sufficient time. However, in this information environment, most readers don't. James II was not crowned until decades after the Irish had already been transported to the Caribbean. He was not even born in 1625,

⁹¹ Alberto Brandolini, ""The Bullshit Asymmetry: The Amount of Energy Needed to Refute Bullshit Is an Order of Magnitude Bigger Than to Produce It." / X," Twitter, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://x.com/ziobrando/status/289635060758507521>.

⁹² Martin, "The Slaves That Time Forgot" (From the Original on OpEd News)

making a proclamation from him impossible at that date. Moreover, no proclamation exists in 1624 concerning Irish slavery from his predecessor, James I.

Here, 47 words were used to counter 20. Brandolini's Law suggests such disproportionality makes misinformation particularly powerful and difficult to counter effectively.⁹³

If the entire paper from Martin is structured like this, how much work would it take, per falsehood or unsupported allegation? Brandolini used size as his measure, that is a place holder for time and attention.

G. A Judgement

Martin's article deserves formal, professional peer review, not because of its scholarly merit, but precisely because it offers a vivid illustration of how easily misinformation can spread, and how disproportionately difficult it is to counter. This analysis demonstrates the amount of scholarly labour required merely to refute a handful of demonstrably false claims.

What was Martin's purpose? Why was such demonstrably false information constructed and presented as truth? It is clear that this is no amateur error. Rather, it was deliberately crafted misinformation containing just enough historically plausible elements to appear credible. Its primary function was political rather than historical. Its use-value lies precisely in distorting historical narratives to serve contemporary ideological purposes.

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, its inaccuracies, "The Slaves That Time Forgot" was quickly and widely disseminated online. First promoted by GlobalResearch.ca, it gained virality through social media shares and algorithmic reinforcement. The article exemplifies a key issue facing historians today: how misinformation, constructed with sufficient

⁹³ J. F. Larkin and P. L. Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations* (Clarendon Press, 1973), <https://books.google.de/books?id=Qni8swEACAAJ>.

plausible-seeming historical details, can quickly dominate popular understanding despite lacking factual integrity. The Gateway Article, therefore, demonstrates how misinformation or malinformation can effectively manipulate public discourse by exploiting historical ignorance and algorithmic amplification.

In the next section, I examine how this gateway article directly inspired graphic memes and further misinformation.

IV. Memes

A. Introducing and Defining Memes

Richard Dawkins coined the term “meme” in 1976,⁹⁴ defining it as a unit of cultural transmission. Today, the term also commonly describes viral online graphics accompanied by short, impactful text. Irish slavery is a meme in many senses.

1. Objections to the term

Academics accept the existence of memes but challenge Dawkins's analogy to genes, arguing culture doesn't evolve biologically.⁹⁵ While memes aren't inherited like genes, they do spread like viruses.⁹⁶ Responses to any of the meme iterations often label it a myth.⁹⁷ The term “Meme” better captures the phenomenon's layered ideas, viral nature, and malinformative use of truth mixed with falsehood.

2. Facets of Memes

This story uses both the ideas and Internet graphics but they must be delineated. The Idea Meme (of Irish Slavery) is the broad idea that the Irish were enslaved in many forms during their 700 years of colonisation. It starts at Henry II and continues past 20th century Irish

⁹⁴ Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, *A New Literacies Sampler*, New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies vol. 29 (New York [i pozostałe]: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁹⁵ Joseph Fracchia and R. C. Lewontin, “The Price of Metaphor,” *History and Theory* 44, no. 1 (2005): 14–15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3590779>.

⁹⁶ Lin Wang and Brendan C. Wood, “An Epidemiological Approach to Model the Viral Propagation of Memes,” *Applied Mathematical Modelling* 35, no. 11 (2011): 5447, doi:10.1016/j.apm.2011.04.035, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0307904X11002824>.

⁹⁷ Liam Stack, “Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2017, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/us/irish-slaves-myth.html>; Liam Hogan, “Irish Slaves’: The Convenient Myth,” *openDemocracy*, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/irish-slaves-convenient-myth/>.

independence. The Internet Meme of Irish Slavery is ahistorical, equating Irish slavery directly with African slavery and often invoking reparations.

The Internet memes and Martin's gateway article are closely connected in timing and context. Pop culture inspired graphic memes bridge the gaps between popular, political and academic cultures online. They compress and distort history, thriving in an Internet that favours brevity, entertainment, and mass participation. Memes continually transmit their message. They do not respond, and they can be sent and read quickly. Irish slavery memes exploit victimhood culture by amplifying claims to social capital for some while denying it to others. Memes are strategically expendable yet effective in online conflicts.

In 2014 sociologists Campbell and Manning identified an emerging culture of victimhood.⁹⁸ Jonathon Haidt links these phenomena to the politicisation of "victims, underdogs, and the disadvantaged."⁹⁹ This can explain this period's instrumentalisation. In a culture increasingly focused on victimhood rather than dignity, claiming victimhood status becomes a form of social capital. Controlling that capital becomes a value and a struggle. This dynamic intensifies within politically polarised contexts, where elites strategically encourage competition among non-elites.¹⁰⁰ In Jonathan Haidt's and Campbell and Manning's analysis, new emphasis on victimhood and denigration of those who dominate will lead to capitalisation and elevation of the status of victim. The selective acknowledgement or denial of suffering becomes an effective way to exert control over social capital. This use of

⁹⁸ Campbell and Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," 692–726.

⁹⁹ Jonathan Haidt, "Where Microaggressions Really Come from: A Sociological Account," The Righteous Mind, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://righteousmind.com/where-microaggressions-really-come-from/> Please also see Jonathan Haidt, "'Two Incompatible Sacred Values in American Universities' Jon Haidt, Hayek Lecture Series," Hayek Lecture Series Duke University, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gatn5ameRr8>.

¹⁰⁰ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarised America*, Great questions in politics series (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 7-8 ; Helen Lewis, "Culture Wars Cross the Atlantic to Coarsen British Politics," *Financial Times*, January 13, 2018, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/5ac4d090-f6f9-11e7-a4c9-bbdefa4f210b>.

victimhood not only influences public perceptions but reinforces existing hierarchies by deciding whose suffering counts.

The Internet Meme is wrong, but in a special way. It is not just misinformation, it's not disinformation. Misinformation is false without intent. Disinformation is false information given with the intent to manipulate. The closest we can come is malinformation, which is information that is true in a sense or partially, but manipulated, exaggerated or twisted in a way to manipulate or damage. The Internet Meme of Irish Slavery is all three: misinformation by the misinformed but well meaning, disinformation from the well informed and ill leaning, and malinformation from the even more ill leaning. This is a nuanced form of falsehood that is made available by the medium. It took Seven years for Martin's article to go truly viral in 2015. This accents the differences between the journalistic focus of Wardle et al., and a history-oriented study.

B. Graphic Memes as Misinformation

1. Source Attribution and Content

The posters or authors of the Graphic Internet Memes of Irish slavery do not reliably attribute their photos.¹⁰¹ The wording of The Internet Meme is an equivocation of Irish status with African slaves¹⁰² invoking slogans such as “What the history books won’t tell you” or “Black slaves were expensive; Irish slaves were cheap,” accompanied by misleading texts.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Royce Chrystin, “The Irish Slaves - What They Will Never Tell You in History.” Your News Wire, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150304220453/http://yournewswire.com/the-irish-slaves-what-they-will-never-tell-you-in-history/>.

¹⁰³ Jacob Ogles, “Ray Blacklidge Feels Backlash to “Irish Slaves’ Meme,” *Florida Politics*, August 6, 2018, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/270842-ray-blacklidge-feels-backlash-to-irish-slaves-meme/>.



Figure 3 “When was the last time?” Posted on Facebook by Shane Carrick on March 9, 2016¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Shane Carrick, “An Unconfirmed Screenshot from 2016: Possibly Posted by User Shane Carrick on Facebook,” <https://imgur.com/irish-americans-were-most-oppressed-group-ever-YRHOYtV>, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://imgur.com/irish-americans-were-most-oppressed-group-ever-YRHOYtV>.



Figure 4 Original Photo by Hine "Breaker boys working in Ewen Breaker of Pennsylvania Coal Co." 1911

These images lack original attribution. They are not actually images of Irish slaves. Figure 3, cited above is a colourised interpolation of Lewis Hine's work from the early 20th

century. The original of this photo is an image of Breaker Boys working in the Ewen Breaker of the Pennsylvania Coal Company in 1911. Figure 5 below is also by Lewis Hines but surrounded by added text. The original is shown in Figure 6, it is of child labourers from the oyster industry in South Carolina in 1911.



Figure 5 Interpolated meme using Lewis Hines' Photo¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Andray Domise, "Original Photo by Lewis Hines: Posted by Twitter User Andray Domise on April 1, 2016 - Since Deleted." accessed October 22, 2024.



Figure 6 Young oyster shuckers, Port Royal, S.C.¹⁰⁶

These types of photographic interpolations in this theme had been appearing since at least 2013.¹⁰⁷ Other interpretations, without historical photos, also appear, using the nonsensical or more entertaining aspect of Internet culture to deliver a similar message.



Figure 7 “That’s none of my business” Posted by Nick Sacco on Word Press in 2015¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Lewis W. Hine, “Josie, Six Year Old, Bertha, Six Years Old, Sophie, 10 Years Old, All Shuck Regularly. Maggioni Canning Co. Location: Port Royal, South Carolina,” The Library of Congress, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/nclc.00991/>.

¹⁰⁷ Robin Wilkey, “Tea Party Leader's Tweet Suggests Blacks Stop ‘Bitching and Moaning’ About Slavery,” *HuffPost*, December 18, 2013, accessed October 22, 2024, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tea-party-racist-tweet_n_4467221.

¹⁰⁸ Nick Sacco, “Serfdom: - Exploring the Past,” accessed October 22, 2024, <https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/tag/serfdom/>.

There is also a commercial aspect, with T-shirts printed with the memes available for purchase.¹⁰⁹

2. A Digital Molotov Cocktail

Anyone can make a graphic meme. Memes can be created easily from any publicly available online photo using meme-generation websites. The content is often publicly posted to be rated, and can be downloaded and reshared. The links can lead anywhere: to further image collections, to Wikipedia, to books, or to videos. One common thread on the Internet leads to the Martin article from Globalresearch.ca.

C. Conclusion – Memes, Truth, and Historical Distortion

The Idea Meme (of Irish Slavery) is not a new phenomenon but has roots in colonial history from as early as the 1200s. Over time, one branch of the meme was formed and became weaponised into the Internet Meme, spreading virally from 2015 to 2020 and beyond, distorting historical narratives for political ends. This type of memetic manipulation undermines public trust in historical truth and educational institutions, highlighting how memes can fuel contested narratives in the culture wars.

The Irish did suffer significant oppression during colonisation, including in the Caribbean. However, the Internet Meme distorts and weaponises this history, turning genuine suffering into a tool for online ideological battles. These distortions, amplified by digital virality, undermine public trust in historical scholarship and complicate academic efforts to provide accurate historical narratives. Scholars face the challenge of countering these rapidly

¹⁰⁹ Spreadshirt, “Irish Power First American Slaves United' Men's Premium T-Shirt | Spreadshirt,” accessed October 20, 2024, [.com/shop/design/irish+power+first+american+slaves+united+mens+premium+t-shirt-D5a5eddb25d52cd51f2f45f27?sellable=MLO8kxyARjHLbxXyLvOm-812-7](https://www.spreadshirt.com/shop/design/irish+power+first+american+slaves+united+mens+premium+t-shirt-D5a5eddb25d52cd51f2f45f27?sellable=MLO8kxyARjHLbxXyLvOm-812-7); Colamaga, “Irish Power American Slaves United – Cool Saying T-Shirt-CL,” accessed October 20, 2024, <https://colamaga.com/product/irish-power-american-slaves-united-cool-saying-t-shirt-cl/>.

spreading distortions, highlighting the urgent need for research methods attuned to the speed and nature of digital information exchange.

V. The Press and the Activism

A. Hogan, Reilly and McAtackney

The Internet Meme gained ground until 2015. This was the beginning of significant pushback which had been building online. Activists and journalists sought to debunk the rising narrative.

While these efforts aimed to restore historical accuracy, they often fell into their own traps of oversimplification and polarisation. They emphasised a rigid dichotomy between indentured servitude and chattel slavery, shaping much of the subsequent media coverage. This section combines the work of activists, like Liam Hogan, with journalists and academics, and then shows its effects mirrored in the legacy media. This section also highlights how binaries and labels are strategically deployed by activists and media to shape historical perceptions.

1. Liam Hogan and the Dichotomy

Liam Hogan, a librarian in Ireland, became the leading voice in contesting the meme. His early efforts included a widely circulated paper on academia.edu (2015), which had over 10,000 downloads before being removed.¹¹⁰ Hogan also published a series of posts on Medium.com, cataloguing instances of the meme and debunking it.¹¹¹ Through his social

¹¹⁰ Liam Hogan, “The Myth of “Irish Slaves” in the Colonies: (Removed),” accessed October 26, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20151007070901/http://www.academia.edu:80/9475964/The_Myth_of_Irish_Slaves_in_the_Colonies.

¹¹¹ Liam Hogan, “All of My Work on the “Irish Slaves” Meme (2015–’23),” *Medium*, March 12, 2017, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://limerick1914.medium.com/all-of-my-work-on-the-irish-slaves-meme-2015-16-4965e445802a>.

media activism, particularly on Twitter, he gained about 50,000 followers and significant visibility.¹¹² In 2016 he wrote an open letter signed by over 80 academics and journalists,

“Journalism and scholarly historical research differ in various ways but they share one thing in common. If they are not based on reliable sources, they are worthless.”¹¹³

Hogan framed the entire Meme of Irish Slavery as a "white supremacist myth," emphasising the stark differences between indentured servitude and chattel slavery. This framing laid the groundwork for subsequent media engagement.¹¹⁴

Liam Hogan’s work, alongside contributions from Reilly and McAtackney, consistently frames the Irish labour experience in the Caribbean as a binary: indentured servitude versus slavery.¹¹⁵ This dichotomy dominates much of the visibility discourse, but it oversimplifies the complex realities of labour systems in the early colonial period.

Hogan and his co-authors repeatedly argue that “The Irish were not slaves, they were indentured servants,”¹¹⁶ presenting these categories as mutually exclusive. Historical evidence demonstrates that labour statuses in the Caribbean were far more fluid. Edward Rugemer’s analysis of Barbados’ 1652 laws, for example, shows that both servants and

¹¹² “Liam Hogan (@Limerick1914) / X,” accessed July 8, 2024, <https://twitter.com/limerick1914>.

¹¹³ Liam Hogan (2016): Open letter to Irish Central, Irish Examiner and Scientific American about their “Irish slaves” disinformation. In Medium, 3/8/2016. Available online at <https://limerick1914.medium.com/open-letter-to-irish-central-irish-examiner-and-scientific-american-about-their-irish-slaves-3f6cf23b8d7f>, checked on 7/8/2024.

¹¹⁴ Hogan, “Irish slaves’: the convenient myth”

¹¹⁵ Liam Hogan, Matthew Reilly, and Laura McAtackney, “The Unfree Irish in the Caribbean Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves,” accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/irish-slaves-myth-2369653-Oct2015/>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

slaves were considered “animate capital,”¹¹⁷ treated similarly in many respects. Simon Newman’s research also highlights distinctions between voluntary indentures, forced transportation, and convict labour.¹¹⁸ This further complicates Hogan’s binary framework.

The implications of Hogan’s framing are significant. By equating indentured servitude with temporary, contractual labour that ensured freedom after a fixed term, he erases the lived realities of many Irish labourers who lacked formal contracts, were forcibly transported, or faced severe exploitation. He also glosses over the high mortality rate. Bridenbaugh estimated mortality rates for indentured servants in the Caribbean reached as high as 50% in the first year.¹¹⁹

This binary framing is not limited to Hogan’s academic contributions but extends into the media narratives he influenced. The 2015 article in *The Journal*, co-authored by Hogan, begins with the statement, “The unfree Irish in the Caribbean were indentured servants, not slaves,” reinforcing the dichotomy.¹²⁰ The by-line further claims, “enslaved Africans were the people treated as livestock,” creating a hierarchy of suffering that distorts attempts to establish what the Irish were. For example, Rugemer’s research shows that both servants and slaves were subjected to commodification during this period, complicating the claim that only African slaves were treated as property.

Similarly, Hogan’s *OpenDemocracy.net* op-ed minimises the diversity of labour experiences in the Caribbean. By describing indentured servitude as a system that “enabled

¹¹⁷ Edward B. Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean During the Seventeenth Century,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2013): 437, doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.70.3.0429, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.70.3.0429>.

¹¹⁸ Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labour*, 1. ed. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 78–80.

¹¹⁹ Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690*, The Beginnings of the American people, 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 106ff.

¹²⁰ Hogan, Reilly and McAttackney, “The unfree Irish in the Caribbean were indentured servants, not slaves”

migration” and asserting that servants were universally freed upon completing their contracts, Hogan ignores evidence that servants often had to sue to be released. This often shown to be the one right they had.¹²¹ Without that right, the Planters would neglect to free them, or to pay them. The disclaimers that some prisoners were sent without any terms or that felons were not always released are buried beneath sweeping generalisations, leaving the false impression of a rigid divide between freedom and enslavement.

2. The Dangers of the Dichotomy

The reliance on such dichotomies is not merely an oversimplification but a distortion that obscures the realities of colonial labour. These binaries erase the intermediate statuses of labourers who were neither voluntary servants nor hereditary slaves but occupied precarious positions with little to no agency. For example, prior to the English restoration prisoners of war and political exiles were often transported without formal indentures, serving under conditions that closely resembled slavery without the protections implied by contracts.¹²²

As an acknowledgement of these oversights, Hogan and his co-authors offer a *Wiedergutmachung* in *The Journal*, stating, “It is true that some Europeans, particularly prisoners of war or political prisoners, were sent to places like Barbados against their will and without a predetermined period of servitude.”¹²³ Sent into forced labour without contracts, under a master’s control, and often for an indefinite period, these individuals’ experiences fit a lay interpretation of slavery. Even voluntary indentures signed away their time, person, and agency during the term of their contract.¹²⁴ Removing them without

¹²¹ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 5ff.

¹²² David Brown, “Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Finola O’Kane and Ciaran O’Neill (Manchester University Press, 2022), 68

¹²³ Hogan, Reilly and McAtackney, “The unfree Irish in the Caribbean were indentured servants, not slaves”

¹²⁴ Vincent T. Harlow, *A History of Barbados* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926). 295

consent, as in the case of prisoners, or the kidnapping or spiriting of children, complicates the discussion further.

The danger of dichotomies lies in their ability to flatten nuance and force complex realities into restrictive categories. Hogan's framing reflects this tendency, reducing labour experiences in the Caribbean to a false binary that leaves no room for the "grey areas" of unfree labour. What if the answer isn't A or B? This specific equation is one of Hogan's markers. He uses the same words and style in almost all his articles throughout the visibility period. For instance this is the device used by Hogan himself to attack genealogist Grenham which is examined below.

3. The Danger of Dissent (Grenham)

In March/April 2016, Hogan, Reilly, and McAtackney published an article in *History Ireland* which repeated the points from the *Journal.ie* article of 2015. The main difference was repeated reference to genealogist John Grenham.¹²⁵

In a separate short article for the *Irish Times*, Grenham labelled the Internet Slavery Meme as "stupid."¹²⁶ acknowledging the Cromwellian deportations as a "short, brutal episode of slave-export" and denounced the Internet Meme's white supremacist overtones. He explicitly rejected its implication that Black Slavery was comprable (i.e., sufficiently similar or interchangeable) or trivial.

Despite Grenham's clear condemnation of the Internet Meme, Hogan et al. lump him with it, claiming he perpetuates "the Irish were slaves too" narrative. They wrote,

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Grenham, "Irish Roots: Were there Irish slaves in Barbados?"

“...Rather than academic ‘quibbling’, as is often suggested by those who perpetuate the ‘Irish were slaves too’ meme¹²⁷...Such statements are part of a larger and growing public sentiment that unequivocally declares the experiences of the Irish in Barbados to be those of slavery.”¹²⁸

Grenham’s answer and subsequent commentary found online¹²⁹ do not unequivocally declare the Irish as African slaves. This is such a clear misrepresentation of Grenham’s position that it is notable as an attack on a dissenter and not a step in a historical debate.

4. The Open Letter of 2016

In 2016 Liam Hogan self-published “Open letter to Irish Central, Irish Examiner and Scientific American about their ‘Irish slaves’ disinformation.” He wrote

“It is thus our duty, as historians, scholars and interested parties, to inform your shareholders and your customers that you have failed to carry out any semblance of fact-checking on this particular article.”¹³⁰

It was signed by 98 academics and interested parties, including Hogan himself.

A. Targets and Impact

Hogan targeted four articles with this letter. Two were subsequently revised. One was withdrawn. the John Martin article remained up at globalresearch.ca. A link to Hogan’s work was added to that website. The New York Times mentioned the Letter in its

¹²⁷ Hogan, McAttackney and Reilly, “The Irish in the Anglo-Caribbean: servants or slaves? - History Ireland”

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Grenham, “Irish Roots: Were there Irish slaves in Barbados?”

¹³⁰ Liam Hogan, “Open Letter to Irish Central, Irish Examiner and Scientific American About Their ‘Irish Slaves’ Disinformation,” *Medium*, March 8, 2016, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://limerick1914.medium.com/open-letter-to-irish-central-irish-examiner-and-scientific-american-about-their-irish-slaves-3f6cf23b8d7f>.

debunking feature in 2017. They noted that the impact other than on the minor outlets which were targeted was “limited.”¹³¹

B. An Intersection with Academia

It is notable that this open letter is an intersection between Hogan’s activism and the academic sphere, in that it contains signatures from academics. Most of them do not go on to publish or intervene in the issue themselves. Reilly and McAttackney are exceptions.

Hogan’s 2016 open letter calls out misinformation in articles about “Irish slavery.” His cause involved correcting misinformation. But correcting misinformation doesn’t mean shifting to politically better misinformation. Hogan often mixes activism with scholarship and errors of his own. The letter, signed by many academics, pushes for accuracy and scholarship. Yet, Hogan’s methods sometimes shut down debate rather than invite it.

B. Media Examples

1. New York Times (2017)

A. Hogan and Reilly

Liam Stack interviewed Liam Hogan and Matthew Reilly as experts in his 2017 New York Times story about the meme. This article takes the same position as Reilly, Hogan and McAttackney’s articles previous articles. It frames the Meme of the Irish as slaves and replaces it with the Internet Meme.

“I’m not saying it was pleasant or anything, it was the opposite, but it was a completely different category from slavery,” said Liam Hogan, a research librarian in Ireland who has spearheaded the debunking effort. “It was a transitory state.”¹³²

¹³¹ Stack, “Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too”

¹³² Ibid.

Here they call servitude a completely different category from slavery. But this begs the question “Category of What?” The only answer that makes sense would be Labour. A different category of Labour. Ontologically not a difference in kind, but in degree. None of those quoted so far are historians or legal scholars. This accents the de-professionalisation of this narrative and presents an issue of use-value, focusing less on historical accuracy and more on the social capital attached to labels. Reilly is quoted here

“The legal differences between indentured servitude and chattel slavery were profound, according to Matthew Reilly, an archaeologist who studies Barbados. Unlike slaves, servants were considered legally human.”

Bound servants who were felons or traitors were not “legally human” if by this appellation Reilly meant people in law. In England, felons and the attainted weren’t people in law.¹³³ Abbot Emerson Smith also noted the convicted felons of the time were in law, dead men.¹³⁴ The Act of Settlement in Ireland and subsequent Interregnum decrees makes any Irish person who the regime targeted guilty of multiple felonies, and treason, and even allows attainder after death. This closed the legal loophole where death before sentencing secured an alleged felon’s property for their heirs.¹³⁵

Throughout the discourse here, the actual experience of being enslaved is denied and minimised despite evidence of many similarities. Even when the experience is partially acknowledged it receives a different title. Why? The answer could be human error. Knowledge of English law of the 17th or 18th century would preclude this kind of error. Hogan and Reilly are not attorneys or legal scholars. They could simply just be buffoons. Why is the New York Times interviewing buffoons though? It could be that as activists

¹³³ K. J. Kesselring, “Felony Forfeiture in England, C.1170–1870,” *The Journal of Legal History* 30, no. 3 (2009): 33, doi:10.1080/01440360903353948.

¹³⁴ Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1947), 131.

¹³⁵ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. 4 (Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon Press, 1765), 329.

they are purposefully protecting their narrative. The rest of their discourse would indicate the reason is to protect an outcome and guarantee a narrative conclusion; to centre, protect and affirm the pre-eminence of African slavery in American politics. To do so, any other slavery must be denied.

B. Why did the Times not Consult Living Caribbean Experts?

There were academics in the Caribbean (Beckles, Sheppard) and in North America (Shaw, Block, Guasco, Donoghue, Leslie Harris, Nell Irvin-Painter) or in Scotland (Simon Newman) working on this subject. The Times did not seek them out or check the literature. This follows another pattern of the period. Despite history's importance to cultural politics, the actual historical work was not done here. Certainly not by the journalists. No one even asked the people who had done the work.

The New York Times did quote one expert academic, Leslie Harris, who is professor at Northwestern University and an expert in Pre-Civil War African-American Labour and Social History. She was quoted as having said

“An indenture implies two people have entered into a contract with each other but slavery is not a contract,” said Leslie Harris, a professor of African-American history at Northwestern University. “It is often about being a prisoner of war or being bought or sold bodily as part of a trade. That is a critical distinction.”¹³⁶

C. Leslie Harris' Framework

Leslie Harris is the first real historian quoted in this post 2015 discourse. Her brief framework, when contextualised with historical evidence rather than Hogan and Reilly's dichotomy, leads to surprising conclusions.

¹³⁶ Stack, “Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too”

1. Thousands of Irish Servants were Prisoners of War

Much of the Irish and other forced labour in the Caribbean during the Rebellion, the Civil War and the Interregnum (1641-1660) was made up of prisoners of war.¹³⁷ In a 1655 petition, the petitioners, calling themselves The Planters of Barbados, claimed to have 12,000 such prisoners as servants.¹³⁸ Those prisoners didn't have a contract. They had a sentence. There's a clear difference. They could also receive a contract or indenture when they arrived or later be placed under indenture. But the sentence would have overlaid the contract. According to Brown, no extant indenture of those prisoners having an indenture has ever been found. The few tales of survivors do not mention them.

2. Servants were a form of Property

The evidence that servants were a form of property in persons who were bodily bought and sold is extant in McDonald-Beckles¹³⁹ and in Eric Williams.¹⁴⁰ There is evidence that bonded servants of all stripes were viewed as chattels of one form or another: bought, sold, inherited and taxed. They are referred to as commodities by Ligon. Williams and McDonald-Beckles are not alone in framing servitude as a form of property; scholars such as Theodore Allen and Jeffrey Perry reinforce this view.¹⁴¹ Perry wrote of Allen's work that it

¹³⁷ Aubrey Gwynn, "Cromwell's Policy of Transportation," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 19, no. 76 (1930): 608ff, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094684>.

¹³⁸ Handler and Reilly, "Contesting "White Slavery" in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," 35.

¹³⁹ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 59ff.

¹⁴⁰ Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill u.a.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994), 16ff.

¹⁴¹ Theodore W. Allen and Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *The Invention of the White Race: Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, Second edition (London, New York: Verso, 2012), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=5177164>, 50,51,52,56, ff.

“shows that in Virginia chattelisation was imposed on free labourers, tenants, and bond-servants increasingly after 1622, that it was imposed on both European and African descended labourers”¹⁴².

This is congruent with McDonald-Beckles and Williams. Especially with McDonald-Beckles’ theory that Servitude was a step on the way to what the Planters viewed as the ideal form of slavery. Servants were a qualified form of chattel. They were a different kind of property in law than African slaves eventually were legislated to be, but they were considered a type of property nonetheless. African slaves were eventually considered chattels personal absolute, or even real estate as was done on Barbados in 1668.¹⁴³ Servants would have been chattels personal, qualified. They could be bought, sold, inherited, lost, and impounded.¹⁴⁴ This legal distinction between “qualified” and “absolute” chattel, though seemingly subtle, underscores the reality that servitude often operated as a form of chattelisation. In many instances, bound servants were legally treated as property, even if the full legal status of absolute chattel slavery was not applied to them. This highlights that servitude existed on a continuum with slavery, complicating any neat separation between the two.

3. Harris is improperly framed?

Properly framed, Harris’ framework supports not Internet Slavery Meme or the premise of Stack’s article, but rather a third premise. That of Grenham and others. Prisoners of War and people who have been bought or traded, people without a contract, who haven’t given

¹⁴² Jeffrey B. Perry, “There’s No Basis for the Claims That John Punch Was “Indentured” -- or That His Fellow Escapees Were “White,” History News Network George Washington University, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://www.hnn.us/article/theres-no-basis-for-the-claims-that-john-punch-was>.

¹⁴³ Barbados, *Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, from 1648, to 1718* (London: printed by John Baskett, Printer to the King’s most Excellent Majesty, and by the assigns of Thomas Newcomb, and Henry Hills, deceas’d, 1721), 63.

¹⁴⁴ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 71; Edward B. Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century,” 436.

consent, and are forced to labour for another are strongly implied to be slaves or enslaved. Not as Africans would be, but enslaved none the less.

Servants on Barbados were under almost the complete control of the owner of the indenture, called their Master, and their bodies were necessarily under the same control as chattels absolute.

It's true that their bodies weren't owned as a personal absolute chattel would have been. But qualified chattel in English common law is treated exactly as absolute chattel, with exceptions made in statute, until the qualification is met. As Beckles notes, West Indian planters applied total control over servants' time and movement, erasing any practical difference between ownership of body and labour.¹⁴⁵

The difference in ownership of body and labour is a de jure distinction without a de facto difference. Eric Williams wrote in 1940 that

“The status of these servants became progressively worse in the plantation colonies. Servitude...tended to pass into a property relation which asserted a control of varying extent over the bodies and liberties of the person during service as if he were a thing”¹⁴⁶

The issue lies not with Harris's response but with the framing of the question, which fails to account for the complexities of servitude as property.

The New York Times Article is more valuable for what is missing, than for most of its content, which is heavy on Hogan and Reilly and light on Harris or any other expertise. The question remains as to why living authors of books on Caribbean History were not consulted on this issue. The New York Times is a distinguished paper with high journalistic

¹⁴⁵ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 71-72ff.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *Capitalism & slavery*, 16.

standards. It is true that Hogan was spearheading his campaign of activism on Twitter and Medium. The saturation of journalists on Twitter was high. His visibility would have been enhanced by this. As a further *Wiedergutmachung*, they may have asked, and the Academics might have not been interested in being interviewed. There were good reasons for avoiding this topic at the time. Racial tension, and a tendency from some sides to attack instead of communicate. Hogan's visibility by 2017, combined with his polarising critiques of dissenters like John Grenham, may have contributed to the Times overlooking Caribbean scholars in favour of activists.

D. Conclusion

While the New York Times and Liam Stack made efforts to shut down the Irish slavery myth, they didn't fully grasp the complexities of the issue. The Times oversimplified servitude's complexities by misinterpreting legal definitions and ignoring Caribbean scholars. The distinctions drawn between slavery and indentured servitude are not as clear-cut as they've been presented, and this kind of ideological framing has only fuelled the myth instead of critically engaging with it. The conversation remained incomplete.

The New York Times article too relied heavily on Hogan et al. and their dichotomy. By improperly framing the one consulted expert and overlooking the broader spectrum of unfree labour, the Times perpetuates a narrow and incomplete narrative. This focus prevents a full recognition of servitude operating as chattelisation. Servitude existed on a continuum of Labour. African slavery is a difference of degree rather than a separate category. They frame servitude within narrow, rigidly simple categories. These terms obscure the realities of servitude, reinforcing a constructed hierarchy of suffering that centres African slavery at the expense of understanding servitude's complex role in colonial labour systems.

2. Christian Science Monitor in 2018

A. Structural Dichotomy Repeated

In March of 2018 Eoin O'Carroll wrote for the *Christian Science Monitor* that the misconception of Irish slavery was strangling certain history forums. His interview subjects Hogan and Reilly O'Carroll wrote that

“Indentured servants in the British colonies were legal persons bound to service by a time-limited, non-hereditary labour contract, often signed in exchange for passage to the New World. Slaves, by contrast, were considered property, a subhuman legal status that was passed from mother to child, in perpetuity.”¹⁴⁷

Structural issues lock the article into a crash course. It does get right that slavery and servitude are both distinctions of labour. It describes voluntary English indentures correctly. This description of indentures not apply accurately to involuntary servants, convicts, prisoners of war, or kidnapped persons whose legal status often remained ambiguous or explicitly unfree. A felon with an indenture remained dead to the law. Indentures were guaranteed on Barbados by law only after 1661. Furthermore, when discussing Slaves as property, O'Carroll implies that indentures were not property.¹⁴⁸ Indentures were considered a form of property in people, they were a different type of chattel.

B. The Importance of Legal Expertise to Legal Distinctions

In this article, Reilly is quoted as saying

“The legal distinction is incredibly important,” says Dr. Reilly, “because it leads to social distinctions that still weigh heavily on how we experience our racial landscape in the 21st century.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Eoin O'Carroll, “No, the Irish Were Not Slaves in the Americas,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 16, 2018, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2018/0316/No-the-Irish-were-not-slaves-in-the-Americas>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ O'Carroll, “No, the Irish were not slaves in the Americas”

Again, the legal explanations that Hogan et al. are attempting are either incomplete or simply wrong. A legal scholar should have been consulted. That sounds harsh. But Hogan has talked at length about the importance of truth and good scholarship. Despite the claims of the Internet, everybody cannot be everything, and experts not only still exist but they are required. The article says

“These distinctions have stood in the way of Irish-Americans and African-Americans developing a sense of shared suffering.”¹⁵⁰

This statement begs the question, why would they have? If the propositions of Hogan, and Reilly are correct, then they didn’t share suffering. The categories of their suffering were completely different. This is stressed in Hogan, Reilly and McAtackney. Denial and minimisation do not inspire solidarity. Reciprocal validation does.

The people who suffered in this era were then divided by the idea of white vs. black which was introduced by the Planters as result of their failed but multiracial rebellions. Thus, servants and slaves, white and black, were divided and conquered. Furthermore, that these particular Caribbean or Irish mainland distinctions have prevented racial reconciliation is highly suspect. The Irish in the Caribbean are very obscure.

C. Spurious Connections and centuries of distrust

Modern Irish Americans are not tangibly connected to the Caribbean. This history was obscure until very recently. Irish-African animosity goes back much further than the creation of Facebook. But the vast arrivals of Irish Catholic immigrants is a mid-19th century phenomena. The distinctions made here for the 17th century here are too new and too incorrect to have had the level of impact Reilly gives them. There are other factors closer to the present that could very well also be responsible for the lack of solidarity

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

between the Irish in the Americas and African Americans; Racism, poverty, fierce industrial era-competition after Famine, American Civil War, Emancipation, and the Great Migration. Also, centuries of the colonial oppression of the wild Irish leading to the untreated intergenerational trauma that marks Ireland to this day, and the similar trauma at work in African-American communities. These are all more likely factors than whether servants and slaves in the Caribbean and Atlantic had it worse.

Furthermore, Hogan is then quoted as having said

“Throughout the 20th century, there was this big divide between Irish Americans and African-Americans that was only exacerbated by these particularly racist skewed understandings of history where one form of oppression outweighed another,”¹⁵¹

This is also notable, in that in almost every article in this section, and every article which contains Hogan and Reilly argues that the oppression of Africans outweighed that of the Irish. Please note the by-line of the Journal article from Hogan et al.¹⁵² In any of those articles Hogan is arguing that one does outweigh the other. The New York Times, and Christian Science Monitor, featuring Hogan et al., are arguing that one outweighs the other.

By sheer numbers and resonant significance one does outweigh the other. Hogan is quoted above saying that conclusion is a skewed understanding of history, while at the same time striving to establish the fact that one absolutely outweighs the other.

Suffering itself can become a tool. In these narratives it is selectively elevated in specific racial hierarchies, instead of people being connected through shared histories of labour exploitation. By weighing one form of oppression against another, the dichotomy drives a

¹⁵¹ O'Carroll, “No, the Irish were not slaves in the Americas”

¹⁵² Liam Hogan and Reilly, Matthew, McAtackney, Laura, “The Unfree Irish in the Caribbean Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves,” accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/irish-slaves-myth-2369653-Oct2015/>.

wedge. Rather than fostering solidarity it pushes ideologies that prioritise narratives of racial distinction. It is a continuation of divide and conquer. In a perverse way, a surely unintentional way, Hogan and Reilly continue the work of the Planters, even while fighting the Meme that is also racially divisive.

Sean O'Callaghan, whose shortcuts with the Rinucinni manuscript have led to vast amounts of misinformation, was one of those who outright stated that Irish slavery wouldn't outweigh African slavery. He called it a drop in the bucket in comparison, but also said that a slave is still a slave no matter their colour. In this at least, O'Callaghan's approach was more honest than other journalists and activists discussed so far.

C. Conclusion – The Press and the Activism

Hogan's dichotomy made the jump from online activism to mainstream media outlets such as The New York Times and The Christian Science Monitor by 2018, but this framework was rigid and misleading. By reducing Caribbean labour systems to a binary of indentured servitude versus chattel slavery, these articles failed to account for the complexities of labour, legal history, and social conditions in the colonial period. This oversimplification not only distorts history but also reinforces a constructed hierarchy of suffering. That could be detrimental to history if trying privilege one group over another. Digital permanence ensures that these distortions, once introduced into the discourse, are continually replicated and referenced in future discussions.

The media's reliance on activists and neophyte academics without consulting Caribbean historians or legal experts reveals a systemic failure in journalistic practices. Instead of critically engaging with the evidence, these articles perpetuate narratives that prioritise ideological goals over historical accuracy. The framing of servitude within narrow categories prevents a full recognition of its role as chattelisation, erasing the shared exploitation that underpinned colonial labour systems.

The uncritical acceptance of Hogan's framing reflects a broader cultural trend: suffering is selectively elevated within specific racial hierarchies, dividing labour histories rather than uniting them. These narratives obscure the possibility of solidarity through shared experiences of oppression, perpetuating the very divisions they seek to critique. By treating the history as settled, these narratives transform the history into a potent tool to direct interest, attention and people, but insulate the phenomena from the possibility of further inquiry. Once inquiry is no longer possible, is it still history?

The spread of such a flawed framework from the blogosphere into legacy media underscores the risks of adopting oversimplified interpretations of history. A more precise treatment of labour histories, grounded in the complexities of law, status, and identity, is essential to accurately understand the role of servitude within the broader context of Caribbean labour systems.

VI. Fact-checkers – Liminal Journalism

A. Introduction

Fact-checking articles are part of this discourse. They occupy an uncertain position between academia and journalism. Whatever their intent, fact-checking articles are not neutral arbiters of truth; they end up part of the visibility discourse itself. Positioned between journalism and academia, fact-checkers function as gatekeepers in digital historical debates, but their methods and sourcing often reinforce existing biases rather than correcting them. Prior to the digital turn, newspapers and magazines were set up to fact check. They also ran appropriate retractions when they discovered errors. The shift to a hybrid online/offline publishing environment may have disrupted traditional fact-checking structures.

Online mistakes can be corrected, and articles redacted, without actually admitting a mistake.¹⁵³ Retractions are now rarer. As a *Wiedergutmachung*, some articles absolutely do note when they have been wrong and post corrections or retractions. The fact-checkers are analysed here: what they address, and how their work fuels a contested narrative instead of settling it.

1. Quantitative Standards

Most fact-checkers are signatory to the International Fact-checking Network.¹⁵⁴ They have 5 commitments and a number of different criteria. They even require a *Wiedergutmachung*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Carrie James, *The Digital Disconnect: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap*, with the assistance of Henry Jenkins, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2014), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=3339864>, 91.

¹⁵⁴ IFCN, “[https://www.Ifncodeofprinciples.Poynter.Org/the-Commitments](https://www.ifncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/the-Commitments),” The Poynter Institute, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.ifncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/the-commitments>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Principle 4, Criteria 3.

The 31 criteria, if followed will provide a quantifiable objective method for determining the facts. They include openness and transparency and impartiality. Also they should use the best available primary sources.¹⁵⁶

2. Repetition

In this section, the presentation of an assured zero-sum dichotomy of slave status vs. that of indentured servant, the lack of primary source references, the overuse of commentary from Hogan et al., and the avoiding the discussion of consent in labour classification are repeated in almost every fact-checking article. The 5 commitments and 31 criteria that would absolutely assure a solid fact check are not followed.

B. 23.09.2016 - Snopes

Snopes is an independent fact-checking website. By 2016, *The Irish in the Caribbean*, especially the Internet Meme had received enough notoriety that Snopes ran an article on the issue.¹⁵⁷

David Emery, long time fact checker, has a background in journalism.¹⁵⁸ The article is framed “Were There Irish Slaves in America, Too?” This framing of heavily affects the analysis.

1. A lack of depth

Snopes’ conclusion is “A Mixture.” For “What’s true” they wrote

“Like impoverished people of other nationalities and ethnicities, many people emigrated from Ireland to the Americas in the 17th and 18th centuries as indentured

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ David Emery, “Were There Irish Slaves in America, Too?,” *Snopes.com*, September 23, 2016, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/irish-slaves-early-america/>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

servants; a smaller number were forcibly banished into indentured servitude during the period of the English Civil Wars; indentured servants often lived and worked under harsh conditions and were sometimes treated cruelly.”¹⁵⁹

“What's False” was

“Unlike institutionalised chattel slavery, indentured servitude was neither hereditary nor lifelong; unlike Black slaves, white indentured servants had legal rights; unlike Black slaves, indentured servants weren't considered property.”¹⁶⁰

The rating of this particular fact check is “mixed.” Snopes here relies on articles which were examined in the previous section. It follows their pattern including their inaccuracies.

The framing prevents the fact check from being able to answer its own question in depth. Their given answers, which are sourced from Hogan et al. are inaccurate in terms of heredity, duration, the rights of servants and their property status. Aside from the what’s written in the what’s false section, Snopes devotes no further space to these issues and accepts them as given. They are though, what’s false.

2. Anachronism

The article is not also historical by location of chronology. To reach their judgment, Snopes references the slave codes of the mainland American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, Dred Scott vs. Sanford (1857), and racial categories that are in use today. As the article moves towards its conclusion, the tone changes from historical fact-checking, to a minimisation of Irish suffering and openly privileges the preservation of the narrative status quo. By applying later legal and racial frameworks to a 17th-century labour system, Snopes retroactively imposes categories that did not yet exist, distorting the historical reality rather

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

than clarifying it. The over simplified or incorrect answers in the “what’s false” section as well as the lack of primary sources, do not match the fact-checking standards of the IFCN. The Snopes article presents a right and a wrong to the question of “Were the Irish slaves in America?” What are the consequences of their “what’s false” section being false? Does that mean the Irish were slaves in America?

3. Snopes gets Post-Historical

“That thousands of Irish people were carried across the sea against their will and indentured to serve on plantations isn't disputed. It happened. What's in question is whether or not they are rightly referred to as "slaves.”

This reflects a focus on social capital over historical accuracy. What’s important is what to call them, and how that can be used, what that will do in the present. Not whether their conditions corresponded to a legitimately defined slavery.

Snopes further accentuates this turn by quoting John Grenham, who has been discussed in the previous sections on Hogan et al.¹⁶¹ Grenham isn’t referring to all Irish in the Caribbean or to the entire period. But Snopes’ critique doesn’t address this, favouring instead a very general rebuttal.

“Generically speaking, any form of forced labour can be called slavery. But what do we gain by doing so, besides blurring historical distinctions?”¹⁶²

Which historical distinctions? Snopes’ distinctions from their judgement are not correct. Without a factual basis, there is a lack of any distinction. A factually arrived at basis, based on available evidence, shows strong comparison and contrast. The Irish were not wholly of

¹⁶¹ Emery, “Were There Irish Slaves in America, Too?”

¹⁶² Ibid.

any status. They were not slaves as Africans were. Some of them were enslaved. Where is the value in this separation?

A status which confers social capital is important. Therefore the status of slaves, even if it also matches the evidence for a small, chronologically liminal group, such as the Irish who were enslaved in the Caribbean or other colonies, is reserved for Africans. This doesn't work historically, or in terms of fact-checking. This article did not check all the facts, it did not make use of primary sources, it did offer some form of *Wiedergutmachung* but then, it shifted tone to minimise in favour of current narratives, bringing it inline with the rest of the visibility discourse.

C. 16.03.2017 AP Fact Check

1. Introduction

The Associate Press (AP) ran a fact check called “Irish “slavery” a St. Patrick’s Day myth” in 2017.¹⁶³ This article was published within months of the Clarke editorial and Hogan’s Open Letter.

At first the AP correctly wrote that hundreds of thousands of Irish weren’t enslaved, referencing the John Martin article. Pogatchnik also notes that the Internet Meme draws in those with a racial or racist bent. While correct, there are no citations or sources, primary or otherwise. Then he writes that

¹⁶³ Shawn Pogatchnik, “AP FACT CHECK: Irish “Slavery” a St. Patrick’s Day Myth,” *AP News*, March 16, 2017, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/920e1c738df04555bccd56c09770b36d>.

“Reputable historians agree that the social media-driven reports deliberately conflate the extremely different contexts and conditions of African slavery and European indentured servitude.”¹⁶⁴

No historians are named. Further, Pogatchnik’s use of “European” indentured servitude is misleading. Unlike Irish servitude, mainland European labour systems operated under different legal and colonial frameworks. The Irish were central to this debate, not other European groups. One notable example, Heinrich von Ucheritz, was a German mercenary, and considered himself enslaved on Barbados as prisoner.

2. A Familiar Pattern

Pogatchnik offers the dichotomy of slave and indentured servant. Then writes,

“Indentured servitude, while often accompanied by years of deprivation and exploitation, offered a usually voluntary means for impoverished British and Irish people to resettle in the Americas from the 17th century to the early 20th century.”¹⁶⁵

This covers three centuries and more than one region, and ignores consent. Forced labour, especially concerning kidnapped children, and adults, as well as prisoners, and prisoners of war, did occur. Many were abducted, and sold off the boats in the Caribbean at auctions, by Ship captains who had bought the prisoners or servants from man-catchers or spirits. There are cases of indentures across more than three generations on the mainland.¹⁶⁶

Prior to 1661 it was more likely that abductees would also not have wages, or a contract, or an end date to their service or sentence. And, as discussed in the previous section, servants were a type of property, referred to as property, and treated as property. They were a

¹⁶⁴ Pogatchnik, “AP FACT CHECK: Irish “slavery” a St. Patrick’s Day myth”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Basya Kasinitz, “Life Story: Dennis and Hannah Holland - Women & the American Story,” accessed October 28, 2024, <https://wams.nyhistory.org/early-encounters/english-colonies/dennis-and-hannah-holland/>.

different type of property than African slaves. They were however still property. Pogatchnik is specifically referring to the good outcome cohort of voluntary servants, but not including the bad outcome of voluntary and involuntary servitude. Voluntary indentured servitude is a different category of labour than forced captive labour. The AP's fact-checker here treats them as one and the same in passing. Within the frame of the visibility discourse, very little else is possible.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this short article gets some things right, but ignores consent, which is very important. It is locked into the dichotomy of slaves and indentures. This results in inaccuracies. The result is favourable to protecting social capital. The indictment of the Internet Meme and Martin's article as racist is absolutely correct. The value of examining this fact check lies in its demonstration that even short articles perpetuate this oversimplified dichotomy. Even in a small sample like this one, the traces are indelible.

D. 18.06.2020 USA Today

USA Today in June of 2020 ran "Fact check: The Irish were indentured servants, not slaves."¹⁶⁷ The USA Today fact check relies almost exclusively on web content which has spun out from Hogan et al.

1. The Dichotomy - Servants and Slaves

The article is from the headline, structurally locked into the dichotomy, and uses Hogan's and Reilly's interviews from 2018 and also direct quotes to establish its fundamentals.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew Brown, USA Today. "Fact Check: The Irish Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves." USA TODAY, June 18, 2020. Accessed August 27, 2024. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/18/fact-check-irish-were-indentured-servants-not-slaves/3198590001/>.

“During their period of servitude, their treatment varied widely. Some suffered extreme violence and brutality, especially the Irish in the Caribbean, but many had avenues to pursue legal action against their masters, something never extended to the enslaved,” Matthew Reilly, an archaeologist who has studied white communities in the Caribbean.”¹⁶⁸

“Avenues to pursue legal action” is a misleading anachronism. Forcibly transported indentured servants had no legal recourse. The Irish and for a time the Scottish as well, were not afforded of the rights of the English. The fact-checker’s claim ignores the reality that many had no contracts, no fixed terms, and were effectively bound for life by circumstance. This point that Reilly makes has been answered already. The article says that

“Crucially, indentured servants were considered human beings under the law. African slaves were seen as property rather than people”

Both servants and slaves were seen as different types of property. Felons, and any other attainted people were not people under the law, neither were any who had been attainted as traitors.

2. A bibliography of the pattern and the Visibility Period

The article itself engages in no original research and relies on the simplified, and polarised commentary of the visibility period. In its conclusion, the article rules that

“Irish indentured servitude was a historical atrocity that saw thousands of Irish people subjected to unjust conditions in a brutal colonial society. The situation was far worse for African slaves who were not afforded any rights under the law and

¹⁶⁸ Matthew Brown, USA Today “Fact Check: The Irish Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves.” USA TODAY, June 18, 2020. Accessed August 27, 2024.
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/18/fact-check-irish-were-indentured-servants-not-slaves/3198590001/>.

consequently treated with historically unprecedented levels of brutality. Historians agree that the two situations, while closely linked, are distinct and not comparable. Often, efforts to do so are disingenuous and politically motivated. I rate the claim that the Irish were slaves FALSE because it is not supported by our research.”

It’s not true that the systems are not comparable. Maybe this author means comparable as well. But, in either case, the article doesn’t contain any original research. It has a visually impressive works cited list of articles. It included Investopedia as its source for indentured

Our fact-check sources:

- [Investopedia, Indentured Servitude](#)
- [Pacific Standard, No, The Irish Weren't Slaves Too](#)
- [Southern Poverty Law Center, How the Myth of the "Irish slaves" Became a Favorite Meme of Racists Online](#)
- [The Canadian Journal of Sociology, Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity](#)
- [New York Times, Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too](#)
- [PolitiFact, No, the first slaves shipped to the American colonies weren't white Irish children](#)
- [New West Indian Guide, Contesting "White Slavery" in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados](#)
- [Liam Hogan on Medium, Open Letter of Irish Academics Condemning "Irish Slave" Disinformation](#)
- [Liam Hogan on OpenDemocracy.net, 'Irish slaves': the convenient myth](#)
- [Liam Kennedy, Unhappy the Land: The Most Oppressed People Ever, the Irish?](#)
- [Liam Hogan on Medium, "Kiss me, my slave owners were Irish"](#)
- [History.com, When America Despised the Irish: The 19th Century's Refugee Crisis](#)
- [Vox, Why historians are fighting about "No Irish Need Apply" signs — and why it matters](#)
- [Guardian, The history of British slave ownership has been buried: now its scale can be revealed](#)
- [New York Times, Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too](#)
- [PolitiFact, No, the first slaves shipped to the American colonies weren't white Irish children](#)

Thank you for supporting our journalism. You can [subscribe to our print edition, ad-free app or electronic newspaper replica here.](#)

Figure 8 USA TODAY Fact Check Works Cited

servitude and had one academic article that dealt with the Caribbean, which was co-authored by one of Liam Hogan’s collaborators, Mathew Reilly.

The other 14 articles listed were journalism articles with interviews with Hogan et al. or were partners to same. This indicates that the fact-checkers stuck to the Internet, or stuck to those who stuck to the Internet for their facts and research. This backs up Brown’s critique of 2024 that this discourse is oversimplified, polarised and takes no recourse to actual archival research, such as census records, the printed laws of the Caribbean or the preserved correspondence of colonial authorities. None of these meets the IFCN guidelines and neither does this article.

3. Objectively checking facts?

While the verdict of this and other articles show that the efforts of the Internet Slavery Meme are disingenuous and politically motivated, they do not deal with the political motivations of the interventions. For instance Reilly is quoted in the article as having said

“The most damaging element of the white slavery narrative, while not taking anything away from the very real violence and brutality done to indentured servants, is that it shifts the focus away from the scale, scope, and horror of the system of race-based slavery that built this country,” Reilly said.” ¹⁶⁹

Quels dommages? Where should the focus be in trying to establish what the Irish were in the Caribbean? The answer must be on the Irish. Combine this with all of the inaccuracies that Reilly and Hogan have woven through their narratives, then look at this quote from Hogan,

“The deeper problem here is that if we don't admit to complexity in our past, how were we going to confront it in the present?” Hogan told Pacific Standard.” ¹⁷⁰

It cannot be ignored at this point that Hogan and Reilly’s work has promoted a dichotomy which is the centre of an oversimplified and polarising discourse. It prevents any nuanced or complex discussion of the complexity in the past, and is failing to confront it in the present. This fact checking article demonstrates how these fact-checks as part of the visibility discourse is grounded in cited and recycled across multiple sources to reinforce the same oversimplified narrative.

¹⁶⁹ Matthew Brown, U.S.A. Today “Fact Check: The Irish Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves.” USA TODAY, June 18, 2020. Accessed August 27, 2024.
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/18/fact-check-irish-were-indentured-servants-not-slaves/3198590001/>.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

E. 06.06.2020 Reuters

Reuters ran “Fact check: First slaves in North American colonies were not “100 white children from Ireland”¹⁷¹ in June of 2020. It dealt with a single image Meme then in circulation. The meme that Reuters is checking is the same Meme featured as Figure 5 in Chapter IV. In 2025, when following the link to its source, Reuters provides the fact check window shown below in Figure 9.

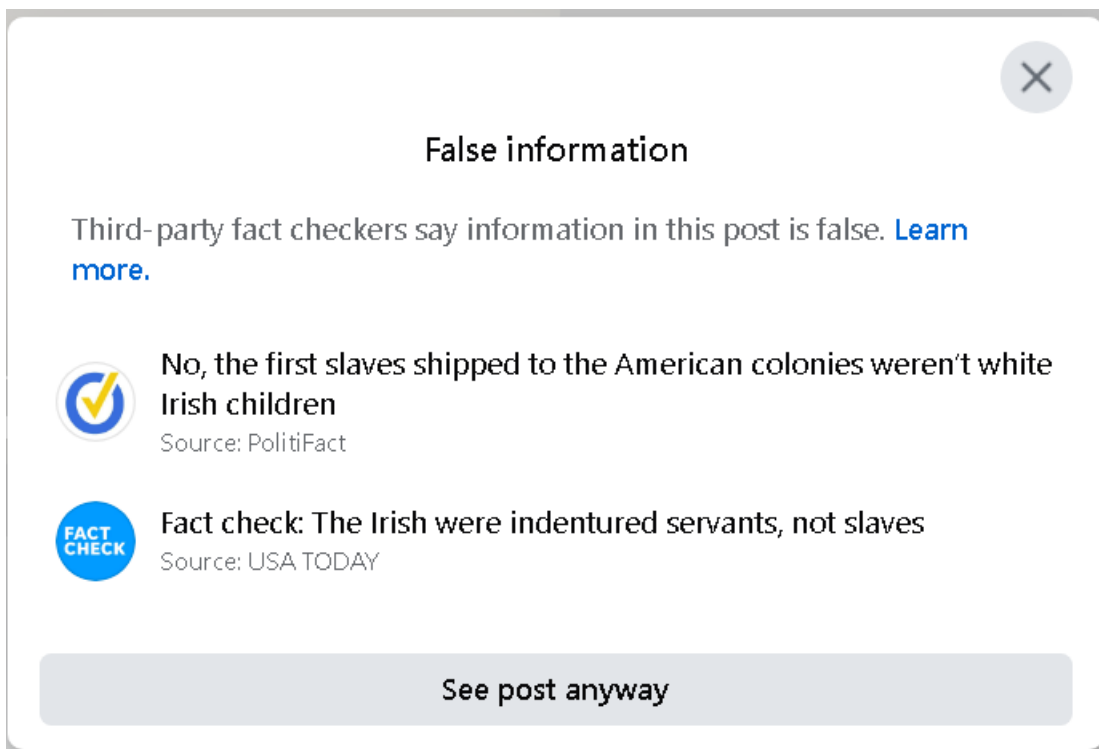


Figure 9 Facebook fact check window from viewing the article in January 2025

¹⁷¹ Reuters, “Fact Check: First Slaves in North American Colonies Were Not “100 White Children from Ireland”,” *Reuters Media*, June 19, 2020, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-fact-check-irish-slaves/fact-check-first-slaves-in-north-american-colonies-were-not-100-white-children-from-ireland-idUSKBN23O2BS/>.

While the first slaves shipped to the colonies were not white Irish children, the fact check uses Hogan's often adopted dichotomy. Note that its source is the USA Today fact check which was just discussed previously. By 2020, the discourse had become highly circular and self-referential, as evidenced by the repeated reliance on Hogan et al., and secondary sources such as the works cited page in USA Today.

The circle of tertiary sources and commentary is not historical, professional or authoritative. As a *Wiedergutmachung* it could be blamed on algorithmic interference. But people are the gate keepers of the algorithm. The fact checkers claim that their judgment proceeded from their research. No archives were disturbed in the making of these fact-checks.

1. A Graphic Meme

In fact, this fact check, is a model of a modern online article. It is filled with links to other sites. While modern hyperlinking can increase transparency, it often masks pseudo-scholarship by creating an illusion of authority.

The narrative here also displays the dichotomy where either slave or voluntary indenture are only categories available. Alan Taylor, former Department head at the University of Virginia is cited.

“Historian Alan Taylor explained that many of these indentured servants prior to 1620 “were forcibly transported either as unwanted orphans or as criminals punished for vagrancy and petty theft,” while after 1620 most were “technically volunteers”¹⁷²

¹⁷² Reuters, “Fact check: First slaves in North American colonies were not “100 white children from Ireland””

Most English colonies were started after 1620, although Jamestown was earlier. There were two known Irishmen in Jamestown. As a *Wiedergutmachung* that it's possible Reuters might be misquoting Taylor.

2. Time Period, Location, and the Consequences of Anachronism

The Reuters team notes of indentured servitude that

“...it can’t be equated with the brutal system of racialised chattel slavery that came to dominate the American agricultural economy by the turn of the 18th century.”

The turn of the 18th century could be a bit early. By the 19th century Atlantic slavery is the apex of the institution. But it also begs the questions, which period of indentured servitude are we discussing? What about other types of servitude and other times and locations? At the apex of slavery, Indenture is no longer a competitive form of Labour. Proper chronology is an issue at the heart of the dichotomy problem. Reuters applies laws from decades after the fact to support its claim, assuming a continuous, unchanging legal framework across the entire colonial period. This ignores the legal evolution of servitude and slavery, misrepresenting how labour status was defined in different decades.

3. Broad Mischaracterisations

This particular fact check veers wildly from having a relatively sedate tone and links to sources, to making completely incorrect claims.

“Though some of the first enslaved Africans were initially treated similarly to indentured servants, slave laws passed in Massachusetts in 1641 and in Virginia in 1661 stripped blacks of any freedom they had been previously given.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Reuters, “Fact check: First slaves in North American colonies were not “100 white children from Ireland””

Those Africans who were free were not enslaved or re-enslaved by laws passed in those time periods. In Massachusetts the Body of Liberties was passed in 1641, and in 1661 in Virginia were passed laws concerning runaway slaves and servants. In 1662 Virginia passed a law clarifying *Partus Sequitor Ventrem* to be the standard for establishing that the status of children was dependent on the mother.¹⁷⁴ None of those laws stripped Africans of freedoms they had previously been awarded. None had been awarded. The article states

“Considered chattel, enslaved people were bought, sold, and treated as property... This was not the case with indentured servitude”¹⁷⁵

It’s been demonstrated that servants were chattels and could be bought, sold, were treated as property etc. Reuters concludes with

“VERDICT: False. The first slaves to arrive in British North America in 1619 were not “100 white children,” but 20 African captives. Although the Irish were among the indentured servants who arrived in the colonies, indentured servitude and chattel slavery were two very different systems.”¹⁷⁶

Please note again the presence of the dichotomy and other issues discussed with similar results as before.

¹⁷⁴ William W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, From the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619. Published Pursuant to an Act of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed on the Fifth Day of February One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight* (Richmond: Pleasants, Samuel, 1823), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036018409&seq=455>, accessed August 2, 2024, 170.

¹⁷⁵ Reuters, “Fact check: First slaves in North American colonies were not “100 white children from Ireland””

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

F. 07.07.2020 AFP Canada

AFP ran “More false claims about “Irish slaves” spread on social media” in 2020.¹⁷⁷

The AFP Canada evaluated a number of different tropes from this narrative, rating them false or true. This article also follows the patterns as they have been described above.

1. Conflating slavery with indentured servitude

“The core claim that Irish workers in the colonies were slaves is false. The term “indentured servants,” is more accurate.”¹⁷⁸

This statement oversimplifies the distinctions necessary to understand the complexities of the period. It lacks distinctions which are necessary to understand the dynamism of the time period. In observing the survey data from Ryszewski and Cherry,

“Status in Montserrat's early plantation-based society was accorded by settlers’ positions as planters, indentured servants, servants, skilled labourers, exiled criminals, slaves, or small farmers.”¹⁷⁹

We can see in just this one list that there were many more possibilities than offered by the dichotomy identified here.

2. More Powerful than the English

The AFP quote Professor Kevin Kenny who was the Director of Glucksman Ireland House at NYU was quoted as saying

¹⁷⁷ Fact Check, “More False Claims About “Irish Slaves’ Spread on Social Media,” accessed August 27, 2024, <https://factcheck.afp.com/more-false-claims-about-irish-slaves-spread-social-media>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Krysta Ryszewski and John F. Cherry, “Struggles of a Sugar Society: Surveying Plantation-Era Montserrat, 1650–1850,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 19, no. 2 (2015), doi:10.1007/s10761-015-0292-7.

“These Irish settlers not only prospered but “became more economically powerful” than their Scottish and English counterparts, largely because “they knew how to be hard and efficient slave masters,”” added Kenny, showing that the claim that the Irish in Montserrat were slaves, is also false.¹⁸⁰

There were a number of Irish families who did prosper on Montserrat. They weren’t settlers or former indentures. McDonald-Beckles¹⁸¹ and Dunn¹⁸² have both pointed out that majority Irish Planters, even on Montserrat were second rate to the English. Orla Power noted in extensive recent research that

“Originally from the British Leeward Islands, this group of Irish merchants and planters, while not overtly discriminated against, were nonetheless excluded from gubernatorial positions and held in mistrust by the British establishment”¹⁸³

Furthermore, these were Old English and New English families. There was one family, the Tuites, who did lead a consortium and achieve the pinnacle of the market for Denmark. They were from an Old English family, from Westmeath, who moved through the Caribbean from Montserrat to the Danish West Indies.¹⁸⁴ Those particular families did make their fortunes, by commercially leaving the orbit of the English for the European continent.

3. More than 100,000 Irish children sold as slaves in the 1650s

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ McDonald-Beckles, “A “riotous and unruly lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” 508.

¹⁸² Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972), 130.

¹⁸³ Orla Power, “Beyond Kinship: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Community at Saint Croix, Danish West Indies,” *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, no. 5 (2007): 207, accessed February 2, 2024, www.irlandeses.org/imsla0711.htm.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 208.

The exact claim the AFP is of hundreds of thousands is false. However, thousands of children were kidnapped and taken to the colonies. They were considered by the general public of the time to have been enslaved.¹⁸⁵ It was a large enough issue to inspire legislation in England since the 1640s. Laws were passed and even possibly observed in Barbados to protect English children from the 1650s on.¹⁸⁶ The laws existed because of cases of kidnapping and their existence in the public eye. Richard Hayes Phillips is an independent scholar who has documented, but without peer review, the cases of thousands of children who were taken to Virginia and to Maryland from the 1660s on.¹⁸⁷ Despite this, the AFP write

“Although conditions were very poor, and many were taken against their will, it is false to describe them as slaves, as they had terms of servitude and would be free once it had ended, unlike African slaves of the time who would remain enslaved for life, as described by historians Handler and Reilly, and in Beverley’s 1722 “History of Virginia”¹⁸⁸

These Children were kidnapped and forced to labour as qualified chattels, of whom 50% or more would die in the first year of the seasoning period, and the rest would suffer equally atrocious casualty rates. According to this discourse they were not to be considered slaves, because 1 in 10 of them might eventually live to be free, and because others had it worse.

¹⁸⁵ Lashua, Kristen McCabe. *Children at the Birth of Empire: British Law, Liberty, and the Global Migration of Destitute Children, C. 1607-1760*. Routledge research in early modern history. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023.174ff

¹⁸⁶ William Bently, *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados: Made and Enacted Since the Reducement of the Same, Unto the Authority of the Common-Wealth of England. And Set Forth the Seventh Day of September, in the Year of Our Lord God 1652, by the Honourable Governour of the Said Island, the Worshipfull the Council, and Gentlemen of the Assembly. Together with the Charter of the Said Island, or Articles Made on the Surrender, and Rendition of the Same. Published for the Publick Good* (Will. Bently, and are to be sould by him at the India Bridge, 1654), Ibid, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Richard Hayes Phillips, *Without Indentures: Index to White Slave Children in Colonial Court Records [Maryland and Virginia]*, Paperback edition (Baltimore Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2013).

¹⁸⁸ Fact Check, “More false claims about “Irish slaves’ spread on social media”

This line of reasoning is irrational. It substitutes the protection of social capital over what appears to be a relatively simple issue.

4. African slaves were more expensive than Irish

The AFP wrote

“There is no evidence to support this claim. In fact, it appears that African slaves were more economical than white indentured servants of the time.

“Planters eventually turned to black slaves as their principal source of bound labour,” wrote economist David Galenson. “The transition from servants to slaves, which occurred at different times in these regions, and at different rates, appears explicable in terms of the changing relative costs of the two types of labour faced by colonial planters.”

This citation from Galenson means that the costs changed. They changed from what they were before. Before, when slaves were more expensive than servants.

The literature of the period from Dunn, Sheridan, McDonald Beckles and Williams, all show that indentures were cheaper than slaves until they weren't. A letter from George Downing¹⁸⁹ gives the plan for a market entry to be first: the purchase of servants, and then the purchase of slaves when sufficient capital has been acquired. For the first period of settlement, slaves were absolutely more expensive than Servants. Once the Dutch-Portuguese colony of Pernambuco burns in the fires of civil war, and the English gain access to the slave market, the price of slaves drops. This made the terrible transportation possible. In the beginning of colonisation, the English did not really have access to slaves as they were competing against the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Spanish. The price of a

¹⁸⁹ Downing College Cambridge, “Downing Publishes Legacies of Enslavement Report | Downing College Cambridge,” accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.dow.cam.ac.uk/news/downing-publishes-legacies-enslavement-report>.

slave was far more than a servant. Which evidence would the AFP have needed to check? They have Galenson. They appear to not understand the implications of their own citations. On page 117 of McDonald-Beckles' *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados*, it's showed that compared to servant costs that

“Planters paid over twice these prices for African slaves”¹⁹⁰

The entire switch to slaves from servants is predicated on the changes in costs. Here especially, the answers were available in the evidence that was provided by professional historians.

G. Conclusion: Rating = Mixed.

This chapter's purpose was to check the state of the art during the visibility period concerning the fact-checkers, who do not wholly represent journalism or academia but in theory might represent aspects of both. They are very often journalistic sources, but their job is to investigate the facts being reported according to schemas that are supposed to ferret out untruths and establish truth, in a way similar to, but according to strict criteria which mimic historical research, when the criteria are followed. Here they were not.

The structural changes that the Internet has made to print media and public history may have well changed fact-checking at news and magazine outlets as well as elsewhere. The results are fairly judged here. They contain some truth, but they are substandard. Some, like USA Today or Reuters, or the AFP, are particularly egregious. As a *Wiedergutmachung*, the fact-checkers assigned to these cases alone could simply not have had the resources.

¹⁹⁰ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 117.

None of these articles observes the 5 commitments or all 31 criteria of the IFCN. Each violated core IFCN principles, including:

- Failure to use primary sources – Instead of archival records, they relied on a small set of secondary sources from the visibility discourse itself.
- Misleading binary framing – The rigid slave vs. servant dichotomy ignored the historical spectrum of unfreedom.
- Circular sourcing – They overwhelmingly cited Hogan et al. or journalists who had already internalised his framing, reinforcing a self-referential loop.
- Lack of chronological and contextual accuracy – Many fact checks applied anachronistic legal standards or selectively used laws that did not reflect the period in question.

In short, rather than objectively checking the historical record, these articles recycled and legitimised a flawed but easy to find narrative. Their function was not to correct distortions, but to preserve a dominant discourse, even at the expense of historical complexity.

The use of only secondary and further sources disqualifies them all from their own set of criteria. It establishes that lazy journalism was a factor in the discourse. This in itself though balances the idea that the Internet creates structural problems that make history online unprofessional. Who is to blame when a journalist who doesn't research a subject gets bad information from an algorithmic whirlpool such as this? But what if the structure is what makes for the lazy journalism via too many deadlines, and not enough money, resources, or attention? It could be viewed as a chicken and egg style problem. But this is only if the observer is willing to excuse the journalists. I am not.

Reilly, Hogan and McAtackney, were the main sources used in the news articles, which seem to be where the fact-checkers checked. There is a canon of articles from the visibility period that feeds the rest of the articles, and restricts ideas that do not fit its patterns. In terms of practice, the ouroboros-like consumption of editorial articles produced in this case,

a feedback effect that restricted accuracy. This may have been on purpose. Accuracy is not always the goal of this discourse.

This chapter demonstrates that fact-checkers, intended to preserve historical accuracy, instead participated in the post-historical discourse, where preserving the dominant narrative mattered more than factual rigor. If fact-checkers are meant to guard truth, then who is fact-checking the fact-checkers?

VII. The Academics and Special Guests

A. Introduction

These Memes influenced hundreds of thousands of people, and also mobilised thousands as well in opposition to the ideas they transmitted. The interventions and respondents above and below were combating the Meme to preserve social capital. In doing so, they made the same errors or oversimplifications that they were criticising in the meme.

1. Contents

This sections examines an academic response from Handler and Mathew Reilly, that was written by at least one academic. Then comes a history magazine piece from Donoghue that attempts to appease the respondents and shows the difficulty of serving two conflicting ideas. Thereafter demonstrating the fallout from that article and the aftermath between two of the academics in question. There is a strong hint that all is maybe not well in academia where this subject is concerned. The end features a 2019 conference with Anthea Butler's giving an address that partially confirms the post-historical aspect of this thesis.

B. 01.01.2017 Handler and Reilly in 2017 “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados.”

1. Introduction

Jerome S. Handler and Matthew C. Reilly published this paper in 2017.¹⁹¹ While they are academics, neither is a historian or a legal scholar. Handler is a significant scholar on the subject of anthropology and Barbados. Reilly studied anthropology, social science, and American studies. Their goal was to “challenge the notion of “white” or “Irish slavery” by

¹⁹¹ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados”³⁶

examining the differences in social and legal status between servitude and slavery in early English America.”¹⁹² The authors further state “referring to white servants as slaves deflects the experiences of millions of persons of African birth or descent.” This is the same pattern as seen above from Journalists and the same goal. Protecting the experiences and predominating narrative.

Handler and Reilly’s article had the potential to add much-needed nuance to the discourse surrounding servitude and slavery in Barbados. However, the analysis is fundamentally weakened by critical omissions and a reliance on oversimplified legal and historical claims. While positioned as a socio-legal comparison, it falls short of engaging with the depth of evidence required for meaningful insight. Given that this is one of the few academic works addressing this topic during the visibility period, it warrants a detailed critique to evaluate its contributions and limitations

2. Undercutting their own premise.

Handler and Reilly are correct that in a zero-sum view of available human sympathy, the “Whites were slaves too” narrative deflects attention from Atlantic slavery. It is also absolutely true that it can be used by revisionists and racists to not only force a redistribution of social capital, it can be used to simply deny it outright. The idea of white or Irish slavery lays claim to social capital (they refer to symbolic capital) that for these two authors is normally and in an absolute sense reserved for African Americans. The Internet Slavery Meme inaccurately equates Atlantic slavery and the Irish experience in the Caribbean.

However, they write,

¹⁹² Ibid, 32.

“Despite general similarities in their material lives and work regimens, it is difficult, if not futile, to meaningfully compare the living conditions of slaves and servants over the seventeenth century. The “white slave” narrative largely hinges on the physical treatment of servants and the material conditions of their existence. Although there is evidence for harsh, even sadistic, treatment inflicted on both groups, there are simply insufficient qualitative/literary or quantitative data to make a thorough comparison.”¹⁹³

If there’s not enough data to make a thorough comparison, then how could anyone favour any conclusion? Their answer is they can therefore only perform a sociological and legal analysis. Dismissing the lived experience of servants hamstring the analysis from the beginning. Furthermore, unless it’s shown that the laws were absolutely followed, (or ignored) then a legal analysis in history of this phenomena requires a comparison of what the laws were to what they did. If the lived experience simply isn’t available, then the analysis is going to be incomplete.

3. Is there a lack of evidence?

The authors state that the evidence to reconstruct the lived experience of servants doesn’t exist. Nini Rodgers has made comparisons in diet, clothes, sleeping arrangements and other factors.¹⁹⁴

Abbot Emerson Smith says “The evidences of fair treatment which have been presented in this chapter are matched by many examples of fantastic miseries.”¹⁹⁵ Dunn also wrote that “there is a good deal of revealing information about slave conditions and slave revolts in the English Caribbean during the seventeenth century.”¹⁹⁶ Bridenbaugh wrote of the

¹⁹³ Ibid.38

¹⁹⁴ Rodgers, *Ireland, slavery and anti-slavery*, 27.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, “The Irish Are Ascendant Again,” 251.

¹⁹⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and slaves*, preface / xviii.

servants' experience in comparison¹⁹⁷ and furthered that by quoting Pere Biet who directly witnessed life throughout the Leewards.¹⁹⁸

Hillary McDonald-Beckles wrote his doctoral thesis on the lived experience of servants and slaves in Barbados and published it as the first deep survey of White West-Indian servitude in 1989. The book was an in-depth treatment of the subject.¹⁹⁹ It is cited throughout Caribbean history. McDonald-Beckles' work alone proves that the authors are incorrect as to the state of the evidence necessary. Taken with the others, we have mentioned above, it's a capstone to a large body of evidence. The omission of McDonald-Beckles' extensive work on the lived experiences of servants and slaves in Barbados, which is an authoritative primary source analysis, renders Handler and Reilly's argument incomplete and fundamentally weakened. Furthermore, Reilly's journalistic efforts with Liam Hogan which were discussed already, make repeated recourse to Akenson's oft misquoted statement about the "galaxy of difference" in the status and conditions of indentured servants and slaves in the Caribbean. In those analyses, the lived experience of servants was treated as if there was enough information for a meaningful comparison. Reilly has repeatedly stated to the press and in his own work in conjunction with Hogan and McAtackney that although servant's lives were often horrible, it was Africans who were treated like livestock.

Handler & Reilly's claim that there is "insufficient evidence" to compare the experiences of servants and slaves is ultimately misleading. They appear to mean that no single dataset allows a comprehensive, numerical comparison, but this overlooks a substantial body of primary sources, from legal cases to contemporary descriptions, that make meaningful comparisons possible. Scholars like McDonald-Beckles, Rodgers, and Dunn provide ample

¹⁹⁷ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 106ff.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., *ibid*, 107.

¹⁹⁹ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 14.

evidence of the material conditions of servitude, which Handler & Reilly sidestep rather than engage

4. Heredity

The authors state that “Servitude was not heritable.”²⁰⁰ Servitude was not passed on through English inheritance laws. Illegitimate children could not inherit under English law. Neither though could slaves. The authors’ assertion that servitude was “not heritable” neglects well-documented instances of multi-decade liens placed on the children of servants, which were placed because of their parent or parents’ condition. Servant children, including illegitimate offspring, were not “born free” but were often bonded to labour under their parent or parents’ master’s terms for significant portions of their lives. Such oversights suggest a superficial engagement with the legal and lived realities of the period, weakening the credibility of their conclusions. Foreign servants’ children were bonded well before they could consent until their 20s. Mixed race indentures could be bonded until their early thirties in some colonies. English servants’ children would be bonded until sometime in their twenties depending on the colony.

Atlantic slaves also can not inherit their parents’ status in that sense either. They are not considered people in law, or English subjects or colonial citizens. They could not conduct business and they couldn’t truly own or inherit or pass down property. They were not subjects. They could not own property. They could not testify in court. They couldn’t legally marry as opposed to slaves under Spanish control. They couldn’t sign contracts. Their status was *de facto* hereditary, but it’s not legally inherited. It was a status assigned by law through the use of legal fictions. In that sense, once the law was amended in Virginia in 1662, it was the law itself that directed the status of the servant’s child, based on the

²⁰⁰ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados” 39

mother's status. This is not a true inheritance in law: Enslaved status was imposed through statute rather than inheritable right, making it a legally mandated condition rather than a true inheritance. This iterates the point that the comparisons of children's status in this debate are equally misunderstood, if not completely flawed. There is a legal difference in a declared state that you assume based on that of your parent or parents, and one which you legally inherit.

The status of servants' children and the condition of slavery were both imposed on the child through the law, and not actually inherited. It's a trick of the usage of the word and an equivocation of the lay use of inherited vs. the assignation of a status based on a factor such as parentage. It is a tremendous inconsistency that is repeated throughout the discourse. Insisting on the heredity of Atlantic slavery, and then insisting that the indentured children didn't inherit the status of their parents when the mechanism of assigning that status was the same.

5. The Rights of the Englishman

Handler and Reilly write

“Taking them at their word, Rivers and Foyle were unfairly arrested and badly mistreated in Barbados, but they could still claim legal rights as Englishmen, something no enslaved African could do.”²⁰¹

At the time of Rivers and Foyle, Many Irish could also not claim legal rights as Englishmen. Neither could felons or non-citizen prisoners of war. Enslaved Africans were not Englishmen. But many English men and women subjected to transportation were also no longer considered alive to the law.

²⁰¹ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” 38.

Handler and Reilly echo Hogan et al. in asserting that Barbadian laws provided servants with legal recourse regardless of national origins.

“Additionally, Barbadian laws that affected servants did not differentiate among them based on national origins, implicitly providing all servants, including the Irish, with similar legal recourse.”²⁰²

If true, this assumption relies on an idealised reading of colonial legal structures rather than actual practice. The right to petition a magistrate was limited to contractual issues and a weak safeguard at best. Handler & Reilly’s claim that legal recourse was universal thus abstracts legal theory from the lived reality of power structures in Barbados. This distinction, between legal principle and historical practice, is precisely where their analysis falls short.

Firstly, the evidence must show whether it’s not true that all servants had similar legal recourse. The laws of 1652 and 1661, explicitly differentiated between nations and status groups such as the Scottish and English. McDonald-Beckles has also shown that in general servants had only one right: to petition a magistrate to uphold their contract.²⁰³

6. Were there national delineations?

Before the accession of Scotland to the Commonwealth, the Scots have reverted to independence and the Irish were attainted in rebellion.²⁰⁴ Aliens, declared rebels, and infidels (according to *Butts vs. Penny 1677*) did not have the rights of Englishmen.²⁰⁵ The laws of England are a decentralised heterogeneous body of law going back hundreds of

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 5ff.

²⁰⁴ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 56.

²⁰⁵ G. J. Hand, *English Law in Ireland, 1290-1324*, Cambridge studies in English legal history (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 188.

years. They are not all represented in the specific codes of Barbados as set down in the 1640s, 1650s, or 1660s. They are in separate places and operate together.

The laws of 1652, and 1661 from Barbados and England refer to and delineate, the English nation, the Scottish nation, the Hebrew nation, Aliens, Foreigners, Infidels, Denizens etc.

A law of 1652 signed on October 7, 1652 by Daniel Searle says

“No person shall presume to bring any children to be sold as servants of the English Nation to this island under the age of 14 years...”²⁰⁶

On 3 December of 1652, Governor Searle also signed

“It is therefore hereby further enacted and ordained by the authority and consent aforesaid, that the late prisoners of war and all others of the Scottish nation, lately arrived, may enjoy the same benefit, liberty, and privilege of the act and all others of the island equal with any, the servants of the English and any thing heretofore to the contrary, notwithstanding.”

This is a clear national delineation, which shows just two examples directly related to servitude. After the English Restoration, the laws had been amended by adding the text

“or the dominions belonging thereunto”

This would then cover all the Crown’s dominions.

The distinctions between aliens and subjects proceeds from the beginnings of English law. Blackstone wrote

²⁰⁶ Bently, *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados: Made and Enacted Since the Reducement of the Same, Unto the Authority of the Common-wealth of England. And Set Forth the Seventh Day of September, in the Year of Our Lord God 1652, by the Honourable Governour of the Said Island, the Worshipfull the Council, and Gentlemen of the Assembly. Together with the Charter of the Said Island, Or Articles Made on the Surrender, and Rendition of the Same. Published for the Publick Good*, Ibid, 16.

"The first and most obvious division of the people is into aliens and natural-born subjects. Natural-born subjects are such as are born within the dominions of the crown of England, that is, within the ligeance, or as it is generally called, the allegiance of the king; and aliens, such as are born out of it. Allegiance is the tie, or ligamen, which binds the subject to the king, in return for that protection which the king affords the subject."²⁰⁷

If an Alien or an infidel (by law) found themselves in the power of the English (on their territory or in their custody) they didn't have the modern protections of an equal rights clause. The first 400 years of Irish-English colonisation history show this in particular with respect to the Irish.

The statement that Barbadian laws that affected servants did not differentiate between nationalities is not accurate in light of archival research into the laws of 1652, 1661 or 1688, or the standing laws of the English regime at the time. The laws do differentiate between nations. English law differentiates between subjects and aliens. It is the first and foremost division of English law. Barbados colonial laws, also differentiated. These claims demonstrates a fundamental misreading of English and colonial law. By ignoring the legal distinctions between subjects, aliens, and infidels, the authors fail to grasp the heterogeneity of seventeenth-century legal frameworks and the implications for servitude in Barbados.

7. What the Law Says

A. Petitioning Parliament

Rivers and Foyle were English royalists that petitioned parliament that their rights were being violated by what they called their enslavement. In concluding Handler and Reilly wrote

²⁰⁷ Blackstone, William, Sir, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book the First* (Project Gutenberg), 354.

“The rights that servants could claim in Barbados were often muted in the face of social realities and their relative powerlessness in the face of a judicial and legal system that heavily favoured the planter class (e.g., Beckles 1989:86–88), but there was no mechanism, legal or customary, whereby any slave could petition the governor or legislature of Barbados, let alone the English/British parliament, for anything.”²⁰⁸

This belies what petitioning Parliament means. Anyone can write a petition and send it to a member. That member can attempt to read it. The question is will Parliament hear it? The right to be heard is repeatedly referenced in pre-modern and early modern English law. To have a voice and to be heard, is repeated in the records. In Thurloe, it’s written that Parliament only really debated over whether they had to consider the Rivers and Foyle petition at all. The debate was on whether the petitioners had the right to be heard, or whether Parliament could table the petition. This was its eventual fate. Foyle and Rivers couldn’t petition Parliament either.

B. As Property

Handler and Reilly state that in regard to slaves

“They were regarded as private property over which owners claimed absolute authority, a fundamental characteristic of slave status in all New World slave societies.”

In early law slaves were regarded as chattels absolute. Servants were chattels personal. The level of control was determined by law or by absence of laws restricting behaviour. The control of chattels personal were limited by a contract or set of conditions. They could though be treated as chattels absolute up to the fulfilment of the contract. The master class

²⁰⁸ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” 39.

in the West Indies exhibited exactly that control over their servants as well. McDonald Beckles has written

“Unlike the English master, the West Indian planter, on purchasing a servant, by the “custom of the country” obtained total control over the servant, that is, not only his labouring hours, but also his nonlabouring hours. ... which in effect meant that the total control so characteristic of black slavery was applied directly to white servants as well.”²⁰⁹

Orlando Patterson noted of the early period of colonisation that

“The independent constituent role of natal alienation in the emergence of slavery is vividly illustrated by the early history of slavery in America. Winthrop D. Jordan has shown that in the early decades of the seventeenth century there were few marked differences in the conception of black and white servitude, the terms “slave” and “servant” being used synonymously. The power of the master over both black and white servants was near total: both could be whipped and sold”²¹⁰

Secondly, what Handler and Reilly wrote above is framed as being for all New World slave societies. This is in general not true for the entire Caribbean. The Spanish system did not have exactly these characteristics. The British did eventually shut out slaves from the benefits of conversion so they could not claim Christian treatment. The Spanish did not. In the Spanish colonies the Church was capable of intervention. Slaves could directly petition the church and be heard. Kristen Block notes that interventions for Isabelle Criolla, and other slaves succeeded.²¹¹ The Church in Spanish colonies had a higher authority than that of the slave’s owner. Marriage wasn’t just a legal contract but a sacrament with a higher

²⁰⁹ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 71-72ff.

²¹⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 7.

²¹¹ Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*, Early American places (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012). 20ff

standing than the law of ownership. The *Siete Partidas* specifically protected the marriages of slaves. Spanish slave society was larger, and more legally developed than that of the British. Whether those laws were always followed is not presented here. But Block has shown some instances where they were.

C. Forced Labour

Handler and Reilly also reiterate

“It is relevant to stress, in light of the “white slave” narrative, that every Barbadian law pertaining to servants applied to all servants regardless of country of origin or ethnicity, and no law ever distinguished between those who had come voluntarily and those who had been forced into servitude.”²¹²

This doesn’t match even a cursory reading of the laws of Barbados. The 1661 law has a specific clause to provide relief kidnapped or abducted people. It’s purpose is stated to be to prevent non-penal servants being taken to Barbados against their will.²¹³ It is possibly found in the 1652 laws as well. Whether a Magistrate would grant that relief is another issue. The presence of such a law which would distinguish voluntary and kidnapped servants, directly contradicts the authors.

Thus, English law and Barbadian laws differentiate based on national origin.²¹⁴ Ethnicity is not a concept that had been introduced. Here Handler and Reilly approach consent. Which is often ignored by other respondents. Handler and Reilly mention it, only to say the law didn’t take it into account. Then they wrote that

²¹² Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” 42.

²¹³ Barbados, *Acts of Assembly, passed in the Island of Barbadoes, From 1648, to 1718*, 21.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

“Prisoners of war and political prisoners could be sold for up to ten years of service, much longer than the customary five to seven years.”²¹⁵

These are the non-consenting servants. The laws distinguishes between them by allowing different sentences. The laws and customs of the country differentiated between voluntary and involuntary servants as noted by Oldmixon in 1708, which was also cited by Newman in *A New World of Labour*.²¹⁶

The contrast between the law and the reality is often found in the historical record. According to McDonald-Beckles, acting Governor Stede wrote the Lord of Trade and Plantations in October of 1686 concerning hundreds of forced indentures with forged contracts. The Lords instructed him by July of 1687 to leave them to serve 10 years, as they were probably better off where they were.²¹⁷

D. Again

The authors further write of the custom of the country that

“Regardless of how this law was actually followed or enforced, no slave was ever party to the “custom of the country,” slaves were never given contracts, and Africans did not come to Barbados voluntarily.”

Handler and Reilly’s treatment of customary law recycles existing misconceptions, offering an interpretation that fails to account for the documented heterogeneity of colonial legal practices. Customary law in the British legal tradition extended beyond mere contracts and encompassed broader customs rooted in antiquity, continuance, certainty, and

²¹⁵ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” 35.

²¹⁶ Newman, Simon P. *A New World of Labour: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic. The Early Modern Americas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2016, 74.

²¹⁷ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 52.

reasonableness.²¹⁸ By reducing complex systems to overly rigid binaries, the authors inadvertently obscure the very dynamics they set out to illuminate. This misstep reveals a lack of depth in their engagement with the legal frameworks of the period. It also doesn't tell us what the Irish were. In the same essay Handler and Reilly wrote that

“However, in early Barbados, Virginia, and Maryland the “custom of the country” applied solely to voluntary servants who had not paid for their passages and had arrived without written contracts or indentures.”²¹⁹

Overall this is completely unworkable. How would the Magistrates on Barbados differentiate between involuntary and voluntary servants - who fell under Custom of the Country - when Handler and Reilly stipulate there was never a law to differentiate voluntary from involuntary servants? This offhand or uninformed treatment of customary law from the authors is a standard among historians that masks how customary laws functioned in the colonies. This has been recently pointed out by Angela Austin of the University of Texas. She wrote

“For many decades the bulk of historians discussing the indentured servant trade have casually stated that servants would either bring official contracts with them, or they would be indentured “according to the custom of the country.”²²⁰

²¹⁸ Giles Jacob, *A New Law-Dictionary: Containing, the Interpretation and Definition of Words and Terms Used in the Law, and Also the Whole Law, and the Practice Thereof, Under All the Heads and Titles of the Same Together with Such Informations Relating Thereto, as Explain the History and Antiquity of the Law, and Our Manners, Customs, and Original Government Abstracted from All Dictionaries, Abridgments, Institutes, Reports, Year-Books, Charters, Registers, Chronicles, and Histories, Published to This Time, and Fitted for the Use of Barristers, Students, and Practisers of the Law, Members of Parliament, and Other Gentlemen, Justices of Peace, Clergymen, &c* (London In the Savoy: Printed by E. and R. Nutt and R. Gosling (assigns of E. Sayer Esq.) for J. and J. Knapton [and 11 others], 1729), 202.

²¹⁹ Handler and Reilly, “Contesting “White Slavery” in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados,” 41.

²²⁰ Angela K. Austin, “Capitalism, Colonial Expansion, and Forced Child Indenture in the British Atlantic, 1618-1776” (PhD, University of Texas, Spring 2024), accessed March 11, 2024, https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/history_dissertations/1/, 113.

Austin further states of the authorities at the time that

“Essentially, by reframing these dubious indentures as legally contracted agreements, colonial courts imbued them with a façade of legitimacy, thereby sanitising the illicit system”²²¹

8. The Pattern re-emerges: The System of forced labour

Handler and Reilly also write

“The two labour systems in Barbados, servitude and slavery, were early recognised in the island’s laws (e.g., Jennings 1654; Hall 1764) and significant differences emerged in how European and African labourers were categorised and governed, in addition to how racial features were associated with labouring status. These laws provide clear evidence of the explicit distinctions between servants and slaves, regardless of how the laws were enforced in practice.”

Handler and Reilly of 2017 note that they see two systems of Labour on Barbados. They posit rights and representation in law for Europeans. Why they use the term European to refer to an British issue in the English and later British Caribbean is unexplained.

At times, they claim the laws either make explicit clear distinction or no clear legal distinctions between slaves and servants. This inconsistency reveals a lack of engagement with the very legal codes they purport to analyse, as exemplified by the 1652 and 1661 laws, which do distinguish between national origins, servitude conditions, and even issues of consent but never specifically say slavery is for Africans only and servitude is for whites. Such contradictions undermine the credibility of their argument and highlight a superficial engagement with the laws or legal realities of the period.

²²¹ Austin, “Capitalism, Colonial Expansion, And Forced Child Indenture In The British Atlantic, 1618-1776,” Ibid. 116.

The methodology employed in this article relies heavily on secondary sources while dismissing a wealth of primary legal evidence that directly challenges its conclusions. This selective engagement with the historical record undermines the authors' attempt at a comparative analysis, leaving their argument incomplete.

Aside from the direct laws of 1652 and 1661, Handler himself wrote one year prior to his paper with Reilly,

“From the founding of Barbados, no law defined the status of slaves in the colony. With one exception enacted in 1668, when Barbados had already passed laws regulating slave behaviour, there was never such a law. Yet people identified as such in official documents, early laws, private correspondence, travellers' accounts, deeds and wills, and so forth became a crucial part of the island's social and economic system.”²²²

“No law defined the status of slaves in the colony... there was never such a law.” 2016's Handler is not alone in this. In 2018 Jennifer Morgan wrote

“Built on the foundations of English legal traditions concerning the regulation of vagabonds and so-called masterless men, the 1661 Barbados slave code was the first comprehensive law passed in the English colonies to regulate the enslaved population, but it did so in the absence of a legal definition of who, what category of person, was enslaved.”²²³

Taunya Banks also wrote in 2008 that

²²² Handler, “Custom and law: The status of enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Barbados,” 235.

²²³ Jennifer L. Morgan, “Partus Sequitur Ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (2018): 2, doi:10.1215/07990537-4378888.

“Virginia, one of the first colonies to formulate racial definitions, did not attempt to statutorily define these categories until the early eighteenth century”²²⁴

In other developing English colonies with slavery they were reluctant to use the term “slave.” The earliest slaves in Bermuda were Native American and African indentures with 99 year terms.²²⁵ They were slaves, with contracts. The Bermudans became enslavers of men, but were reticent to admit it.

2016’s Handler was very clear that slavery in Barbados was based on the custom of the country as extended to slaves, and was extraordinarily implicit. 2017’s paper says that the custom of the country was only for voluntary servants and slavery in Barbados was delineated by law, denoted as separate from servitude specifically, and explicit. 2017’s Handler was paired with Reilly and directly connected to Hogan et al.

Dividing one system with degrees of labour in two complete systems is a lot of work. In this paper that seems to have been done not because it matches past or best practice. If though, the purpose of the article as stated is to protect the social capital that is under threat from the Internet Slavery Meme, then it is at least explained, if not justified.

9. Conclusion

Those academics who signed Liam Hogan’s 2016 open letter didn’t publish on the subject. This article best fits as an academic continuation of Hogan et al., (of which Reilly is a part) and their arguments. The Internet Slavery Meme and reactions to it jeopardise the stability of social capital of existing narratives. This was directly stated as the reason that Handler

²²⁴ Taunya Banks, “Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key’s Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialised Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia,” *Faculty Scholarship*, 2008, 802, https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/fac_pubs/52.

²²⁵ Virginia Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616-1782* (University of Missouri Press, 1999), <https://books.google.de/books?id=lpv6uT4k47kC>, 49.

and Reilly say their paper was written.²²⁶ Handler and Reilly in 2017 contradict themselves and then contradict Handler's own paper from 2016 on the legal status and delineation of slaves. There is no explanation for the switch. Their later position is not supported by an examination of the laws in question.

Although their analysis dismisses the de facto treatment of servants due a perceived lack of evidence, it is presented as a socio-legal analysis. No cases, or case-law was cited. Neither author has a background in 17th century English, Scottish, Irish or colonial law. This article displays a lack of familiarity with standard terminology of English law and the heterogeneous nature of colonial law. They made critical errors in statements on heredity, inheritance, the rights of Englishmen, and what the law contains. Those errors are in statements that underpin their argument. Therefore although this is an academic article in form, it cannot be considered a professional historical legal analysis. It is rather a paper written by professionals who are out of their field. By echoing oversimplified legal distinctions without critically engaging with primary sources, Handler and Reilly inadvertently reinforce the same reductive binaries that have long plagued discussions of Atlantic labour systems. Such an approach risks further entrenching a flawed narrative, rather than addressing the complex realities of servitude and slavery in the Caribbean. This pattern of oversimplification and polarisation aligns closely with the errors commonly found in non-academic articles, diminishing the paper's potential contribution to scholarly discourse.

The enslavement of the Irish is vulnerable to instrumentalisation and can be misused, as warned by Akenson. In this Handler and Reilly are also correct. The narrative is easy to weaponise. The best way however to ensure against that is a scrupled meticulously written

²²⁶ Handler and Reilly, "Contesting "White Slavery" in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," 30.

history that is logically coherent and presents the facts and information and counter arguments from primary sources whenever possible.

Ultimately, Handler and Reilly's article repackages flawed arguments from popular discourse into a framework that appears academic but lacks the rigor necessary to substantiate its claims. Far from offering a corrective to the Internet Slavery Meme, this work perpetuates its own set of inaccuracies, rendering it more of a rhetorical exercise than a substantive contribution.

Furthermore, the contradictions between Handler's 2016 work and this later intervention suggest that accuracy was secondary to the need to stabilise a social narrative. This is a hallmark of a post-historical condition: when factual historical engagement is overtaken by the strategic utility of a narrative. Rather than debunking the meme with historical rigor, this work mirrors the very simplifications it critiques, reinforcing a dichotomy that was never so clear in the historical record.

C. 07.07.2017 Donoghue and "The Curse of Cromwell"

1. Donoghue himself

John Donoghue revisited the Irish Slavery Debate in July 2017. He was an associate professor at Loyola University Chicago specialising in the early modern Atlantic World. His article bears examination as an example that doesn't fully follow the established pattern of the other interventions.²²⁷

2. Irish captives as Nationalist Propaganda

In "The curse of Cromwell" Donoghue presents historiographical research. This contrasts with the other discourse of the visibility period which has been shown to be mostly

²²⁷ Donoghue, "The Curse of Cromwell"

commentary. He noted that the 19th century estimates of the number of Irish transported by Cromwell to the West Indies varied from 10,000 to 130,000.²²⁸ The number increases concomitantly with the demands of Irish nationalists as the 19th century progresses. He connects the 19th century histories he mentions with the drive to independence of the early 20th century.²²⁹ Historiographically, this is a crucial piece of evidence. Why?

Despite 19th century exaggerations, this shows that some were making use of the Irish in the Caribbean, long before the Internet existed. This argument is a lynchpin to assessing the post-historical as a state in which we could find ourselves on this issue. If we've been here before, so to speak, it calls into question whether there is anything novel about the visibility period. In the end, the speed, scale, and totality of the ophelialogical shift, are the other side of the *Wiedergutmachung*. We haven't been here before. Not like this. History is used to argue politics. But the history has been left behind, while the historians turned activists argue the politics. And the issue could be said to be the consequences of arriving at the point where the history doesn't matter anyone. That that might be a cyclical point, arrived at and departed from, wouldn't detract from its existence. In fact, those cycles in view of the speed and scale of modern information would merit the examination. This adds some importance to a relatively short article by Donoghue. He also notes Hogan et al. and their contribution to the debate. He accepts, and problematically does not engage Hogan's work.

3. Slippery Slopes

One can see an overtly political interpretation of the Internet Slavery Meme,

“Although the Republican party and its ideological handlers in the right-wing media have long stoked racist resentment, now white nationalists, having become part of

²²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²²⁹ Ibid.

President Donald Trump's base of support, have revived overt bigotry as a mainstream force in American political culture. The Irish slave meme cannot be understood apart from this political context."²³⁰

While Donoghue is correct that the Irish slavery meme was weaponised in right-wing political discourse, his framing suggests a level of novelty that does not fully account for the meme's deeper historical roots. The meme did not emerge in response to Trump's presidency. it was already gaining traction in the early 2000s, driven by shifts in Internet discourse and the culture war over historical narratives. By attributing its rise primarily to contemporary American politics, Donoghue downplays the pre-existing structural conditions that allowed the meme to flourish, reinforcing a surface-level analysis rather than a deeper historiographical critique. There are also other countries in the diaspora, where the Irish population might differ from the American.

4. Liarnising Hogan

Donoghue begins by paying tribute to Liam Hogan

"Hogan has moved beyond his on-line investigation into the Irish slave meme with careful historical research to demonstrate the clear differences between Irish bondage and African slavery. While attentive to the hardships faced by Irish indentured servants, his point is that slavery was a condition reserved for people of African descent in the British Atlantic and the United States."

The work of Hogan et al., has been shown to be problematically inconsistent with the evidence. As shown from Chapter V and further it is arguable that Hogan's research has been careful, although it is influential.

²³⁰ Ibid., 25.

Considering just this article, evidence shows that slavery was not only a condition reserved for people of African descent in the British Atlantic. Native of the mainland and Caribbean were also enslaved in New England, Virginia, Bermuda, and the West Indies. In 2016 Handler noted the presence of Native Americans on Barbados from the beginning

“The Amerindians had come to Barbados voluntarily and as “free people” ... and, according to Powell, “the former government, of this island ... hath taken them by force and made them slaves’.”²³¹

In a 2011 confession of the institution’s connections to slavery, Harvard scholars Beckert et al., noted

“If the slaves brought back on the *Desire* were the first to come to Massachusetts from the West Indies they would have been remarkable not for being slaves, but for being African.”²³²

If that was Hogan’s point, that slavery was solely for Africans, then it is not correct. It does eventually become the reality by the 19th century in the US. The Caribbean’s historic tangle of liminal boundaries that are brought on by multiple geographic locations and dynamic development will not allow such an easy explanation.

By aligning himself so closely with Hogan, Donoghue paradoxically undermines his own intervention. If the Irish slavery meme is as complex as his article suggests, then Hogan’s rigid denialism should have been interrogated rather than taken as settled fact. Instead, Donoghue pays tribute to Hogan while simultaneously presenting evidence that complicates the very narrative Hogan established. This inconsistency suggests that while Donoghue was

²³¹ Handler, “Custom and law: The status of enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Barbados,” 235ff.

²³² Sven Beckert and Katherine Stevens, “Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History,” 1 (2011), accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.harvardandslavery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Harvard-Slavery-Book-111110.pdf>.

willing to challenge some aspects of the discourse, he remained tethered to its fundamental boundaries.

5. A Deviation from the typical pattern

While Donoghue begins by paying tribute to Hogan's scholarly work, he gradually diverges from the pattern established by Hogan and others in the field. This shift marks a significant turning point in Donoghue's analysis.

“Hogan’s fearless intervention, he has received many threats, is a case-study of how scholars should employ relevant research to combat white supremacists. But has he closed the case of the curse of Cromwell and its connection to colonial bondage?”²³³

Donoghue frames a comparative perspective that is different from Hogan’s pattern.

“Race was an early modern invention. Racial slavery was an essential innovation of global capitalism; it was atypically dehumanising and therefore atypically profitable. Moreover, racial slavery’s oppressive cultural legacy has left a far deeper historical imprint than any other form of bondage.”²³⁴

It is true that racial slavery has left a deep imprint in the countries which had it. Race was an modern invention. Bigotry was not. Neither was othering. It is often implied that the invention of race is the invention of difference. Race is a placeholder for differences past. Slavery was profitable because of the economics of scale involving water borne transport as a result of naval superiority in conjunction with the ability of planters to maximise profits with forced labour on carefully organised farms selling commodities in high demand. An advanced market view entails dehumanisation of labour. But only in part. This is a complex

²³³ Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell,” Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 25.

economic phenomenon and not simply a result of the inhumanity of the labour force's treatment.

Donoghue then goes on to write that

“Petty's account proves that some very powerful members of the Cromwellian regime envisioned enslaving Irish and “negroes” in parallel fashion.”

This turns out to have been based on an error on Donoghue's part. He is strongly critiqued for it. He does admit the error, much to his credit. This is discussed in section D below. Neither Donoghue and McCormick in that section discuss that in 1607 or 1622 plans for shipping the remaining Irish troublemakers were documented by Gwynn in could be called proto-white papers.²³⁵

6. Severity of Treatment

Donoghue writes of servants who had been cruelly mistreated that

“in the accounts above, the slavery referred to was economic, different from the lifelong enslavement of Africans but a form of slavery nonetheless.”²³⁶

This matches Eric Williams, Simon Newman, and McDonald-Beckles. It's also a departure from the pattern of Hogan et al., which treats enslavement as zero-sum. That pattern relies on a strict denial of any other group as any kind of slaves, in order to preserve the social capital on what its adherents see as an exclusive claim on slavery for African-Americans. This is shown in the fact checking section above, where attempting to categorize different forms of forced labour is referred to as blurring the boundaries instead of defining them. This is a structural result of holding to the idea there is only one acceptable definition of slavery. In that case, where the definition is linked to social capital, which is treated as

²³⁵ Gwynn, “Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies,” 157–58

²³⁶ Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell,” 28.

zero-sum, it's understandable to see that any other definition is seen as blurring, as stealing that capital.

Then Donoghue writes

“Unfree whites who called themselves slaves or were called such by black slaves were known in law as “indentured servants”. But I cannot look to colonial law alone to define slavery.”²³⁷

They were not known in law only as indentured servants. The laws of Barbados do not refer to indentured servants; just servants. That term is not part of Barbadian law. The dichotomy that presents the only choice of slavery or indentured servant is incorrect. There were other types of servants. Penal servitude differed from indenture, so did customary servitude. The Prisoners of War who were shipped during the Interregnum may not have had a contract at all.²³⁸ Even so, the laws of 1661, were written in part to ameliorate the extent problem of servants being kidnapped, or forced into servitude without a contract.

Donoghue insists that one cannot look to the law alone to define slavery. The de facto history is necessary to contextualise the de jure history. Here, another reason that the law is not a source of a definition at all. Morgan has pointed out²³⁹ that Barbadian Law certainly is not a source of explicit differentiation. There are clues within the laws of the Caribbean, but they are implicit. Handler clearly made a case for that in 2016.²⁴⁰ There are multiple cases previously where the de jure experience does not match the de facto situation. The laws are obviously important, but so are the situations given by the evidence.

7. Donoghue's Deviation

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 66ff.

²³⁹ Morgan, “Partus sequitur Ventrem,” 2.

²⁴⁰ Handler, “Custom and law: The status of enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Barbados”

Donoghue makes the point that Servants were property. This is a risky deviation from the pattern of Hogan et al. It is backed up by the evidence from English property law. He calls the argument that it was only the labour that was owned and not the worker, a legal fiction instead of a material reality, noting

“Contracts did not cut sugar cane and weed tobacco fields; chattel workers did.”²⁴¹

He also notes that

“Instead, contracts led to enslavement, transforming people into term-bound chattel property...Contracts commodified more than “servant” labour; they commodified the person as a species of capital collateral. Planters used “servants”, like slaves, as financial instruments to escape bankruptcy, to satisfy creditors, to liquidate estates, and to resolve debts and broken contracts.”²⁴²

This is congruent with Patterson, and other professional scholars of slavery and the Caribbean. Williams notes that the Planters turned their servants into a thing. McDonald-Beckles noted that

“planters were keen to demonstrate that the servant was not a free person operating under a contractual obligation, but rather primarily a capital investment with property characteristics.”²⁴³

Though Donoghue errs in his use of the term legal fiction. This term is often misused in the discourse as synonymous with “legal technicality” as it was here. That is not correct. A legal fiction is where a thing is accepted as true, because it is legislated or ordered by the courts, to be taken as true even though it isn’t. It is not a legal fiction that servant’s labour

²⁴¹ Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell,” 28.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 6ff.

was provided by their indenture, but a technicality. The body in this case must precede the labour, and is granted as chattel to the master for the duration of the contract.

8. Conclusion

Ultimately, Donoghue's work occupies an unusual space in this debate. While flawed in some respects, particularly in its selective engagement with Hogan et al., it represents a departure from the rigid dichotomies that defined earlier interventions. His economic framing aligns with Williams, Newman, and McDonald-Beckles, providing a more flexible approach to unfree labour. However, what is perhaps most revealing is not Donoghue's argument itself, but the reaction it provoked. His deviation from the pattern resulted in immediate hostility, signalling that the Irish slavery discourse had entered a post-historical phase where adherence to an approved narrative mattered more than historical complexity. This reinforces the central argument of this thesis: that the post-historical phase of the Irish slavery debate is measurable in how deviation is met with excommunication rather than engagement.

D. 09.13.2017 Ted McCormick gets Petty

1. Chain of Events and Importance

In September 2017 on his Blog "memorious" Ted McCormick, and associate professor in Montreal, strongly critiqued Donoghue for his Petty misquotation.²⁴⁴ He also contacted

²⁴⁴ Ted McCormick, "Memorious:: How to Change History: William Petty, Irish Slavery, and a Fake Debate," accessed September 19, 2024, <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/13/how-to-change-history-william-petty-irish-slavery-and-a-fake-debate/>.

History Ireland with his concerns about the quotation. Those concerns were printed in his letter to the editors of History Ireland in November 2017. In short, Donoghue says Petty's information shows that the Interregnum regime wanted to use the Irish and Africans in parallel. McCormick says that's in error, as the quotation is sandwiched from bits of Petty written 30 years apart. Donoghue says yes, the quote was a mistake, but the main argument isn't affected, and the second half of the quote still represents a post English Restoration royalist idea to send thieves to the colonies as penal servants. McCormick and Donoghue discuss this on McCormick's blog, and do not come to an agreement. This encounter is important, both for examining the discourse between academics, but also the nature of exchange and the position in the visibility period.

2. Daniel McCormick notes Donoghue's error

In his Article, McCormack says

“Ironically, Donoghue, unlike Hogan, defends the idea of Irish slavery. But he does so in part through an academic argument about Cromwellian policy in 1650s Ireland apparently based on the examination of seventeenth-century sources...But the plausibility their scholarly presentation confers makes their publication, if anything, more harmful.”²⁴⁵

We are already talking about harm amplified by the source being academic. We have noted though that Donoghue is an academic, and his work checks out, with exceptions. The application of Donoghue's work as harmful is similar to the direction taken by Derakhshan in his definition of malinformation. It sets off Derakhshan's malinformative heuristic, but then doubles back to Hogan et al's infallibility.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

3. The Articles of Slavery

Donoghue was submitting an idea of Irish Slavery in a relatively short comparative labour framework. He was presenting a different Meme: using an Economic Slavery that was not Africans' slavery. It is the modern view of debt slavery. McCormick uses the Irish Slavery Meme. This very early on frames the two academics, and places their arguments in conflict. McCormick is following Hogan, Reilly & McAtackney's pattern. Donoghue deviates from it.

Donoghue was very clear about his framework and what he meant,. The onus is on McCormick to meet Donoghue's argument. He seemingly does not.

“Donoghue argues for the historical reality of Irish slavery in two ways. First, he downplays distinctions between indentured servitude for a fixed term (the standard means by which English, Irish, and Scottish labour was brought to the Caribbean plantations) and the permanent, heritable, and racialised enslavement of African people and their descendants, arguing on the basis of contemporary comment that Irish servants were treated in much the same way as enslaved Africans.”²⁴⁶

Donoghue, however, wrote

“In contrast to those of African descent, the Irish were never legally nor systematically subjected to lifelong, heritable slavery in the colonies.”²⁴⁷

Donoghue made the distinction. McCormick's argument is not borne out in the evidence.

McCormick's further says that

²⁴⁶ Ted McCormick, “Memorious: How to Change History: William Petty, Irish Slavery, and a Fake Debate,” accessed November 10, 2024, <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/13/how-to-change-history-william-petty-irish-slavery-and-a-fake-debate/>.

²⁴⁷ Donoghue, “The Curse of Cromwell”

“Second, Donoghue asserts (p.27) that officials in Oliver Cromwell’s regime “envisioned enslaving Irish and “negroes” in parallel fashion”, a claim he relates to the scale of indentured servitude in the English Caribbean during the 1650s.”²⁴⁸

McCormick was correct to note the error in this quote. Let’s note again plans to transport the Irish to colonise, cited by Gwynn from 1607 and 1622. The idea of disposing of the Irish in this way did exist. Not though as a grand narrative. There Irish prisoners had been sent to St. Kitts and then to Montserrat. And they did work together with Africans in the fields. McDonald-Beckles noted that “traditional ideological English labour constraints’ prevented the final steps in converting Irish and English people to that kind of slavery.”²⁴⁹ In this, any slavery that is encountered by non-Africans in the Caribbean is mostly liminal. Brown notes that the Irish of the 1650s were divided from African unfree labour by terming them servants, but without them even having minimal rights of servants.²⁵⁰

As a reactionary military dictatorship, the Cromwellian regime had every intention of using whatever labour they could get in the Colonies. This is demonstrated by Cromwell’s orders in 1654 to Scotland to round up the vagabonds, and masterless men, and to make them ready to be useful and to clear the country of them at the same time.²⁵¹

Donoghue cites Richard Ligon, Charles Bailey, Major John Scott, and anonymous Irish royalist sailors. He does not cite any contemporary commentary. He does cite Redeker et al., and Simon Newman, both of whom are professional historians with extensive works on the subject and region. McCormick doesn’t offer any sources on the obscure subject of Caribbean History, instead saying

²⁴⁸ McCormick, “Memorious:

²⁴⁹ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 8.

²⁵⁰ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 68.

²⁵¹ John Thurloe, “State Papers, 1655: September (3 of 4)”: In a Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe,” British History Online, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/thurloe-papers/vol4/pp31-47>.

“These sources are well known to historians of slavery in the Atlantic world; I will not pursue them here.”²⁵²

This isn't really an argument anymore at this point. McCormick hasn't submitted any evidence.

Despite this, McCormick has already judged Donoghue to be on the other side of the us vs them dichotomy so common to Hogan et al. The structure of McCormick's argument is not scholarly rebuttal but boundary maintenance: Donoghue, by entertaining a different model of servitude, has placed himself outside the approved discourse, and McCormick's primary goal is to signal that exclusion rather than engage in debate.

4. No other case made

McCormick raised high expectations with his introduction and provided an article with no arguments, and no sources. Then closed with the following

“At a time when the quality of public discourse about history and much else is degraded by fantasies and half-truths, and the capacity of experts to present and defend their research is under ever greater assault, allegiance to this distinction brings obligations. It obliges us to distinguish ranting and abuse from criticism grounded in knowledge of sources and methods. It obliges us to distinguish real from spurious evidence. It obliges us to substantiate our claims and to own and address our errors. It obliges us to promote real debate for the sake of advancing knowledge, not to debase our knowledge for the sake of debate.”²⁵³

People could reasonably expect an academic argument based on the above paragraph. McCormick obligates himself to one. That obligation wasn't met. The Petty citation and

²⁵² McCormick, “Memorious:”

²⁵³ Ibid.

subsequent argument by Donoghue was a mistake. But Donoghue acknowledges it. There's a bit of smoke, but no fire here.

McCormick offers no other real evidence. Donoghue is not guilty of McCormick's other critiques. They are not only not substantiated in Donoghue's text, they are directly contradicted.

Then it gets interesting.

5. Never read the comments.

Donoghue responded to McCormick in the comments. He notes that he was appraised of the mistake in August 2017 and that the Magazine editors had made them both aware there would be an exchange on the letters page.²⁵⁴ He also pointed out that he had explained his error and offered to make a correction together with McCormick. He was refused.

McCormick did know why Donoghue made his mistake and he also already had even read the response. McCormick wrote this Blog as if he did not know any of this. Donoghue tries to make the case to McCormick that the error in his article wasn't made in bad faith.

The response from McCormick was

“As I tried to make clear above, I have no stake in the “innocence” or otherwise of the mistake. ...Nor does that change if it was done inadvertently. The damage is the same...My purpose here is not to vilify you.... But what I am concerned with is the effect of a spurious quotation on the presentation of a contentious historical issue to a wide audience. That effect is the same whether the quotation appeared through malice or, as seems to be the case here, neglect.”²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Ibid., The Comments, 1.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 1ff

This is refusal to synthesise or discuss seems out of character with McCormick's conclusion where he obliges us to promote debate for knowledge's sake. This represents a shift from historical debate to moral boundary enforcement. That trips the heuristic and shows a post-historical turn to use, rather than truth as the end goal.

Then McCormick wrote

“If Liam Hogan's work has shown anything, it is that misread, misquoted, or mis-contextualised sources can have immensely long and harmful afterlives, particularly once they enter the public realm.

This might be very true, but in a different way than McCormick intended.

He further writes

“The history of the “Irish slaves” meme is very largely the story of just such an afterlife...I do not think you are on the same page politically or intellectually as Mike McCormack. But I do think it more than likely that he, and others of his persuasion, derive benefit from putative evidence that their fantasies are real, even if that evidence is furnished with the best of intentions, by someone concerned with racial justice rather than white resentment.”²⁵⁶

By the end of the exchange, it becomes clear that McCormick is not attempting to correct Donoghue but to excommunicate him. The reference to who might "benefit" from Donoghue's argument is key.

This is a post-historical statement, underlined by the heuristic of use value. The motivation of McCormick turns out to overwhelmingly visible in the mentioning of Mike McCormack.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Mike McCormack was a 2016-2017 online opponent of Liam Hogan.²⁵⁷ He is considered one of “the bad guys.” His letter excoriating Hogan has been erased online in a modern iteration of *damnatio memoriae*. McCormack’s letter was awful and also incorrect. If McCormick is saying that Donoghue’s work here benefits him, then that put’s Donoghue on the other side of a simple good/bad axis.

This represents a fundamental feature of post-historical discourse. McCormick’s rejection is not about accuracy, but about maintaining an accepted framework. In a post-historical context, historical claims are not judged on their merit, but on their political function. If a claim can be co-opted by the wrong people, it is treated as inherently dangerous, regardless of whether it is true. McCormick does not argue that Donoghue’s sources are unsound he argues that certain things should not be debated at all because they might benefit his opponents.

McCormick has not engaged with any of the rest of Donoghue’s argument, neither his sources, or his assertions. The issue here for McCormick is who Donoghue’s argument can be used by, what it can be used for, and “the damage” it will do so long as it remains available, regardless of his intentions, or politics. This is shown by McCormick’s comments about McCormack and Hogan.

McCormick writes,

“Donoghue refers, accurately enough, to there having been different “kinds” of slavery through history. This allows him to bring the Irish into the discussion without needing to claim that they were subject to the same “kind” as Africans. But he then collapses other uses of the language of “slavery” in the period by referring indiscriminately to Irish and African “chattel” (and treating impressionistic

²⁵⁷ History Ireland. “Apology to Liam Hogan - History Ireland.” Accessed January 5, 2025. <https://historyireland.com/liam-hogan/>.

reportage like Ligon's as analytically decisive), implying that there was no very great difference, beyond a "legal fiction", between permanent, heritable enslavement and fixed-term indenture."²⁵⁸

Slaves were chattels. Indentures were also chattels. They were different kinds of chattels. In general, people obviously don't know that. Otherwise they wouldn't keep making the same mistake over and over again. That's a problem of legal jargon or distinctions. There are other scholars like Theodore Allen and Noel Ignatiev who are radically pro African-American and Anti-White and use the same terms.²⁵⁹ Writing about this history though, means a scholar should know the word, and what it means, and especially what it meant at the time.

Additionally, there were different conditions or "kinds" of slavery. This is a historical fact. That fact doesn't "allow" Donoghue to bring in the Irish as McCormick puts it. It *compels* him to do so. That is a function of proof through evidence. Leaving them out, would have been historically unprofessional.

Donoghue says Irish were subject to term bound chattel bondage. In his article he also said that "In contrast to those of African descent, the Irish were never legally nor systematically subjected to lifelong, heritable slavery in the colonies" this is not indiscriminate use of chattel or slavery to collapse the definition. Donoghue doesn't imply that there was no great difference. He states that there were immense differences. But his point is that the Irish were subject to the same type of enslavement as other servants: economic.

²⁵⁸ McCormick, "Memorious: Comments, 1ff.

²⁵⁹ Perry, "There's No Basis for the Claims that John Punch was "Indentured" -- Or That His Fellow Escapees Were "White"

Donoghue continues in the comments to try and find some common ground offering to correspond with McCormick. He offers numerous works to try and show his bona fides. McCormick has shut him out. Donoghue finally leaves the conversation

“It doesn’t seem like my effort has or will bear any fruit -so, best of luck to you and don’t hesitate to reach out in the future if you’re interested in conducting a serious and thoughtful discussion.”

McCormick’s response is

“Civil debate, like scholarly discussion, is premised on common adherence to shared norms. The point of this post and the last was that some issues are not matters for debate in that sense, such as whether long-debunked myths should be reasserted on the basis of discredited or imagined sources, or whether non-existent sources can furnish a legitimate basis for historical claims.”

At the end of the comment Trail, McCormick’s anger is finally contextualised. The Myth he mentions is Irish Slaves from the original Hogan texts. Hogan was the debunker. The offense is Donoghue’s dissent. McCormick is now revealing that Donoghue has been outside as an other the entire time, since he is a dissenter from Hogan et al. This citation especially is key to understanding where Donoghue went wrong in this sense. He is asserting the Irish were enslaved in a way. Which is to McCormick a cardinal sin. The pattern that Hogan et al., create and follow treats enslavement as zero-sum, because it represents a zero-sum view of social capital. Part of the pattern is to give no ground. Everything Donoghue has said is therefore suspect. He has been subject to *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus* since he published his article.

McCormick's next entry states that he does not believe that Donoghue made an honest mistake but rather that he fabricated his evidence on purpose.²⁶⁰ The evidence doesn't match this. Donoghue's misquote came from Redeker. This indicates that he didn't fabricate it for the slavery debate, and that he never read Petty in the entirety. But what McCormick is asking for is unsure. Peer review is supposed to be corrective not punitive. According to that post, he finds that corrections, letters to the editors and the right of reply do not go far enough. Donoghue does refuse a full retraction. However, Donoghue's error is not the end of the world, and he treated it in good faith (once it was caught.) The fact that he's used the same quote in a book before, years older than this debate, is proof enough that he didn't fabricate the quote just for this argument.

6. Ontological Impasse?

The debate ultimately falls into an impasse. That makes it useful to observe. McCormick makes an absolute distinction between slavery and all other forms unfree labour. This could be driven by a fear of legitimising problematic historical memes. It contrasts with Donoghue's comparative analysis of unfree labour systems. Donoghue acknowledges degrees of exploitation without equating them. They fail to bridge their frameworks. But Donoghue made several offers. It's not a failure to bridge. It's a refusal. McCormick insists that they have no common ground as some things are beyond debate, because of who might use it and how. This appears ontological but it might not be. There is nothing in the actual narrative either ontological or epistemological that makes any of this beyond debate.

In order to find that things are incomprable (i.e., insufficiently similar or not interchangeable) they must first be compared. As long as the will to debate exists it's

²⁶⁰ Ted McCormick, "History in the Toilet: Memorious," accessed September 20, 2024, <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/29/history-in-the-toilet/>.

possible. What makes this beyond debate is the use value. Debate could lessen the use value by exposing other conclusions.

Simply accepting the orthodoxy that McCormick demands equates to self-censorship. His later post shows he will not be satisfied with any answer from Donoghue except acceptance of Hogan et al., and a total retraction of his article. Donoghue calls Hogan et al., up to this point in 2017, "careful scholarship." The evidence shows that it was not. He does not engage or question the conclusions of Hogan et al. In fact he pays tribute before offering an alternative corrective thesis. Because he does not tow the line, later he is excommunicated. McCormick does not argue that Donoghue's sources are unsound, he argues that certain things should not be debated at all. This is a post-historical threshold: For McCormick, the question of Irish servitude must be resolved not on the basis of archival evidence, but on whether it serves or disrupts a sanctioned historical framework. His rejection of debate is not about the rigor of Donoghue's research, but about the risk that allowing the discussion will undermine the stability of an existing moral-political order.

7. Conclusion

The exchange between Donoghue and McCormick shows how fractured and heated the debate over the "Irish slavery" narrative had become by 2017. Donoghue's work, despite errors like the misquote of Petty, remains a reasonable, well-researched take on the treatment of Irish indentured servants. His work does not play into white supremacist narratives but instead attempts to analyse unfree labour in the early Atlantic world, drawing clear distinctions between different forms of exploitation. However, because he acknowledges the possibility of economic enslavement, he is condemned from the outset.

McCormick, rather than engaging with the broader substance of Donoghue's argument, seizes on the Petty error as a means of discrediting the entire work. His critique is not a scholarly rebuttal but an enforcement of ideological boundaries. He does not challenge Donoghue's sources, he challenges the right to discuss certain topics at all. His refusal to

engage with evidence or debate alternatives reflects a deeper shift in historiographical discourse.

But this was never just about historical accuracy, it was about maintaining ideological boundaries. McCormick's rejection of debate is not about the rigor of Donoghue's research, but about the risk that allowing the discussion will undermine the stability of an existing moral-political order. The actual history is secondary, what matters is who benefits from the argument.

This is a defining feature of a post-historical discourse. If these landscapes exist, the function of history takes precedence over its content. Whether something is true becomes secondary than how it might be perceived or misused. This is the real conflict at play, not just between Donoghue and McCormick, but within the wider historiographical landscape. The Irish slavery debate is no longer about evidence or accuracy, but about which narratives are allowed to exist in the first place.

E. 03.10.2019 The Trinity Conference Speech with Dr. Anthea Butler

1. Introduction.

Anthea Butler, Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania, delivered the Annual Humanities Horizons Lecture at Trinity College Dublin on Tuesday, 1 October 2019.”²⁶¹

This was not an article but a lecture, it was however livestreamed and remains up on the University's website as a podcast. There is a comment section on the audio hosting site. It

²⁶¹ Anthea Butler, “The Myth of the Irish Slave, White Supremacy and Social Media” (2019 Annual Horizons Lecture, Dublin, October 10, 2022), accessed October 10, 2022, https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/the-myth-of-the-irish-slave-white-supremacy-and-social-media/.

has no comments of note. It was intended to be public. There are no indications of the number of views.

Titled “Irish Slaves in America: Myths, history, and the problems of social media.” Dr. Butler covers a lot of ground.

2. What’s covered?

Dr. Butler begins by touching on the Irish slaves myth as the Internet Meme, how it spread, and how white supremacist groups latched onto it. Dr. Butler’s approach to the Irish slaves meme appears to subordinate archival depth to activism, a hallmark of the post-historical landscape. She warns that this twisted version of history is being weaponised as a narrative. From there, she shifts to actual violence, Utøya, Christchurch, Charleston, all massacres, showing how disinformation pushes people to act. She notes the killers pieced their manifestos together from the dark corners of the web. Dr. Butler points out that academics aren’t out there fighting this, though they should be.

There is throughout the lecture, an assumed equivalence between activism and accuracy. If activism, rather than historical method, becomes the primary criterion for evaluating historical scholarship, then the question of whether the visibility discourse is actually rigorous becomes secondary to whether it serves the correct ideological function.

And as a *Wiedergutmachung*, if the visibility discourse were more or less epistemologically and ontologically sound, i.e., historically, then it would offer an ethically untroublesome transition to action. Settled history is used to argue politics. But in this case, the history is so unsettled, it should be (re)examined. Attempts to call this out, such as Donoghue or Grenham, result in excommunication rather than reformation.

Memes and stories go further than stacks of academic books. Dr. Butler argues that scholars need to be on social media, where the battle is happening, especially since young people are being misled online. She highlights immigration and authoritarianism as the big issues coming, makes a stunning but beautifully simple defence of Western civilisation and Western Civilisation classes, and calls for more humanities funding. The talk ends with a

clear warning: without stepping up, these radical ideas will keep inspiring violence. Yet Dr. Butler offers no archival detail or specific historical evidence when discussing the Irish slaves meme, relying instead on its current social impact to illustrate its danger. This selective omission exemplifies how contemporary utility eclipses historical depth in her lecture. Butler's decision to treat the Irish slaves claim as a settled fact, rather than a nuanced historical subject, reveals a shift away from examining historical intricacies and toward assessing the meme's effect on political discourse.

3. What's wrong with the article is also what's right with it.

Dr. Butler's lecture doesn't contain any history of the Irish in the Caribbean or in the United States, or British North America. There is a brief description. None of the substantive facts of the Irish in their history or the subject matter of the debate are mentioned at all. It could be described as treated as a settled issue, but it's simply not treated at all. Dr. Butler credits Liam Hogan as the foundation of her lecture, without reference to what he has actually said or written. She does not engage his work or any of the discourse.

This is the reflection on the benefits of professionalism. If a historian professes to follow the standards of the field such as peer reviewed historical practice, then it's safe or excusable to base conclusions on their research.

There are gaping holes in the professionalism of Hogan et al., and their approach shows this, and thus their conclusions, especially the zero-sum nature of their conclusions are beyond risky. But even Hogan et al., are not credited in this lecture. Only Hogan is mentioned. Almost no one has publicly fact checked Hogan or Hogan et al., at all. The exceptions are Donoghue, who pushed back on Hogan's conclusions, but didn't check Hogan's work and Grenham whose answer was as brief as it was correct. Both were exposed as dissidents on Twitter or in publications subsequently, and immediately lumped in with racists and white supremacists and excoriated in the public-digital world.

The lack of history in the lecture doesn't remove it from its significance to this historiography. In fact it underscores and confirms a number of important findings. What is

important in this essay, to this issue, by 2019, is the use of this history, not the history itself. Dr. Butler's avoidance of Irish historical complexity underscores a post-historical orientation. Instead of engaging with evidence on forced labour in the Caribbean, she proceeds to examine how the meme might be leveraged by extremist groups, illustrating a preference for present-day repercussions over rigorous inquiry into the past. That might be understandable, justifiable, good sense. But it's post-historical.

By the nadir that this lecture represents, the facts, the history, the ontological categories, the etymological arguments, especially those in this section from Handler and Donoghue, are not mentioned, or even worth mentioning. Not to this lecture, and not to this issue.

Although Butler rightly emphasises the social and political ramifications of the meme, she sidesteps the nuanced historical record that underpins it. This sidestepping is not simply an oversight but a hallmark of a post-historical framework, where historians are encouraged to abandon the depth of archival debate in favour of urgent activism and civic engagement.

History is not the goal, it is only a means to an end. The activism is what is being served here as an end. That's not to say the activism of Hogan, which was mentioned in the lecture. But rather the lecture is a clear call agitate against any mis and dis-information that encourages violence. This in itself is a demonstration of a turn in this issue.

4. White Cargo and the Victim Industrial Complex

Speaking of White Cargo, by Jordan and Walsh, Dr. Butler says,

"Now to be fair, this book isn't by white supremacist. What it is used for, however, is a way of talking about Irish slavery... This mixes all in with your own history

and it has been picked up by neo Confederates and white nationalists in America as a way to have what I call the victim industrial complex.”²⁶²

The victim industrial complex Dr. Butler refers to here, is synonymous with what Campbell and Manning describe as a “Culture of Victimhood” in their 2014 paper on Microaggressions and Moral Cultures.²⁶³ In terms of providing social capital, and the presence of social capital destabilising social relations in the context of culture war, this would be a confirmation of Campbell and Manning. Dr. Butler was using Victim Industrial Complex slightly ironically. But there is an industrial aspect to outrage that permeates web culture. Among other strong emotions, outrage increases engagement.²⁶⁴ Engagement teaches outrage.²⁶⁵ And victim culture as a new moral standard encourages group action over social media in order to call for help and to produce the leverage of the commons. Our use of social capital, denying it, or acquiring it, intersects with Professor Butler’s comments here.

“But this is a way for white men, especially in America, to be able to say, look, we were enslaved too.”²⁶⁶

Why would they need to do that? Social Capital. Those using the Internet Meme, including the Gateway article to claim that the Irish were slaves as Africans were, are claiming enslavement of their ancestors, or on behalf of this group. This not only has the effect of claiming it for themselves but in a zero sum framework, nullifying social capital for

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Campbell and Manning, “Microaggression and Moral Cultures”

²⁶⁴ Steve Rathje, Jay J. van Bavel, and Sander van der Linden, “Out-Group Animosity Drives Engagement on Social Media,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 26 (2021), doi:10.1073/pnas.2024292118.

²⁶⁵ William J. Brady et al., “How Social Learning Amplifies Moral Outrage Expression in Online Social Networks,” *Science Advances* 7, no. 33 (2021), doi:10.1126/sciadv.abe5641.

²⁶⁶ Butler, “The Myth of the Irish Slave, White Supremacy and Social Media”

Africans. That's only valuable in a context where that victimhood is or has the appearance of, value.

5. The Visibility Period on Twitter begins at 2014

Dr. Butler points out that she started seeing this on Twitter, her preferred network in 2014. She notes that this coincided with the Ferguson, Missouri shooting of Michael Brown in 2014, the community's pushback against the shooting and claims for reparations. Reparations claims in the US invoke antebellum slavery. It makes sense that those claims would be countered by attempts to deny the social capital underpinning the claims. However as a *Wiedergutmachung*, related discussions were already beginning to notice the rise in Irish slaves posts before 2014. Interest in the subject precedes this with *To Hell*, and *White Cargo*, and *Testimony*. The reactions though do sit directly in the visibility period.

Dr. Butler, notes of that period and beyond, that

“But there are a lot of people who on the web who don't know that this isn't history. They think it's real. And when they start to begin to study these things, the voices of those of us in the humanities are not there.”²⁶⁷

The major living professors of the Caribbean are not involved in this debate. Handler, was the exception. The history is real, albeit distorted.

6. To what is that attributed?

Butler notes of the online increase in radicalisation and violence offline, that the academics are not present. Why?

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

“Part of that has to do with the way the Internet works, and I'm going to talk about that a little bit. Part of it has to do with these sites are well produced. and they look really good. And part of it has to do with it plays to people's feelings and emotions.”

The structure of the web is not only unfriendly to professional historical methodology, but also to the older top down academic hierarchy. Dr. Butler would agree, given her comments that.

“it brings you in because it's a rich story, it brings you in because it's a meme. It brings you into something so that you do not have to read a 300 page book anymore. You can look at a picture; you can read something that is very short. You can read an article that says this is a 5 minute read and you have all the information you need”²⁶⁸

Butler notes another hardship of scholars in getting their work out in that,

“Now, I'm not saying the Internet is bad. What I am saying is, is that you aren't there. You are so far down on the tube that nobody's going to look for your stuff because your stuff's not interesting. You don't have meme. You don't have a way to get to somebody. What I'm saying now is that we're fighting because the algorithm doesn't benefit us”²⁶⁹

In this brief remark on the algorithm, Butler contextualises the difficulty of visibility when you are not selling commodities, advertising, or outrage.

There is possibly a critique that can be laid against Dr. Butler's urge to “get out there and be activists, which she urges her audience to do.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

“So what one of the things I think I can do that's something very simple is don't just spend time here on Trinity campus, even though it's a beautiful campus, you need to be doing things. Somebody like Liam, who works at the Public Library has done more work than many scholars I know who are sitting with lots of accolades and degrees. And why is that? Because he's been online, he's pushed against people, he's written op-eds, he's done things.”²⁷⁰

Hogan's activity is documented. Liam Hogan is an activist. As an independent scholar, he doesn't have to answer to anyone. He's free, but being free of quality control, doesn't guarantee quality. The speed of scholarship is slower, which Dr. Butler knows, but parts of her speech are about the increases made available by technology and crowd sourcing in order to be able to produce speedy work. This only works in the intersections of news and scholarship which, like activism adds a dimension to working that seems to detract from accuracy.

7. Why should they get involved?

As part of her reasoning Dr. Butler said that

“And so what I want to do is to try to get an understanding of that tonight and understand why it's important for the humanities, especially the humanities, to be involved in this at the time where universities are saying. Do I really need the humanities? Do I really need people doing this kind of work of history and literature and religion and all of this? Now more than ever, I need it. There are so many situations right now in the world that I need this kind of training and how to fight back.”²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

She further notes that

“And so you have this disinformation cycle that continues to go on and on and on, and this bad information goes everywhere, OK. Now it's not just to say that it's bad information, it's inflammatory information at times. It's the kind of information that makes people want to do things... especially if. They don't understand what's going on with this information and it's spread.”²⁷²

Dr. Butler is alluding again to horrible violence. In this lecture it consisted of the massacres in Norway, New Zealand, and Charleston, South Carolina.

Part of the problem here might be terminology. The memes and their articles that comprise the Internet Meme are really not mis-information. They aren't disinformation. The Memes are Malinformation. They are a mix of truth and falsehood intended to maximise the chaos, outrage and dissension that comes from disagreement, over treasured folk norms in this case. Disinformation is usually done on purpose, and Malinformation also. This is the problem mentioned with the John Martin article as well as some of the books, or other shorter content. Some of it is true. Some of it is sort of true. Some looks true and isn't. And weeding all of that out takes so much time and effort, it does not match the mechanics of the Internet. Furthermore, it also tests the limits and patience of scholarship, which were limited by the hours in a day, before the internet stole our attention spans.

8. The 2% of History in the box.

There is one section where historical aspects of Irish and African slavery is discussed.

Butler notes that

“And so the way that this gets conflated essentially is that they conflate indentured servitude with slavery. Indentured servitude, you have seven years. I know the Irish

²⁷² Ibid.

were indentured servants. After seven years, you're done. If you were black slave from Africa, you would never be done, your family wasn't done. Your kids were never done. Nobody was getting you out unless you ran away and escaped.”²⁷³

One could take some issue with this small paragraph historically. It is an example of Brown's critique of oversimplification. It's not though intended to be polarising. But historically, it is oversimplified in the face of the more detailed evidence that has been discussed. The argument being made here and by Reilly or any one following the pattern as it's described here, is that there is a simply non-negotiable dichotomy between slavery and indentured servitude. The latter is always limited and invariably ends in the freedom of the servant. “After seven years, you're done.” In reality, the Caribbean's lethal climate and brutal work conditions often nullified any promised time limit on servitude. As Simon Newman shows, both servants and slaves died at alarming rates, making the theoretical seven-year term functionally irrelevant for many.²⁷⁴ Nini Rodgers similarly underscores that duration was the key legal distinction, yet widespread mortality blurred any practical difference²⁷⁵, turning the “seven years, you're done” assumption into a drastic, almost cruel oversimplification.

When the history is examined, then it turns out that many of those complications as discussed show that the parallels at some points, in some ways, outweigh the contrasts, such as the period of the English Civil War, or Bermudian “servitude” for 99 years. The de jure and de facto status of the servant or slave, also doesn't match the simplification. In the early periods of colonisation it's nowhere near as simple as the pattern asserts. And the answers, articles and lectures that assert that pattern with the dichotomy is the case, and the

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labour: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic, The Early Modern Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2016), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=3442229>, 83, 203.

²⁷⁵ Rodgers, *Ireland, slavery and anti-slavery*, 37.

only case? They are simply incorrect as a result. It is precisely the absence of any source evaluation that transforms a historical question into a purely instrumental narrative.

Dr. Butler finished this section by saying

“Now, I want to say publicly here that I know some of Irish history. You ‘ve had a terrible history. This is in no way of taking away from that history. But what I want you to see tonight is that your history has been used for nefarious means. And that when you see these names that you need to understand that they are being used in a way to promote white supremacy. And they have been used as a sense to make people start to think about how they can assert themselves in ways that I believe sometimes are not the proper ways to assert your beliefs.”²⁷⁶

On the one hand there is no record at present of people turning to violence as a result of the Irish in Caribbean. Yet. The Irish in the Caribbean are significant because they are part of a web of conspiracy culture, a sliver in the body of radicalism, and the puzzle piece hiding behind the couch of online activism. The Gateway article has been labelled that because it’s a gateway to the question at the heart of conspiracy theory, “What else are they lying about?” This could lead a person anywhere down that web, even down to the centre. Therefore, this criticism which ends with Dr. Butlers allusion to her conclusion, that someone could be convinced to do violence by radicalising Internet content, is not wrong, and not even too far off, despite the lack of violence so far.

9. A Few Notes before concluding

Dr. Butler also said

“So I’ll go back to the story about Irish slaves here for a minute. nobody in America is paying attention to this except for white supremacists and black people who are

²⁷⁶ Butler, “The Myth of the Irish Slave, White Supremacy and Social Media”

upset when everybody says that Irish slaves were like you know, worse, because they know what chattel slavery was. There are only two groups of people that are kind of paying attention to this right now.”

On the one hand, by 2019, Irish Slaves as a search term indicating interest had peaked and was diminishing. The lines drawn by those in support of the Meme and those against had included by that time, Google and other search engines, which used AI and curated searches to pre-emptively shift traffic away from the sites which had before directed people into the Internet Meme. Curated searches disallow the citation of search results. However considering it's impact, it cannot be an accident that googling “Irish Forgotten White Slaves” or some other combination thereof will not have Globalresearch.ca appear in the search until far down in the results. There have been millions of shares of that article, and it doesn't come up on the first pages of the big three search engines. That's not being judged in favour of Globalresearch. It just can't be accidental at this point. If Google has taken a side, then that would also trip the ophelialogical heuristic.

On the other hand, the response from Dr. Butler, also begs the question, if only two groups care, why are we talking about it? If it is an obscure subject that flared up and would again flare out.

Dr. Butler concludes thus

“Our thinking has become truncated, and there's a moment in which I have to use these tools, but I also need to step back from these tools and realise that these tools are shaping our souls. And they're shaping our souls in certain kinds of ways. And for some people, that shaping is dangerous. For young men who don't, you know, have a lot to hope for, or they see themselves as not being viable in today's society, or they think somebody like me is taking their place, what they are thinking about now is how can I get back on top? And so our slave meme might be the thing that

leads them in a year or two to go shoot nine people in a church or to go take somebody out on the island or to go into Walmart and shoot everybody.²⁷⁷

In this conclusion Dr. Butler notes the reciprocal effect of the social Internet on users and vice versa. But her allusions to young men who need to get back on top mar the general scope of her comments. This issue is a strand in the web of conspiracy theory that threatens to overwhelm societies' ability to discern truth from nonsense, but the Irish Slavery Meme is not going to directly cause a massacre at present. However, an Irish slavery Meme leading to the gateway article and further exposure to radical uncontrolled content on the web, could very well be one step among the many that lead a person to acts of violence or terror. But that would require from historians, more detail and less dichotomy. Dr. Butler is correct about the shape of the shore. There is though far more water in between the Meme and the Massacre than is implied.

10. In conclusion.

Dr. Butler's 2019 lecture at Trinity College marks a critical point in the debate surrounding the Irish slaves myth. Rather than delving into the history of Irish indentured servitude or addressing the complexities of the myth itself, Butler's focus was on the broader societal implications of disinformation and radicalisation in the digital age. While she offered insightful commentary on the dangers of misinformation, her lecture largely sidestepped the historical nuances of the Irish in the Caribbean and America, instead centring on activism and social media's role in spreading false narratives.

By analysing Dr. Butler's approach using the heuristic of ophelialogy, there is a clear shift from traditional historical inquiry to a more pragmatic consideration of what historical phenomena can do. The absolute abandonment of any epistemological or ontological discussion, is key. Dr. Butler, whether consciously or not, steps beyond the bounds of

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

historical accuracy, focusing instead on how these narratives can be repurposed, reused, and mobilised for contemporary utility. Her analysis and commentary is almost purely post-historical. What could someone do with the information? What should they do with it? What are others doing with it? Is that an innovation? Is that going to have aftereffects?

This omission of substantive history is emblematic of a broader trend: the reduction of intricate historical debates into simplified talking points. While Butler rightly warns of the dangers of white supremacist groups weaponising the Internet Meme of Irish Slavery, her lecture ultimately treats the historical question as settled without examining the evidence. The activism-centred approach, while important, leaves gaps in addressing the actual historical context. This shift away from rigorous historical analysis toward activism is part of a post-historical shift that is particularly strong online. The truth as arrived at from a professional historical viewpoint, is held equal, or second to the effect the information could have. This is visible in the conclusion to the lecture.

"... what I'm saying to you is this, begin to consider how the humanities can really shape things. The stories that I know, the basic framework of what the humanities are, whether we are talking about the arts, music, history, literature, all of these things are being used by other people to make them turn into something that they should not be, or they or they could be and that they shouldn't be. And I wanted you to consider today that all of us have a responsibility to engage this era."²⁷⁸

Butler connects the Irish slaves meme to potential violence and radicalisation "turning people into something they should not be." This reflects a valid concern about the power of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. But it doesn't account for the Malinformation concerning the Irish in the Caribbean. It may also overstate the direct connection between the meme and acts of mass violence, as the leap from sharing a meme

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

to committing a massacre involves a much more complex process of radicalisation than just sharing a Photo with a caption. Nevertheless, Butler's call for scholars to engage in public discourse and push back against misinformation is clear. By reducing all flawed content to simple falsehood or disinformation, Dr. Butler overlooks how partial truths and selective evidence, which characterise malinformation, can appear more credible to online audiences and evade easy debunking.

In understanding the phenomena of this period. Dr. Butler ending with a caution against that "thing you are writing being used for nefarious means." This tips the heuristic and couldn't be a clearer signpost towards a post-historical turn, at least concerning this phenomena.

VIII. Two Papers in 2022: Seeing Past the Visibility Discourse

A. Ending on a comparative note

This section examines two recent papers that take starkly different approaches to the history of the Irish in the Caribbean. Together, they reveal diverging historiographical trajectories, reflecting opposing approaches to the Irish in the Caribbean.

David Brown's paper exemplifies an archival, evidence-based tradition that largely sidesteps modern ideological debates, whereas Natalie Zacek's paper aligns with post-visibility discourse, foregrounding contemporary cultural politics over direct engagement with primary sources.

The contrast between these papers is striking. Brown prioritises archival reconstruction and primary sources, while Zacek foregrounds ideological and discursive interventions, privileging contemporary cultural politics over historical complexity

1. Brown

David Brown's "Free, and unfree - Ireland and Barbados, 1620-60" acknowledges the visibility period discourse, judging it to be oversimplified and polarising. This characterisation aligns with the structural tendencies of Internet discourse. Brown's work challenges the pattern as identified in this paper. He lays a new foundation for understanding what happened in the period of the interregnum that produces the Irish in the Caribbean as folk memory. In doing so, he shows the faults in the visibility discourse vis-à-vis archival research. This further highlights both the limitations and the lack of popular appeal of professional historiography. The success of his paper may suggest that the only viable approach to the visibility discourse is to disengage from it entirely.

2. Zacek

Natalie Zacek's "How the Irish became Black" is from the same book as Brown, and provides our contrast. It exemplifies the pattern of Hogan et al. Zacek raises important questions about how to combat the dangerous myth of Irish enslavement; however, her

work overlooks significant existing scholarship on Irish indentured servitude. In particular, she misrepresents the historical context and contributions of scholars like McDonald-Beckles and Berleant-Schiller, resulting in substantial inaccuracies. By failing to engage with earlier research, she undermines the credibility of her arguments and misrepresents the complexities of both Irish and African experiences in the Caribbean. Ultimately, this oversight points to a deeper issue within the discourse on race and identity.

Their conclusions diverge so significantly that the contrast itself is worth close examination.

B. 2022 - Brown - Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620–1660

1. Who is Brown & What is his method?

David Brown's "Free, and Unfree - Ireland and Barbados, 1620-60" exemplifies a methodologically rigorous, evidence-based approach to history. Rather than engaging in cultural commentary or theoretical critique, Brown reconstructs a chronology from newly discovered archival sources, prioritising documentation over discourse. Brown is a senior research fellow at Trinity College in Dublin. Brown's archival research aligns with both my 2015 master's thesis and the arguments presented here. His work directly challenges the visibility discourse by grounding the history of the Irish in the Caribbean in newly examined primary sources, rather than ideological narratives. His findings expose the limitations of discourse-driven history and highlight the lack of popular appeal for traditional, evidence-based historiography.

He is not attempting to defend the Internet Meme, or attack it. Brown doesn't engage in commentary or theorisation. Instead, he stays on point contextualising new sources. These are in conjunction with primary records from Barbados and elsewhere. Brown constructs a chronology of Irish transportation to the Caribbean during colonisation. There are no sweeping cultural claims or speculative connections. Brown's paper is not a commentary, it is an account.

2. Brown's Methodology: Search the Archival Sources

Brown uses rare archival sources. Many remain unavailable online²⁷⁹ placing him within a particular tradition of historical scholarship that prioritises access over interpretation. Finding such sources is, after all, an art and science in itself. Professional researchers often distinguish themselves not by their ability to comment on culture. They are distinguished by their ability to uncover and curate previously unseen materials. Brown demonstrates that archival access and research is critical. In doing so, he contrasts the work of the visibility discourse and other commentary. As a *Wiedergutmachung* the questions of Irish slavery could be sufficiently answered a priori Brown's work. Corish answered the question historically, when he said

“The national legend of the man-hunts is therefore founded on fact, although it exaggerates their scale and it errs in so far as it attributes them to government policy. They arose from commercial greed.”²⁸⁰

Grenham answered the question culturally, stating that the Internet Meme,

“...is so stupid it's not worth arguing with. It's certainly no reason to deny that a short, brutal episode of slave-export from these islands took place in the mid-17th century.”

McDonald-Beckles widens the net when discussing labour

²⁷⁹ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 69, Footnote #2.

²⁸⁰ Patrick J. Corish, “The Cromwellian Regime, 1650–60,” in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 363.

“Irish servants in general experienced servitude as an oppressive labour system in which their condition was nearer slavery than freedom. Like blacks, they resisted this unfamiliar subservience when and how they could.”²⁸¹

This paper or other critiques do not need to rely on Brown’s work. His findings correspond and support the historical arguments made here, sometimes less than wholly and other times exactly.

There’s a method to Brown’s madness or perhaps his careful avoidance of it. His paper contrasts to more culturally focused work like Zacek’s. She approaches multiple cultural points. She also grapples directly with the visibility discourse. Brown avoids that “slippery slope” altogether. He chooses instead to report what is, leaving the “what was not” to other historians or theorists. This could be part of what makes Brown’s paper seem so dry especially to modern readers accustomed to more cultural work or online texts.

3. Brown’s goal is Historical

“This chapter examines Irish sources that have newly come to light, in concordance with primary sources in Barbados and elsewhere, to create a chronology and contextualise the circumstances under which transportations of people took place from Ireland, and the outcomes”²⁸²

Brown does not indicate that he set out to revise history. In every sense, research is a revision in itself, but also a quest to see more, to perfect, or hone the discourse. F.S.L Lyons, the former Provost of Trinity College noted that

“What historians call revisionism is not only reasonable but necessary if it is done in the right way and for the right reasons. These are not subjectively arrived at by

²⁸¹ McDonald-Beckles, “A “riotous and unruly lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freeman in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” 511.

²⁸² Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 54.

the light of the individual conscience, receiving from some private source a special infusion of grace. Revisionism is proper revisionism if it is a response to the new evidence which, after being duly tested, brings us nearer to a truth independent of the wishes and aspirations of those for whom truth consists solely of what happens to coincide with those wishes and aspirations.”²⁸³

“Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados “is a paper with a not un-new conclusion. This is interesting situation in that a traditional history paper, which is avoiding politics, produces a revisionist result. This says a great deal about the quality of the Internet Meme, but also the premises of the Interventions.

C. How Brown challenges the pattern

1. Rejecting the Pattern

Brown deviates from the pattern of the visibility discourse. That discourse of 2015-2020 followed a certain trajectory. It could itself be a meme. It dominates popular and scholarly discussions. It spreads from person to person. Is treated as sacred or dogmatic. For instance, in the pattern the Irish are flattened into a single monolithic people, first by the Memes and the Gateway article. Then they are treated the same way in the responses and interventions. Brown also outlines Irish as a term is a very loose grouping of very different people. His categories are: Old English, Old Irish, and New English. This paper notes this as well. The divisions between Old English and Old Irish have meaning to the history and nature of the Caribbean. Brown confirms this.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ F.S.L. Lyons, *The Burden of Our History*, Belfast: Mayne, Boyd & Son, LTD. 1978, p. 12

²⁸⁴ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 60-61, 63.

Brown's avoidance of the Memetic pattern is deliberate. As an archival researcher, he is operating in a separate historiographical sphere. Zacek's work of 2022, engages with the visibility discourse, privileging it. Brown does not.

This is perhaps Brown's greatest contribution, historically speaking. "Free and Unfree" is a contrast to the Interventions that allows us to use it to see them more clearly for what they are. In doing so, it offers a "boring," but essential, return to the foundations of archival history. In today's world of fast-paced, content-driven history, that might be what is needed. It isn't what the Internet wants though.

2. Eliminating the visibility discourse

There are two aspects. Firstly, Brown dismisses the visibility discourse in its entirety. While noting that it is McDonald-Beckles who has previously warned that we do not have much first-hand information on the period of the protectorate, he writes further.

"This cautionary note, however, has gone unheeded during an avalanche of recent interest in the topic that has produced much commentary but little by way of detailed further archival research. An ideological history has instead emerged, reflecting modern trends towards simplification and polarisation."²⁸⁵

Brown eliminates the need to argue with any of the discourse by labelling it commentary and moving past it. His statement is broad enough to include all of the visibility discourse.

Brown might have included my few papers on the subject in his dismissal. However, I am confident though that no one, including Brown himself, has read them.

Furthermore, even though he avoids the pattern, he is still affected by it. He does mention the only paper written on the subject in the visibility discourse

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 55.

“Jerome Handler and Matthew Reilly tie this limited debate to the campaign for financial compensation for historical enslavement and argue that the mere acknowledgement of Irish enslavement “has been used to undermine arguments in favour of reparations for the injustices of slavery.”²⁸⁶

This is Handler and Reilly’s paper which was also examined above. Brown notes

“This is true, but this approach, taken without re-examining the sources, veers towards a form of self-censorship that academic historians cannot accept.”²⁸⁷

3. Strengths & Weaknesses

D. A Necessary Boredom

Brown doesn't use section headings. This makes the paper monotonous. Even for the motivated. It's a lot of information. He also relies on rare manuscripts. Those are hard to access. Double checking Brown was extremely time consuming. He dismisses the visibility discourse with a wave of his hand. But in other cases, he pulled his punches too much. The visibility discourse is very popular. Engaging with its false or poorly researched premises is dangerous to some extent.

Brown’s method is not optimised or particularly engaging to a non-specialist audience. It is though methodologically sound, archivally solid, and thoroughly professional. It is a good example of the slow, meticulous process of historical research.

That's not Internet-friendly, looping us back around to Baudrillard and hyperspace. The speed at which all are living, might be one of the reasons we're being driven to post history.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Brown, “*Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660*,” Ibid.

The Internet and its simulacra and representations demand immediate attention. And they trap us in what appears to be a hall of mirrors and false representations. Brown's way out is to refuse. Concerning post-historicism, if the history is right, then skipping the debate is ok. Who's got time to check? We are moving so fast online, that waiting for the work to catch up is not likely. Therefore what the visibility discourse is doing is creating and serving a simulation of history which isn't history at all. That is, if someone's agrees with Baudrillard.

E. Key Findings (Irish in Barbados, forced transport, lack of indentures, mortality rates)

1. The Interregnum

Brown's interpretation of what happened to the Irish in the Caribbean during the Interregnum is as follows. The Island of Barbados declared for Charles II during the civil war and was only occupied by the Parliamentarians in 1651. Prior to their capitulation to Parliament, they had purchased slaves piecemeal from Dutch slave merchants and islands. They were in desperate need of labour as the civil war had eroded their indentured base of servants. The Navigation act of 1651 made legally purchased slaves extremely expensive. The end of the wars offered some relief as limited labour in the form of servants was sometimes available. The Protestant government's expedition to the Gambia in 1652 to secure gold and slaves was foiled by Rupert of the Rhine.

“One ship was abandoned and the other two were forced to escape at night without their cargoes.”²⁸⁸

This failure for the English in Africa had long reaching implications for the Irish, although Brown notes that

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 63.

“There is no documentary evidence of a sustained official policy to transport soldiers to the colonies.”²⁸⁹

Prior to the failure of the Gambia expedition, the Guinea company had contracted to provide 200 enslaved people. Since their presence in the Gambia failed they were unable to deliver Africans. Brown notes that

“Cromwell’s sole instruction regarding the transport of any Irish other than the garrison at Drogheda was issued to General George Fleetwood in January 1652. This was a recommendation that some “merchants of Bristol” should be allowed to ship 400 Irish Tories and vagrants to the Caribbean”²⁹⁰

Robert Lewellin bought that warrant and used it to transport 300. He was involved in the slave trade to the Gambia with other English merchants.²⁹¹ To Brown this says that,

“Irish captives became, therefore, a direct alternative to enslaved African people.”²⁹²

Then in 1654 came the fall of Dutch Brazil. Since 1651, the Navigation Act had made it a requirement to only purchase from English ships. The Barbadians has skirted, avoided or flaunted this law for as long as they could. They purchased slaves from Dutch markets and would ship them in. can infer that they were already doing this when Winthrop wrote to his friend Downing in 1645 that slaves were the life of the place. Brown says that

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., *ff.*

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

“With the Dutch driven out, the planters once again turned to Ireland, the source of labour that had served them well when the Guinea Company had failed them in 1652.”²⁹³

Desperate for Labour to meet intensive sugar demand, with the Dutch eliminated both as slave suppliers and sugar buyers, the Barbadians were in a weak position vis-à-vis supply, and Brown writes,

“Thus was Ireland drawn into the slave trade, caused in the first instance by the Gambia failure and then by the fall of Dutch Brazil. A combination of Cromwell’s initiative and the presence of many Irish labourers on Barbados already made Ireland an obvious place to look.”²⁹⁴

According to Brown working with manuscripts in the possession heretofore of the Irish Military, enterprising merchants who were all connected through the Guinea company, obtained licences to ship thousands to Barbados.

“The involvement of Sadlier and Hawkins, and the return of Lewellin’s vessels to Ireland, demonstrate that the largescale transports, those of 1655-6, were an extension of the slave trade, organised by the Guinea Company merchants who were temporarily shut out of West Africa by hostile forces.”²⁹⁵

Furthermore, notes Brown,

“Business was so good that when faced with empty prisons, on 29 July 1656, the English Parliament’s council in Dublin issued a warrant to William Hawkins that

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 64.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

allowed him to arrest and deport any person suspected of not transplanting to Connacht.”

Brown says that this order meant that anybody could be snatched from the side of the road and thrown onto a ship, and that is what happened.

“A disorganised manhunt ensued as gangs of men roamed the country in search of Irish civilians who were induced or forced onto ships, taken to Barbados and sold at the quayside.”²⁹⁶

According to Brown the man hunters were stopped because they became too greedy, and kidnapped English people as well. Here is the complete citation from Brown,

“People were captured based on their ethnicity, transported on foot of their guilt for the most minor of crimes, and often for no crime at all. They left Ireland on the assumption that they were the property of the merchants who were paying for their transport, without indentures, and were expected to be unfree for an undetermined period. For many, this was a life sentence, and a tragically short one.”²⁹⁷

Brown completed a survey of Barbadian burials, noting an eightfold increase in Irish deaths from 1652 to 1654 from remaining records. The burial records are the only official records on Barbados that undergird historical accounts of massive export of people. They are strong piece of circumstantial evidence.

“Certainly hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of Irish people were sent to Barbados in the 1650s, divided from African unfree co-workers by being termed servants, but without the rights of servants.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 64–65.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

With the coming of the Restoration, the surviving Irish who had been thus transported were offered 30 acres on Jamaica as recompense to “those who were forced there by their suffering for and service in his Majesty’s cause.”²⁹⁹ and Brown notes that Barbados, now freed of its surplus of Irish for the time being, switched to the slavery model that was being encouraged by the government.³⁰⁰

This account of the Irish both wild Catholic Irish, and Anglo-Irish or Old English, also mostly Catholic, should be authoritative. Only time will tell. Brown’s account mostly speaks for itself.

Brown also addresses, unbeknownst to him possibly, the issue of whether slaves and Irish servants were thought of as property.

“The full names of English servants were normally given, together with the time left to serve. Irish servants to Irish masters, however, tended to have their full names and terms listed, but to most English enslavers, captive Irish and enslaved Africans were clearly different, subtly non-equivalent classes of property, equal to farm animals but unequal to English servants. It is a differential only evident in deeds to property. This role for the Irish was peculiar to Barbados in the mid to late 1650s and there is no evidence of it anywhere else in the English Atlantic.”³⁰¹

This matches the earlier analysis (Chapter II, Section D of the legal status of the Irish, and the conclusion that forced and voluntary Irish servants they were chattels personal qualified, while African slaves were chattels real or chattels personal absolute. He is correct he calls them “different, subtly non-equivalent classes of property.” But that in itself could stand more exposition. They are less different and more comparable.

²⁹⁹ Brown, David. “Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660.” In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Finola O’Kane and Ciaran O’Neill, 54–73. Manchester University Press, 2022, 66.

³⁰⁰ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660”

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 69

Brown, much like Corish ends by confirming the legends of the Manhunt as fact. Patrick Corish also noted the older commentary and exaggeration.

Brown also notes of the Irish themselves for possibly the first time anywhere

“Crucially, the Irish at the time, and many others, believed they were being enslaved. Belief does not require overwhelming evidence, and the burden of proof diminishes further over time as great injustices are amplified in folk memory. It is a duty of the historian to uncover the evidence and interpret it as best they can, with empathy. The brief episode of mass forced Irish transportation, 1652-1657, was a product both of its time and of the changes in Caribbean agriculture brought about by the sugar boom. It remains one of many of Cromwell's deeply unpleasant legacies in Ireland”³⁰²

2. Takeaways

Brown notes that the dichotomy we have discussed throughout this paper robs narratives of nuance. His view is slightly different,

“The binary categorisation of unfree labour into “blacks” and “whites” oversimplifies the importance of nationality, ethnicity and religion to English settlers in Barbados. For example, English servants normally had indentures: contracts that theoretically limited their term of labour with some legal rights of redress for unfair treatment. Prisoners and convict labour had fewer rights.”³⁰³

The visibility discourse tends to simplify the issue, ignoring the nuances of Irish identity and the various types of unfree labour that existed beyond the traditional dichotomy of indentured servitude and chattel slavery. This is interchangeable with black/white or other

³⁰² Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid., 56.

dichotomies presented. Akenson engages in this flattening of Irishness,³⁰⁴ as do other scholars.

Where Brown goes deeper into the evidence is in noting that the Commonwealth and the English Republic that made up interregnum Britain was a different country. It did not honour all the legal rights and obligations of its preceding monarchy. It is noted herein that Scottish prisoners in Barbados were granted rights in 1654 upon Scotland and England's commonwealth union. This shows that they would have ostensibly lost them after having become Aliens in English law when the kingdoms separated after the murder of Charles I. This is an aspect missed by the visibility discourse, when it assigns all Irish labour in the Caribbean the title "indentured servants." Brown notes,

"The Irish, however, as a conquered nation, were left out of this arrangement, just when transports of Irish prisoners and captives peaked. Assuming that all white labourers in the English Caribbean were indentured assumes that all were English, or later Scottish, and had access to formal institutions for redress. The Irish had no such access."³⁰⁵

This is in line with the critique made of Hogan et al., and of Handler and Reilly, from Chapters V through VII that the Irish had legal rights, personhood and access to the courts. Brown notes they did not. Brown's narrative is a deep look into the years in question. Brown notes,

"Conflating "white" and Irish, which is effectively conflating English and Irish, misses the central point of the status of the native Irish under the Commonwealth and Cromwellian Protectorate. The Irish, by a series of Acts and orders from August 1652 until May 1658, were collectively guilty of multiple crimes and

³⁰⁴ Akenson, *If the Irish ran the World*, 172.

³⁰⁵ Brown, "Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660," 56.

misdemeanours that were punishable by indefinite transportation to Barbados, to work for subsistence as the property of English planters. There are no mentions in the surviving literature of indentures, nor have any ever been produced indicating that the people transported from Ireland during the 1650s could ever expect to be freed.”³⁰⁶

If Brown is correct, this undermines some of the ideas of the pattern completely, in so far as the presence of indentures and the rights of the indentured servant to legal recourse, redress and their dues, etc., are quoted throughout the interventions.

This is not Brown writing another victimhood narrative of the Irish. He notes thereafter that

“Emphasising Irish labour while removing capital to the shadows has created an impression that the Irish were European victims of English colonial ambition and only occasional partners in the western expansion.”³⁰⁷

As a *Wiedergutmachung*, the commercial centres were held by the Old English, who under Cromwell compete the transformation to being seen as Irish by the English. Brown notes this, and calls it Irish capital anyway. For the five centuries before the Caribbean settlement the commercial centres were held by the Norse-Irish and then the Old English in Ireland. This separation from the wild Irish didn’t change. Only the loyalties and the titles of the people changed. Then the level of tolerance for the Old English became one of distrust.³⁰⁸ This connects to issues of identity that are not often discussed in the discourse amid the general flattening of identity used throughout all the discourses.

3. “Irish” Capital at work.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 57.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Edmund Curtis, *A History of Medieval Ireland: From 1086 to 1513 (Routledge Revivals)*, Routledge revivals (Abingdon, Oxon, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1923). doi:10.4324/9780203116371, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781136298707>, 365.

Brown's paper shows a chronology that matches many of our earliest observations about the Irish in the Caribbean. They were there from the beginning, in every capacity from lowest to highest. What made Ireland so attractive to the crown and people who become the Old English were its resources, and the money they could have from it. Despite the danger and constant internecine warfare. Brown notes of West Africa that

“it was successfully infiltrated at multiple locations by both English and Dutch trading operations by the 1630s”³⁰⁹

And he then goes on to describe how

“The second Guinea Company established a highly valuable trade for gold, bartering iron sourced from the smelting operation of Richard Boyle, the First Earl of Cork, at Bandon.”³¹⁰

This bar iron ingots upset the balance of trade in what was called Senegambia at the time. This shows the complicated nature of colonisation when trying to make sense of this history. Brown refers to the bars from Boyle, known as the “First Earl, or the Great Earl” as Irish iron. He is using them as way to balance the narrative having shown that the concentration of Irish historiography on labour overshadows what was also Irish capital in the formation of the slave trade. However, the Earl of Cork, Richard Boyle, was not Irish.

Not in the Old English sense and not in the Old Irish sense. He was born in Canterbury, and came to Ireland to colonise it. And colonise it he did. The town of Bandon where the Iron was smelted was a favourite city of his. He supported the town and used the industry he built there. Bandon wasn't an old town. It was founded by protestant settlers from England in 1604. This Irish Iron was Iron made in Ireland by a town of English protestants

³⁰⁹ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 57.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

supported by and English born colonist. Foster has described Boyle as the “epitome of Elizabethan adventurer-colonist in Ireland.”³¹¹

It is difficult to accept the capital herein described as Irish. Not because the Irish as they were, are innocent of participating in Empire. Far from it. However, this particular colony of St. Kitts, or Saint Christopher, is labelled as a “Munster financed colony.” This implies its Irishness in a modern sense. Munster especially was one of the Kingdoms of Ireland that was laid ruin and then planted with Elizabethan settlers after the Second Desmond Rebellion in the 1580s.

“April 23. 45. Sir Warham Sentleger to Sir John Perrot. Munster nearly unpeopled by the murders done by the rebels and the killings by the soldiers. 30,000 dead of famine in half a year, besides numbers that are hanged and killed. The realm never in greater danger or the like misery. Beeves, muttons, swine, poultry, and butter all consumed.”³¹²

Yes the resources came out of Ireland, but they were often claimed by England or the English and directed to elsewhere in the nascent Empire.

As a *Wiedergutmachung*, Barbados itself had many Old English, mixed Anglo-Irish families with grander aspirations than the Native Irish who went to work as proper indentures in the orderly time period before the rebellion and civil war. Brown outlines the holdings of families such the Bourke, or Burke, Cohan, O’Carry, Blake, Fitzgerald and others were active on Barbados and lived in a peaceful a state as possible on such an

³¹¹ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (New York N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1989, 1988), 8.

³¹² H. C. Hamilton and Great Britain. Public Record Office, *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elisabeth: Preserved in the Public Department of Her Majesty’s Public Record Office. 1574 - 1585*, Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elisabeth: Preserved in the Public Department of Her Majesty’s Public Record Office. 1574 - 1585 (Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1867), <https://books.google.de/books?id=hdk9AAAACAAJ>.

island.³¹³ That ended in 1641, beginning a new period for any “Irish” in the Caribbean.

Brown notes that

“This peaceful coexistence ended abruptly in the aftermath of the Irish rebellion of October 1641, perhaps because they were no longer trusted by their English neighbours, but also because the home ports of the Old English planters in Ireland had become disrupted and, in some cases, destroyed.”³¹⁴

F. Why Brown’s Work Matters

1. How it reframes the Irish slavery discourse.

Brown’s paper is the first real history paper outside the visibility discourse, aside from Donoghue’s magazine article (when corrected) that is reliable under source analysis. He not only alludes to where the strongest pieces of evidence of the Irish as Slaves can be found. He finds them.

He shows the Irish in the Caribbean were used there in the 1650s as a substitute for enslaved African labour. The failure of the English slave trade efforts in Africa in the 1650s interrupted the flow of slaves. Brown shows Irish prisoners sent to islands such as Antigua and Barbados. He also shows they were treated as property. Brown notes that they had a somewhat different property status than African slaves. Brown notes that they were not treated in law as English indentured servants. They were also not inventoried the same as Indentures were. Brown emphasises that although they were called “servants” they often had no legal rights, or official end date to their servitude. The great delineation between servant and slave was the temporary status of servitude. It is often noted in the visibility discourse and elsewhere.

³¹³ Brown, “Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660,” 60.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

Brown highlights these deportations of Irish to the Caribbean. They were organised by English already involved with slave concerns in Africa and facilitated by English officials. The mortality rate for this cohort of Irish in Barbados was especially high. Half died within a year of arrival. Only a few survived to the Restoration. Then, they would again be subjects and have their rights restored. Brown notes that the folk memory of Irish enslavement here is often exaggerated, while in some respects it is also grounded in historical fact. He argues that the Irish were not enslaved to the same extent as Africans. Their treatment was similarly brutal. Their role in the colonial labour system was significant. He recognises that the Irish themselves believed they were enslaved.

2. What it tells us about history vs. visibility discourse.

The contrast in this section between Brown's paper and the lecture from Dr. Butler is clear. his paper is a historical account. Dr. Butler puts all her trust in what she thinks is a reliable account from Hogan et al. It has been shown that it turned out to be not so reliable. Corish has come to the same conclusion as Brown decades ago. The same correct conclusions are available with the previous discourse of Bridenbaugh or McDonald-Beckles. Zacek's paper as well contrasts very much with this paper. The contrasts are important. Zacek and Butler take the history attached to the visibility discourse for granted. They are dealing with the cultural issues almost exclusively, though in different contexts. They are completely facing the discourse of the visibility period. Butler engages the idea that the disinformation can lead to radicalisation and violence. Zacek is an avatar or the ultimate expression of the pattern as it has been observed. Her conclusions raise questions about the epicentre of the pattern.

Additionally Brown adheres rigidly to his own version of the servant-slave dichotomy. He does not attempt to argue the Irish were slaves. He is not defending or even acknowledging the Internet Meme. What he does is use archival and textual sources to show a short and brutal period. He demonstrates that Irish prisoners were substituted for interrupted slave

labour importation from Africa. That context had already begun, could not be stopped, but had been interrupted. Those forced labourers did not have the rights of the English. They were of an unknown and delineated status. They were freed by the Restoration. However, that was not a foregone conclusion while they were captives. They did not know they would be freed until it happened. Additionally, very few survived for that long.

3. Why “boring” is Essential.

The visibility discourse is driven by popularity and use value. In some cases it approaches a post-historical state. It's noted here that it perpetuates simplified unchecked, and unreliable narratives. The pattern of the visibility discourse has gained much traction online. It is held sacred and inarguable. This reinforces false historical narratives through repetition by both people and algorithms. Further, dissenting scholars face personal attacks. This highlights how dissent against the dominant narrative is demonised. The complexity of critiques against the visibility discourse might limit their influence. Popular online discourse favours simplicity. Brown doesn't pay any attention to this at all.

He dismissed the visibility discourse by labelling it as mere commentary. He notes that it's not substantive scholarship based on archival research. He critiques the ideological oversimplified and polarise narratives. Then he moves on. He does acknowledge Handler and Reilly. He notes their debate about Irish enslavement and modern arguments for reparations. Brown critiques their required self-censorship in this context. He emphasises academic historians must critically re-examine sources instead of accepting ideological narratives. do worry that Brown would consider our earlier work as mere commentary as well.

Brown's paper is not for non-specialists. His avoidance of the visibility discourse is methodologically sound. But it makes his work less appealing to a modern, web-driven audience. If not less appealing, less visible. Brown's meticulous archival work is a counterpoint to the nature of the visibility discourse.

Brown does not adopt the cultural framework used by scholars like Zacek or Butler. This deviation from the pattern offers a new way of examining Irish history: the old way. This account doesn't show the memeification of historical discourse that often occurs online. Brown provides a contrast to culturally driven narratives prevalent in modern historical analysis.

G. Conclusion

Brown's paper traces how the Irish were increasingly transported to the Caribbean. It is the only paper within this discourse that effectively challenges core assumptions. This challenge arises naturally from the research itself. The paper is not actively seeking to overturn the discourse. It's outside of the discourse as it was released years after the end of our scope and the visibility period.

However, there is a debate about what qualifies as "Irish" in this context. Brown references the use of "Irish iron" in trade with West Africa. This was iron from Richard Boyle's smelting operations in Bandon. Boyle himself, his partners, and his smelting centre in Bandon, were English, not Irish. This brings into question whether those resources could be accurately described as Irish. Many participants in the colonisation efforts were English out of Ireland. Irish capital played a role, but much of it was tied to English or Anglo-Irish interests. There were few purely Irish interests at this time. The answer is less important than the illustration. The divided people of the time have been smelted, as Boyle's iron was, into a single people.

Brown critiques the binary categorisation of labour in Barbados. He argues that it erases the complexities of nationality, ethnicity, and religion. The flattening of these distinctions reduces the nuance of Irish identity. Brown's narrative points out Scottish prisoners regained some rights under the Commonwealth. He notes also that the Irish did not. This shows the value of a paper which can relate to and overturn some of the visibility discourse. His legal and political context is nuanced. This contrasts the dichotomies of the visibility discourse

Brown's paper is the least Internet-friendly, but it might have the highest historical value. It overturns further many of the oft repeated maxims of the visibility discourse. He isn't trying to do so. He isn't fighting the discourse at all. Brown carefully avoids direct engagement with key figures in the visibility discourse, opting instead for a methodologically detached critique. Grenham and Donoghue show that would be a dangerous thing in itself for a scholar to do in this milieu.

The next section is an analysis of where the visibility discourse spins to its self-referential centre, Dr. Natalie Zacek's paper. While Brown's work returns to a source-driven, evidence-based approach, Zacek's paper represents the opposite trajectory. Rather than interrogating historical complexity, she adopts the visibility discourse framework, reinforcing contemporary political narratives rather than examining their factual basis.

IX. 2022 - Natalie Zacek “How the Irish became black.”

Natalie Zacek’s article examines the emergence of the Irish slaves myth, arguing that it is a modern phenomenon that distorts historical reality and is weaponised in contemporary political discourse to undermine discussions of race and social justice. She asserts that all historical Irish indentured servitude, while harsh, was fundamentally different from the hereditary racial slavery imposed on Africans. The Internet, she claims, has fuelled misinformation, creating a false equivalence that threatens to erase or diminish the unique suffering of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

This section critically examines Zacek’s claims, highlighting historical omissions, and ideological biases that undermine her conclusions. While her concern over the political use of the Irish slaves meme is valid, her argument oversimplifies historical complexity, misrepresents scholarly discourse, and inaccurately frames the timeline of these ideas. Moreover, her insistence on restricting the term “slavery” exclusively to the Atlantic chattel model leads to logical inconsistencies, particularly in her dismissal of modern forced labour and sex slavery as “not real slavery.”

By misrepresenting historical Irish servitude, ignoring key historiographical works, and prioritising ideological protectionism over accuracy, Zacek’s intervention inadvertently replicates the same discursive distortions she seeks to combat. This critique challenges her framing, arguing instead that the Irish slavery discourse, though weaponised in recent years, is not a modern invention but a historical theme with deep roots, manipulated in different ways over time. What is not necessary is a great deal of new argument, as many of the issues, if not all, have been dealt with already in the text. The analysis also considers the wider implications of her argument, particularly the dangers of restricting historical narratives to fit contemporary ideological concerns.

A. Zacek argues that Irish indentured servants were not enslaved in the way that Africans were.

"But the fact remains that indentured servitude was neither racialised nor inheritable, and those who survived their years of service would regain their liberty and, with hard work and a measure of luck, might significantly improve their economic and social status. As W. E. B. DuBois stated in *Black Reconstruction*, "no matter how degraded the [white] factory hand, he is not real estate".³¹⁵

Servitude was a complicated topic. Voluntary and involuntary servants in the 17th through the 18th centuries in the Caribbean weren't 20th century factory hands. The argument stands that few other groups were enslaved the way Africans were. This makes the distinction though weaker comparatively and not stronger.

1. The Distinction is not a stronger argument.

In the race to the bottom, the comparison is made with the properties of African slavery and nothing equates. This is a distinction without difference. Nothing will equate. African slavery was almost unique in the annals of that institution. It was so bad that it was stopped by those who were benefiting from it. There were though, other contemporary slaveries that were also legitimately slavery. They were different in degree, but not in kind. Russian, Ottoman Turkish, and Pacific Northwest Native American slavery existed contemporaneously, just to name a few types that were not African. Barbary slavery was African. These are all legitimately types of slavery and were contemporaneous with the slavery of the Caribbean and Atlantic world. Slavery as racially limited to Africans, even in early North America is to speak historically, indefensible. The contemporary settlers of Barbados and New England took Native Americans as slaves (Chapter VII, C, Section 4, 105) Indigenous Pacific Northwesterners treated their slaves just as brutally as white slave masters in the antebellum American south.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Zacek, "How the Irish Became Black," 331.

³¹⁶ Leland Donald, "The Study of Northwest Coast Slavery," in *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, ed. Donald Leland, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 1997),

2. Racialisation and Heredity

In this essay, which is two years past the visibility discourse, Natalie Zacek writes many of the same discursive issues that were found in the discourse of 2015-2020. As an example, she claims servitude wasn't racialised or heritable, noting through DuBois (above) that factory hands weren't real estate. This is true. Servants though were alienable property. And of course servitude was racialised. Unracialised servitude would be servitude either without any reference to race, or servitude containing all races as servants. And servitude as heritable as has been discussed in the section Handler and Reilly (Chapter VII, B. Section 4.) If the argument is made that servitude isn't truly an inheritance, then slavery also goes with it, because as mentioned, neither slaves nor illegitimate children, i.e., most servant children, could inherit. Lastly the issue of survivors is far too rosy in this citation and in the paper itself. The main division between servitude and slavery is duration, as shown by Wood or by Rodgers in (Chapter II, C. The differences between Servitude and African slavery.) That difference is undercut by the terrific mortality rate. Which is noted by Rodgers, documented by Bridenbaugh, and followed up in far more modern scholarship by Newman.³¹⁷

Abbot Emerson Smith noted that colonial governors estimated that only 2 in 10 servants survived their first year, and only 10% completed their indenture.³¹⁸ McDonald-Beckles noted that the economic structure caused Barbados to early-on exhaust its supply of arable land. Dunn said the same of Montserrat. He noted that after the restructuring of 1666 that it

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.5973043.8>, 33. Book, Edited Donald, Leland, ed. *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 1997.

³¹⁷ Newman, *A New World of Labour*, 83, 203.

³¹⁸ "Enquiries to the Governor of Virginia, 1670, 1671 the Statues at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in 1619," accessed September 11, 2024, <https://www.virtualjamestown.org/exist/cocoon/jamestown/fha/J1062>.

would be inevitable. Berleant-Schiller said the restructuring was anathema to free white labour.³¹⁹

And the Bridenbaughs, also noting exhausted supplies of land and hope, said of the recently freed servants of Barbados,

“When freedom came, more than one must have looked ahead and asked himself rhetorically: ‘Freedom for what?’”³²⁰

3. Deciding status through potentiality or hope?

Overall though, servants were not enslaved as Africans were. Some, not all, were enslaved differently than Africans would be, but they were still enslaved according to a legitimately articulated definition of slavery. This is also an issue for Zacek,

“(they) could not plan or even realistically hope for a better future for him/ herself or for his/her children. This, more than anything, is the line that separates servitude from enslavement, and that gives the lie to the previously discussed attempts to transform the Irish servant into the white slave.”³²¹

Zacek’s separation of servitude and slavery hinges entirely on potential outcomes, which can only be assessed in hindsight. What happens between the beginning and end of one’s servitude or enslavement, or even one’s eventual death, is not factored into her analysis. In both cases, the individual’s consent is disregarded. Servants and slaves, forced into labour and who ultimately die, may have experienced similar lives and fates.

To Zacek, the defining mark of slavery seems to be the absence of hope for a better future. But is it the absence of hope or the absence of possibility? And whose hope or belief in

³¹⁹ Riva Berleant-Schiller, “Free Labour and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 545, doi:10.2307/1922355, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1922355>.

³²⁰ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 112.

³²¹ Zacek, “How the Irish Became Black,” 331.

possibility is being considered? Hope is a complex and subjective measure, how would we even quantify it? Especially considering what we know about servant's children if they were conceived in the service period. Their lives may have been very short on hope, and without any agency until well into an adulthood that might not ever arrive. This perspective doesn't work at all.

B. Zacek argues that the Myth is political

"Why? Because the meme of the Irish slave is currently being deployed not only as a symbol of an alleged historical atrocity, but as a weapon with which to undermine current initiatives to redress past and present racial injustices – against African-Americans, not the Irish."³²²

The meme, as well as the Gateway Article which we discussed in Chapter III and IV show the article from Martin and the graphic Memes that follow are implicitly and explicitly malinformation. They have the effect of using the Irish in the Caribbean to widen existing cracks in societies with large diaspora communities. But some of the information therein is true, and “myth” has been since the beginning of the study, a less than optimal way of describing the complicated situation. The writings of Bishop Lynch, or Aubrey Gwynn, were also political. As was the Irish remonstrance, and the writings referred to by Donoghue in Chapter VII on Irish nationalist use of the slavery of Irish in the Caribbean. This reinforces again, that this is not a new issue. It is and has been since Henry II of England, a political issue.

C. Zacek argues that the Irish Did Not See Themselves as Comparable to Black People:

"If a generation ago neither the Irish nor Irish- Americans would have considered their historical experiences to have paralleled those of African slaves and their

³²² Ibid., 328.

American descendants, and Jimmy Rabbitte's comments on page and screen evoked laughter for their hyperbolic nature rather than nods of approval at their accuracy, why, over the past two decades, has the figure of the "Irish slave" become increasingly visible in culture and politics on both sides of the Atlantic?"³²³

Zacek's opening frame here was based on the famous scene in *The Commitments* by Roddy Doyle, Jimmy Rabbitte says to his potential bandmates when they hesitate to play black music, that the "Irish are the niggers of Europe." The print version was less politically correct than the film which used the word "blacks" instead. *The Commitments* was published in 1987, with the film released in 1991, shortly before the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Doyle's writing was representing blackness, and not slavery.

Zacek asks why the Irish slaves figure has emerged, when no one thinks the Irish share parallels with blackness? In her formulation, Zacek treats "black" and "slave" as interchangeable.

³²³ Ibid., 323.

A generation ago would be the time of the Holy Cross Dispute in the neighbourhood of Ardoyne, in Belfast,³²⁴ in 2001, three years after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The dispute focused on protestors obstructing Catholic school children and their parents on their way to school through Protestant neighbourhoods.

Figure 10 shows a photo of the dispute with 7 year old Eirinn Flood³²⁵ and members of the



Figure 11 Elizabeth Eckford by Will Counts



Figure 10 Eirinn Flood by Unattributed

Royal Ulster Constabulary in background. Figure 11 shows Elizabeth Eckford³²⁶ in the context of the Little Rock 9. Figure 12 features both, bridging the school girls in Arkansas in 1957 with Ardoyne in 2001. Murals are long recognised speech act in Northern Ireland. In the middle is a representation of a mother leading two children in the school's red

³²⁴ Unattributed, "BBC News | NORTHERN IRELAND | School Dispute Strikes a Chord," accessed October 1, 2024, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1531582.stm.

³²⁵ Conor Mcparland, "Holy Cross 20 Years on: Mother Still Gets Flashbacks of 'Nightmare' Days," *Belfast Media*, September 10, 2021, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://belfastmedia.com/holy-cross-dispute-twenty-years-on-mother-still-gets-flashbacks-of-nightmare-days>. Please also see

³²⁶ Brianna Kwasnik, "Marching on: Elizabeth Eckford of the Little Rock Nine Shares Her Traumatic Experiences Attending Central High School," *Arkansas Online*, September 5, 2021, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/sep/05/marching-on/>.

sweater uniform, modelling the 3 month long period of daily walks to school through verbal abuse, physical violence, bricks, fireworks, gunshots, bags full of human waste, and Improvised Explosive Devices being thrown at the children, parents, and police.



Figure 12 Ardoyne Mural to mark Holy Cross Dispute of 2001. Unattributed

This mural is a powerful example of how, a generation ago, some in Northern Ireland explicitly drew parallels with the African-American experience. Regardless of anyone's position vis-à-vis the Internet Meme, the mural shows that these connections were being made by Irish people.

Zacek also uses census statistics to show that in the 1980s, the Irish did not self identify as Africans and that very few Irish were African.

"In the 2016 census, only 1.3 per cent of the Republic's inhabitants identified themselves as "black", and this percentage would have been lower in the years of economic depression prior to the rise of the "Celtic Tiger" in the mid- 1990s, which saw an influx of migrants, including some of African descent."³²⁷

Rabbitte is talking about American soul music. He is discussing blackness in a metaphoric and fictional sense. He wasn't suggesting the Irish were racially black, neither was Doyle.

Zacek implies that no one ever thought of the Irish this way. That is, as Blacks or Ignatiev's "Negroes turned inside out."

According to Ignatiev, in the 1850's "Smoked" Irish was used and intended to insult black people, and was taken that way.³²⁸ "Negroes turned inside out" was another term used for the Irish. There is the famous Caribbean citation about whites branded with the epithet "white slaves" in 1667 and 1668.³²⁹ The term was used in 1960s British-Irish journalism. Ronan Fanning (2004) detailed how a former newspaper head used "white nigger" to describe his editorial positions on Northern Ireland.³³⁰ In 1979 Elvis Costello released the Single "Oliver's Army." The song references Cromwell's New Model Army and 1970s Troubles in Northern Ireland.

"There was a Checkpoint Charlie
He didn't crack a smile
But it's no laughing party
When you've been on the murder mile
Only takes one itchy trigger
One more widow one less white nigger"

³²⁷ Zacek, "How the Irish Became Black," 322.

³²⁸ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York [u.a.]: Routledge, 1995), 41.

³²⁹ Aubrey Gwynn, "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies," *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 4 (1932): 250, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25510930>.

³³⁰ Ronan Fanning, "'White Nigger' Denial Poses a Real Dilemma - Analysis, Opinion - Independent.Ie," Independent.ie, accessed September 29, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111102120135/https://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/white-nigger-denial-poses-a-real-dilemma-488276.html>.

The "white nigger" in the song refers to Catholic northern Irish in the vernacular.³³¹

Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh published in 1994, a history of the civil unrest that led to the troubles. It is titled *Ulster's White Negroes*.³³² None of these have to be correct to show more than circumstantially that the connection was made more often than Zacek's remarks would indicate.

A 2024 chapter from Simon Prince is also called "Ulster's white negroes." It was published in 2024's *Race in Irish Literature and Culture*. It outlines how activists on both sides took up the American Black decolonial experience in their rhetoric.³³³

In Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel 1987–2007, Liam Harte writes,

"For Elizabeth Cullingford, however, the Irish/black analogy is historically misleading because it overlooks "the dismal history of Irish-American hostility to African-Americans," which complicates in turn any notion of "the Catholics as the white Negroes of Northern Ireland." And yet, as Lauren Onkey and Timothy Taylor have observed, historical evidence to support this cultural correspondence can be found not only in the political wall murals of Derry and West Belfast but also in the utterances of leading figures in the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, who looked to the Irish literary revival for artistic models."³³⁴

³³¹ Elvis Costello, *Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2015), 35–36.

³³² Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh and Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, *Ulster's White Negroes* (Edinburgh, San Francisco: AK Press, 1994).

³³³ Simon Prince, "'Ulster's White Negroes': Rhetoric of Race at the Start of the Troubles," in *Race in Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. Malcolm Sen and Julie M. Weng, Cambridge themes in Irish literature and culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/4632AE10849CB8A4ABB84DB4860BA240>, 172ff.

³³⁴ Liam Harte, *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel, 1987–2007*, Reading the novel (Chichester West Sussex U.K., Hoboken New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014). doi:10.1002/9781118502334, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9781118502334>.

The idea of an amalgamation of Irishness and Blackness whether correct or not, whether welcome or not, accepted by either party or not, is not unheard of, it is not a novel idea.³³⁵

Returning to our investigation of the question, the frame that Irish a generation (or more) ago did consider parallels with black America, regardless of whether those parallels themselves are sound.

D. Zacek also argues the "Irish slaves" narrative is a recent invention

“According to the prolific and well-respected independent scholar Liam Hogan, the Internet meme of the “Irish slave” first appeared in 2013, when an article called “The Irish slave trade – The forgotten “white” slaves” first published in 2008, went viral on Facebook, on which it has now been shared almost a million times.”³³⁶

Continuing the novelty discussion Zacek asks

“why, over the past two decades, has the figure of the “Irish slave” become increasingly visible in culture and politics on both sides of the Atlantic?”

She asks further

“Where did this image of “Irish slavery” come from? Why has it gained so much traction in such a short period of time?”

The answer to all of these questions, is that someone (interested people) was pushing the idea, and then something (the social Internet) pushed it to many more. The traction comes from the Internet’s reach and speed, but the idea is older. The Irish Slave Meme as we’ve described it goes back to the beginning of the 17th century or further. We could also call it a narrative as Zacek does here. That does weaken the argument for Zacek. The Irish Slave

³³⁵ Ignatiev, *How the Irish became white*, 41.

³³⁶ Zacek, “How the Irish Became Black,” 328.

Meme is functionally the same as a general narrative of slavery. The Internet Meme of Irish slavery is as new as the Internet. But it is a subset of the Irish Slavery idea packaged for online consumption. Donoghue's Section C in Chapter VII, explains the use of Irish slaves in the Caribbean to further the nationalist project in Ireland, in the 19th century.

In the 1930's Gwynn also told us

“That Cromwell's Government transported many thousands of Irish men and women, and sold them as slaves in the Barbados, has been a common place of Irish history since the days of Dr. Lynch and his *Alithinologia*”³³⁷

The Alithinologia discussing the enslavement of the Irish was written by Archbishop of Tuam, John Lynch in 1664. The Irish as slaves is not a completely new idea.

E. Ignoring Caribbean and Atlantic History

Zacek wrote

“Prior to the publication of O’Callaghan’s book, the experiences of Irishmen and women in the seventeenth- century English West Indian colonies had not received much attention from historians, at least in part because of the limited corpus of primary sources that describe them. The most substantive works on this subject were a pair of articles that appeared in quick succession in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the leading journal of early American and Atlantic history: Riva Berleant- Schiller’s “Free labour and the economy in seventeenth- century Montserrat” and Hilary McDonald Beckles’s “ “A riotous and unruly lot”: Irish indentured servants and freemen in the English West Indies, 1644– 1713’.”³³⁸

³³⁷ Aubrey Gwynn, “Indentured Servants and Negro Slaves in Barbados (1642-1650),” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 19, no. 74 (1930): 279, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094620>.

³³⁸ Zacek, “How the Irish Became Black,” 323.

Significant research existed well before O'Callaghan, Donald Harman Akenson published *If the Irish ran the World* in 1997. Beckles published *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados* in 1989. Jill Sheppard wrote "the Red Legs of Barbados: Their Origins and History" in 1977.³³⁹

We are left wondering, why would Zacek say this? Why leave out *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados*? Why leave out Akenson and *If the Irish ran the World*?

In his book McDonald Beckles notes the Irish and other servants were temporary chattels, treated like things, sold with no consultation, and although they were not slaves as Africans were, they were closer to slave than free.³⁴⁰ This accentuates more than the simple dichotomy of slaves and indentured servants. Akenson wrote specifically about the Irish in the Leewards.

To any scholar of the Caribbean, the omission of *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados* from 1989 strongly implies a wasteful lack of engagement with the subject matter. The omission of Akenson's 1997 work *If the Irish Ran the World* is also unexplainable in Zacek's work, whether one agrees with him or not.

Zacek mentions McDonald-Beckles article "Black Men in White Skins." It was published in 1986.³⁴¹ "Plantation Production and White "Proto-Slavery": White Indentured Servants and the Colonisation of the English West Indies, 1624-1645" was published in 1985.³⁴² It is just as substantive as later papers. The historiographical record does not support Zacek

³³⁹ Jill Sheppard, *The "Redlegs" of Barbados, Their Origins and History*, The Caribbean, historical and cultural perspectives (Millwood N.Y.: KTO Press, 1977).

³⁴⁰ McDonald-Beckles, *White servitude and black slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*, 6.

³⁴¹ Hilary Beckles, "'Black Men in White Skins': The Formation of a White Proletariat in West Indian Slave Society," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 15, no. 1 (1986), doi:10.1080/03086538608582726.

³⁴² Hilary McD. Beckles, "Plantation Production and White "Proto-Slavery": White Indentured Servants and the Colonisation of the English West Indies, 1624-1645," *The Americas* 41, no. 3 (1985), doi:10.2307/1007098, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1007098>.

here. The possible implications of that are far reaching for the credibility of the paper we're discussing.

1. Apples and Oranges

McDonald Beckles has noted that he is not saying that Irish were enslaved as Africans were. Rather, servitude on Barbados went as far towards slavery with servants as possible. The majority of those were Irish in the early Caribbean. When the market enabled it, the planters switched to black labour. The Planters had an advanced market view of servants as capital. Meaning they were just pieces of a machine to produce capital. The human considerations of labour in a market view are subsumed to the pursuit of profit. Beckles said servitude approached the planter's ideal of guaranteed labour output. All this occurred well before the 1670 scope of Zacek's 2010 book. McDonald Beckles scope begins in 1627. That's 43 years of development in the most dynamic setting available. Possibly the most dynamic in early modern history. The Leewards are not going to resemble Barbados in 1670. They are not the same periods. When examined in the same period, they aren't at the same stage of development.

2. Riva Berleant-Schiller

Beside Beckles, Zacek cites Riva Berleant-Schiller's paper on Montserrat. "Free labour and the economy in seventeenth-century Montserrat" is full of citations. There are so many substantial works, they take up the entire first page. Higham, and Harlow are the first two, but she also mentions Pulsipher and her single island study.

Zacek makes this positive reflection on freed indentures in the Caribbean,

"In many cases, these Irish servants were able to establish themselves in nonplantation employment at the end of their indentures, frequently as artisans or small independent cultivators. Rather than being viewed by the planters as a bestial rabble whose loyalty to white authority was always in doubt, they were valued as a

population that could be mobilised in the defence of the islands against foreign invasion or slave rebellion”³⁴³

Berleant-Schiller wrote though that

“they were disadvantaged in Montserrat's emerging sugar and slave economy. Inadequate wages, high prices, restrictive land policies, and fines and taxes levied by the planter oligarchy hobbled them and diminished their already poor chances of becoming planters themselves. The number of servant immigrants dropped and the entire white population dwindled as freed servants left, looking for better opportunities elsewhere in the colonies, especially the Carolinas.”³⁴⁴

This contradicts Zacek on the subject of the free labourers of Montserrat. It's true that Zacek doesn't quote Berleant Schiller, she cites her paper's existence, but doesn't make use of it. If there are only two substantial papers on Irish servants why are they not worth citing, quoting or refutation? Why cite a different paper with a different scope than your own monograph? Or papers that are different than the ones mentioned?

What Irish were left in Montserrat in Zacek's scope, might have been in the favourable situation she is describing. She is critiquing McDonald Beckles with a different island and time period than he was writing about. We note the same issue occurred in Akenson's critiques of McDonald-Beckles. In *If the Irish...* he claims that Montserrat's servitude is a galaxy of difference from Barbados. Beckles starts in 1627, which is prior to the timeline Akenson discusses. The scope of Akenson, the early 18th century, doesn't match Beckles. We have hardly much less information about pre 1672 Montserrat. Akenson is talking about Successful Montserrat. That does not start until after 1666. Zacek is also talking about 1670 to 1776.

³⁴³ Zacek, “How the Irish Became Black,” Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Berleant-Schiller, “Free Labour and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat”

We note the colonial history of Berleant-Schiller. She outlines that after the French destroyed the nascent Sugar production in 1666. French forces burned the small holdings that Dunn had noted were present from the beginning. Subsequently, the Colonial Office sought to use the clean state to re-establish Montserrat as a sugar-based slave economy. Berleant-Schiller observes that

“After the Anglo-French wars of 1666-1667, the prospects for freed servants of any ethnicity worsened in Montserrat. In 1666 French and Carib raiders burned the island and sacked its plantations, snuffing its incipient sugar economy. When the wars were over, rebuilding was guided by explicit policies and practices for resuming the interrupted course toward a sugar and slave economy. Nothing in these policies and practices favoured freed white labour.”³⁴⁵

Zacek is comparing Montserrat in the slavery phase with the pre-slavery servant economy. She starts in 1670. McDonald-Beckles starts with servitude in 1627. Comparable? Yes. Comprable? No. Montserrat after 1670 is the beginning of its slave economy acceleration. It is not going to be a similar market situation for servants as before. It will never resemble Barbados. The market situation is not the same. The scope of Zacek and Akenson does not match that of Beckles. This makes a comparison a minefield unless it is recognised that they are comparing apples and oranges. Neither Akenson nor Zacek does so.

What is evident here is where unfamiliarity the region takes us to the pattern established by Hogan and Reilly et al. Zacek ignores the dynamism of the Caribbean and ignores the breadth of studies she critiques. When Beckles wrote of protoslavery, he is talking about the early period of servitude. This is in the formative years of colonisation. The Planters are developing their ideal form of slavery through the misery they visit on their servants. Zacek writes that her servants were much different, as does Akenson.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 545.

We are sure she is correct. The servants she describes are sent by west coast merchant families to work. They are not POWs with no legal status as in 1652 on an island known for violence, drunkenness and licentiousness. They are on Montserrat, in 1700, post Restoration in a directed project to make the island a profitable slave economy. Montserrat had been wiped out by the French, and rebuilt according to the slave model. Yes, they are going to be differences with Barbados in the 1650s. These are a difference without the distinction of negating each other. Apples and Oranges.

3. Truth vs. Usefulness

“It was the combination of improved possibilities at home and growing awareness of the miseries of colonial indenture that resulted in a decline in the availability of white servants, and thus an increased dependence on enslaved people of African descent as a plantation labour force.”³⁴⁶

Zacek notes that there was a decline in the availability of servants. It is true that white labour had cycles of supply that waxed and waned, those cycles were parallel with a perpetually increasing purchase of African slaves whenever they could be had. That purchase didn't match demand. They wanted far more. Bridenbaugh and Beckles note, the availability of slaves changed the market. Africans who would be owned for life were a better investment and made more money for their masters. This was especially true once slaves became cheaper due to Dutch credit and colonial civil war in Pernambuco.³⁴⁷ British control of the trade was eventually secured. Then the market made the dependency. Brown's paper above shows that the Protectorate government was attempting to further its slavery ambitions prior to 1652. According to Brown the Irish used in this way, were a stopgap on the way to the terrible transformation from servitude to African slavery.

³⁴⁶ Zacek, “How the Irish Became Black,” 331.

³⁴⁷ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 33.

Winthrop's letter of 1645 to Downing shows that by then servants were only a means to an end. The end was profit, and that could be best reached by acquiring African slaves.

Zacek's statement treats this as a causal dichotomy. This does not match the record. The Planters wanted African slaves badly. White labour or not. Bridenbaugh asserted in the 1970s that slavery on Barbados was more pervasive at an earlier date than previously thought. Russell Menard also showed this to be the case in *Sweet Negotiations*.³⁴⁸ If slaves had been feasibly available sooner, they would have adopted them sooner.

That implication that the switch to slavery was an unavailability of whites is almost victim blaming. The reason for the switch was the profit potential of permanently enslaved African labour. They were called the "life of the place" by Winthrop in that letter to Downing in August of 1645.³⁴⁹ This was provided they survived the seasoning year and then survived long enough to pay for themselves. Newman notes through letters from Drax and Littleton that on the Islands they often didn't.³⁵⁰

F. Ideological protectionism eventually veers into absurdity.

Up until now this analysis has shown that the pattern set by the online discourse has remained. One of the chief aims, stated or unstated, of the visibility discourses was to protect the narrative of African slavery from white supremacists. Then it accelerated to an aggressive hoarding of social capital in a victim culture context. Brown has noted that

³⁴⁸ Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, First paperback edition (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

³⁴⁹ "Downing Publishes Legacies of Enslavement Report | Downing College Cambridge," accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.dow.cam.ac.uk/news/downing-publishes-legacies-enslavement-report>. Annex 3.

³⁵⁰ Newman, *A New World of Labour*, 203.

discourse is oversimplified and lacks research.³⁵¹ But Zacek's article shows where these narratives can go when taken to their conclusion.

Zacek's steps to the end of the trajectory with her penultimate position,

"I urge scholars who are concerned about the political effects of this conflation to make every effort to correct the misuse, over centuries, of the term 'slavery'. Many idealistic reformers, whether in the American Revolution, in the campaign for women's suffrage or in turn-of-the-century initiatives against forced prostitution, have described themselves or those for whom they claimed to speak as 'slaves' when, no matter how deep their sufferings may have been, this category was simply not applicable to their situations."³⁵²

This is the ultimate expression of the pattern and the protection of historical social capital, obscenity is the result.

It's true that modern forced prostitutes weren't Atlantic slaves. Have we really fallen so low that we'll now claim the word slavery means only Atlantic slavery? Not because it must mean that. But in order to protect the capital of a narrative? In doing so, we would deny modern living people who are held in sex work, or farm work, or any other forced labour, and who cannot escape due to fear or violence as "not enslaved?" There are, according to the International Labour Organisation, 4,9 Million are trapped in sex slavery alone³⁵³ We shouldn't call them slaves because ontologically they aren't comparable to American slaves in the 19th century?

This is exactly what Zacek is advocating when she writes

³⁵¹ Brown, "Free, and unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660"

³⁵² Zacek, "How the Irish Became Black," 332.

³⁵³ International Labour Organization, "Data and Research on Forced Labour," accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/data-and-research-forced-labour>.

"We can see this same problematic conception of "slavery" at work today in the activities of non- profit organisations such as Anti- Slavery International. These campaigners' dedication to raising awareness of and combating such evils as sex- trafficking, child marriage and bonded labour is entirely admirable, but collapsing these practices under the umbrella of "slavery" amplifies the sufferings of the present by muting those of the past."

Considering how terrible sex slavery would be, it's hard to imagine being able to amplify it by changing its title. Surely the *Wiedergutmachung* to Zacek here is that if we privilege the unchangeable sufferings of the past, we ignore the preventable sufferings of the present?

It is almost unbelievable that Zacek writes

"In the majority of situations to which these groups respond, the individuals who have been forced into various types of uncompensated or coerced labour, trafficked into sex work, or compelled to marry without their consent are not considered chattel in legal terms"

It is true that modern slaves aren't de jure chattel. They are de facto slaves though. A modern slave isn't chattel as recognised in law.³⁵⁴ Western nations often don't have chattels in people anymore, not since the British began a campaign to end chattel slavery worldwide in the 19th century.

Modern Slavery has many definitions. Sex slavery, uncompensated, inescapable coerced labour, forced marriage for adults or children. These are forms of forcing someone into

³⁵⁴ United Nations, "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime: United Nations Treaty Collection," accessed October 7, 2024, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=_en.

someone else' power, taking away their freedom, livelihood, violating their rights and exerting a proprietary interest where none exists.

While modern forced labourers aren't legally chattel, they nonetheless experience conditions fundamentally which can be legitimately articulated as slavery. Slavery with people as property is illegal almost worldwide. To make this distinction Zacek again uses a comparative framework where Atlantic slavery is the only slavery. She writes that,

"they have not forfeited their human rights, and their servitude is not passed on to their children. If they run away from their captors, the latter cannot expect law enforcement officials to locate them and return them to servitude, and it is those captors who will face legal consequences for their actions. When confronted with horrific accounts of unfree labour that range from eastern European and African girls being trafficked to European cities to work in the sex industry to English teenagers from troubled backgrounds who have been groomed to join "county lines" drug-dealing gangs, this distinction may seem semantic, but misconceptions regarding the nature of slavery, as opposed to other forms of forced labour and related abuses, have unfortunately contributed to the power of the image of "Irish slavery", and thus have worked to minimise the sufferings of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas."

The human rights of sex slaves haven't been forfeited. Human rights by their nature cannot be forfeited, only violated, they are endowed by the Creator. This was one of the reasons the abolitionists gave for ending slavery. As a *Wiedergutmachung* we understand that Zacek is trying to say African slaves forfeited their human rights under the laws that made them real estate, and the legal fiction that they weren't people in law. Those laws were and are held to have not been legitimate. Despite Zacek's attempt, the question arises: Slavery was once a norm of the human societal condition. We agree that even though it was legal, it was unjust. Doesn't that mean that it would be even more unjust in its modern form? It's not supposed to exist. It's no longer legitimised through law. Every part of it is illegal. But for the person subjected to it, that must be cold comfort.

Atlantic slavery was not the only form of slavery to exist, it is not the only form of slavery there ever was. It ended. People have been enslaved for thousands of years, in a variety of ways. Calling modern slaves, modern slaves or even just slaves does not minimise the suffering of Africans or their descendants. That suffering will be minimised by white supremacists or other ignorant people who are doing it because they want the social capital. They don't need a misconception of what sex slavery is in order to do so. Sex Slavery is slavery. Even though by law a trafficked teenager isn't chattel or a hereditary slave or real estate. If they are forced into prostitution and can't leave? They are a slave. A modern slave. Recognising that doesn't present a clear and present danger. The idea that it does is the obscene conclusion to the pattern we have noted in this discourse.

This absurdity directly undermines the very pursuit of justice that activists are seeking. This highlights the need for an understanding of slavery that encompasses both its historical and contemporary forms.

G. Conclusion

Zacek's insistence on limiting the definition of slavery to Atlantic contexts caps her essay with an absurdity that trivialises the suffering of modern victims of exploitation. By prioritising a narrow historical narrative, she not only stifles essential social movements but also undermines the pursuit of justice for all those currently trapped in various forms of slavery, highlighting the urgent need for a broader understanding of this critical issue. Her omission of key information may activate the ophelialogical heuristic, as it underscores a lack of engagement with the complex realities of colonial labour systems, or indicates a purposeful omission of important information. Zacek's attempt to draw a stark line between servitude and slavery overlooks the shared experiences of exploitation and despair faced by both groups, reducing a nuanced historical interplay to a simplistic and inaccurate narrative.

The issue is not the absence of historical expertise but rather the deliberate exclusion or ignorance of existing scholarship, rendering her approach inadequate for addressing the problem at its source. Her flawed comparison between Montserrat and Barbados fails to

acknowledge critical differences in time periods and market conditions, ultimately invalidating her critiques. The omission of McDonald-Beckles' work, or Akenson's, is both surprising and problematic, given their foundational role in Caribbean historiography.

The question of why the Irish slavery narrative has gained traction does highlight a deliberate intent to undermine the social capital of African American descendants. While the idea of Irish enslavement is not new, the Internet has facilitated its rapid spread, showcasing how historical narratives can be manipulated for contemporary purposes. Zacek's oversight of the Irish majority among servants during the first 30-50 years of colonisation indicates a lack of engagement with crucial primary sources and demographic data necessary for understanding their role in early colonial society.

In summary, Zacek's work ultimately illustrates how problematic narratives can emerge when unchecked discursive patterns lead to absurdist arguments. This reflects the broader implications of such discourse in contemporary discussions. This paper encapsulates the ultimate expression of the pattern we've observed during this visibility period, and its ridiculous conclusions, and it raises critical questions about the logical conclusions that might arise if these narratives are left unchecked.

H. Comparing Brown and Zacek

1. The Role of Historical Sources

Brown and Zacek represent two opposing tendencies in contemporary historiography. Brown's work engages with archival records, expanding the historical narrative by addressing gaps in primary sources. It would be valuable to know how long his research took compared to Zacek's paper. He approaches the Irish in the Caribbean in archival terms. In contrast, Zacek does not engage with new evidence, nor does she attempt to fill historiographical gaps. Instead, she aligns herself with the visibility discourse, prioritizing its conclusions over an independent analysis of the historical record. Her omissions are not just a matter of oversight but are structurally necessary to maintain the position she takes.

2. Method vs. Ideology

Brown's work dismantles the visibility discourse by refusing to acknowledge it as a valid framework for analysis. He sidesteps the debate altogether. Zacek, on the other hand, validates the discourse explicitly, reinforcing its underlying assumptions even when they are historically unsound. Her selective use of evidence and insistence on restricting the term "slavery" to a single historical context suggest an attempt to control not just historical interpretation but language itself. The end result is not historical clarity but discursive policing, where language is shaped to protect ideological narratives rather than reflect historical realities.

3. Political Implications

The political implications of their work also diverge. Brown's work neither reinforces Irish victimhood nor minimises African slavery. It simply completes the historical picture. Zacek, by contrast, explicitly frames her intervention as a defence against right-wing misuse of history. Her approach is not neutral; it is designed to prevent the appropriation of African American historical suffering. However, in her attempt to contain misinformation, she ends up reinforcing a feedback loop that produces its own distortions. The contradictions in her work, claiming that Irish servitude was fundamentally different from slavery while sidestepping key evidence about the coercive nature of the system, are not incidental. She presents her work as a historical intervention, but it is actually ideological containment.

4. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times

In the end, Brown and Zacek do not simply present two different perspectives on the same issue; they operate in fundamentally different intellectual spaces. Brown is doing historiography. Zacek is engaging in ideological gatekeeping. The comparison between their work is not just a contrast in conclusions but in function: one expands the field, the other leaves it behind. The fact that both are responding to the same historical question

highlights a deeper tension in the field, whether history is meant to be an exploration of the past or a battleground for contemporary discourse.

X. Conclusion: On the Uses of the Irish in the Caribbean

A. The Post-Historical Shift

The Irish slavery debate is not an isolated case. It is part of a wider shift where historical narratives are increasingly judged by their ability to serve contemporary agendas. Where epistemology asks, “How do we know this?” and ontology asks, “What is this?” these narratives seem to ask, “Is it useful for what I’m selling?” This framework reveals a structural transformation in digital historical discourse: facts become secondary to ideological utility, correction is not rewarded if it does not serve the dominant narrative, and the Internet enables narratives to circulate without accountability. As Jean Baudrillard warned, in an era of hyperreality, truth is no longer contested, it is replaced by simulation of itself.

The central lesson of this study is that when history is judged by its utility rather than by epistemological or ontological factors such as accuracy, it ceases to be history at all. History cannot be divorced from truth claims or from the process of questioning and testing them. This is not to say that history possesses absolute truths, but that it strives for them with vigour. This returns us to the introduction and to Willie Thompson’s assertion that verifiable knowledge is possible, though always provisional and incomplete. We do not know the whole past any more than we know the whole present. History is the process of eking out truth, or at least verifiable knowledge, from the remains of the past. Except in exceptional cases or at broad levels of analysis, claiming knowledge is the responsibility of the scholar, based on their work and professionalism, while questioning that work is the right of the recipients. It is a reciprocal relationship, the dynamics of which create both the field and the subject. Break that, and break the field.

These narratives or discourses or texts claim to be historical. This gives them the credibility of that striving. Yet they often abandon epistemological or ontological striving entirely in favour of manipulating mass opinion. They pass history on their way to propaganda. So the

terms Post history, or ophelialogy aren't gimmicks. Especially post history is a description of where some of the discussion goes when it is exposed unprotected to the currents of new mass media and negligent or malicious actors. The Irish Slavery Meme and its response illustrate how digital platforms have reshaped historical discourse, favouring narratives that provoke engagement over those that pursue truth, disempowering old gatekeeping structures. This isn't completely novel. Donoghue's notes on 19th century use of the Irish exiled to the Caribbean shows that. The uses of history were often intertwined with politics. But now it is inescapable, and the world is up to their necks in it.

This trend represents a profound challenge for historians. Journalism's adaptation to the online challenges of the last two decades has produced a sleeker, more diffuse body of reportage. But that body has also partially discarded the idea of journalistic objectivity and at least in an American context ceased to strive for the ideal.³⁵⁵ The Fact-Checkers' and Journalism's extremely poor performance in this phenomenon strongly supports this. History's product is different than journalism. History and historians are not as fast as journalism. If the historical method cannot compete with virality, what is the future of historical scholarship?

The post-historical shift might be inevitable. Technological innovations might produce a solution set we cannot yet see. Either way, it demands a response. Historians must engage with digital media while maintaining their commitment to accuracy, even when the work to produce the best results possible is inconvenient. Dr. Butler cannot be anything but right to preach a gospel of engagement *before* the damage sets in. When engaging online, historians should also beware of post-historical pitfalls. The challenge ahead is not just understanding history, but recognising when it has been left behind.

³⁵⁵ YouTube (2022): Megan Williams - Objectivity doesn't exist even for journalists. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdYAshutLho>, updated on 10/22/2022, checked on 10/22/2022.

B. Findings

The Internet Slavery Meme and the response to it represent a striking example of how historical narratives are instrumentalised for political and social capital at the expense of professional and rigorous historical practice. There is a divided discourse where both sides argued their positions rigorously without rigorous evidence. Some of these issues stem from human error, as seen in the work of Hogan and Zacek. Others, such as the shallow scope of fact-checkers' inquiries, may be exacerbated by the structural tendencies of digital platforms. Finally, cases like the Internet Meme or John Martin's article demonstrate deliberate manipulation. Research that could correct the misinformation in the pattern and discourse exists in the form of a body of publishing from legitimate academics since the 1960s at least. The facts do not actually seem to matter to the participants. This signals a post-historical turn in the discourse beyond epistemology and ontology to situations where the use value of the narrative far outstrips its truth value.

C. What Are the Limitations of the Study

The availability of historical evidence, particularly in Caribbean contexts, remains limited, constraining scholars' ability to provide comprehensive answers to certain research questions. Judging the motivations of participants in the visibility discourse is similarly difficult, as many key figures are inaccessible, leaving us reliant on their published works and public statements. Additionally, the intersection of the social Internet and history is still in its early stages, meaning that future developments in digital history will likely reshape how these topics are studied. Even so, certain limitations persist. This investigation focused on a specific meme and the period of its heightened visibility, yet its roots stretch back through centuries of folk memory and nationalist retellings. Similar patterns appear in other debates, such as those surrounding the 1619 Project, suggesting that many controversies follow or will follow the same post-historical trajectory.

D. The Fluid Identity of the Irish in the Caribbean

The evidence shows that the Irish in the Caribbean were both real and constructed a people who existed as a distinct group within colonial society but whose identity was curated by external forces and reinterpreted in modern discourse. This duality exemplifies the malleability of historical identity and its potential for instrumentalisation, a theme that resonates throughout this dissertation.

The Irish in the Caribbean present a paradoxical case of identity. While they were a recognised group within colonial society, their identity was both real and constructed, shaped by external forces and internal dynamics. Historical records indicate that the Irish did not exist in the 17th century as a homogenous group akin to the modern Irish Republic. Instead, their identity was fragmented, divided between Old Irish and Old English factions.

Historically, the Irish in the Caribbean occupied a liminal space. On islands like Montserrat, they created concentrated communities that retained a semblance of Irishness, yet they operated under the economic and political structures of English rule. Their presence as a distinct group is supported by colonial records, albeit often in disparaging terms. However, it is critical to stress that this Irishness was shaped as much by English perceptions as by the Irish themselves.

E. Visibility Discourse

The response to the Internet Meme followed a problematic pattern of denial, minimisation, and dichotomisation. For instance, phrases like “unanimous agreement” or “overwhelming evidence” were wielded to create a semblance of solidity around arguments that could not withstand scrutiny, such as Hogan’s position that the divide between servants and slaves was unanimously decided by scholars or historians. The frequent reliance on tautological definitions of slavery, limiting it to “racialised perpetual hereditary chattel slavery” created a conceptual trap, precluding honest engagement with the complexities of servitude in the Caribbean.

Despite the dominance of Hogan's framing, exceptions like Grenham and Donoghue provide models of scholarship and argument that resist the binary framing of the discourse. Grenham's critique that denying the term "slavery" for Irish experiences is "quibbling"³⁵⁶ serves as a reminder that historical nuance is not only possible but necessary. However, such dissenting voices were often marginalised in the digital discourse, raising questions about the gatekeeping mechanisms of visibility on social media and in journalism.

The discourse also revealed a troubling lack of regional or specialist expertise. Journalists and activists frequently cited non-specialist opinions, bypassing established experts in Caribbean history. They made no recourse to available primary sources. This gap in authority contributes to the erosion of trust in historical scholarship, a crucial theme in this thesis. As Dr. Leslie Harris's side-lining in the 1619 Project reminds us,³⁵⁷ this dismissal of expertise is not unique to the Irish slavery debate. It underscores the structural and ethical challenges of practicing history in digital spaces.

Dr. Anthea Butler's 2019 lecture marked a critical turning point, solidifying the post-historical trajectory. By uncritically adopting Hogan's framing, she demonstrated how the visibility discourse had fully detached from historical inquiry, becoming a political tool rather than an academic investigation. David Brown's research on mortality rates of Irish forced labourers in Barbados provides critical evidence that contradicts mainstream visibility discourse, yet it remains largely ignored in favour of more simplistic dichotomies. The result is clear: by 2019, the debate over Irish slavery had ceased to be about the historical questions at all.

³⁵⁶ Grenham, "Irish Roots: Were there Irish slaves in Barbados?"

³⁵⁷ Leslie Harris, "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me," POLITICO, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>.

F. Answering the Research Questions

These research questions addressed the broader issue of how historical narratives are instrumentalised in this discourse. Specifically:

How accurate are the claims about Irish slavery? Most of the claims of the discourse on either side are not accurate. The Internet Slavery Meme's false equivalence between Irish and African slavery is historically inaccurate, it is false. The Irish were not slaves exactly as Africans were. Since some Irish were enslaved in a different degree though, the responses to the meme are shown to be flawed, revealing a need for more balanced and nuanced historical analysis. Felons and traitors were not "legally human" or people in law. They were dead to the law. There are groups of Irish people in the Caribbean who can be considered slaves by almost any articulate legitimate definition (forcibly transported, sold for a term, died unfree) and others who might be considered slaves from a certain point of view (debt slavery) and there are others that were not (voluntary servants and those Irish of higher classes) For instance Old English Irish who owned and / or oversaw slaves in collaboration with the regime.

How has the social Internet reshaped historical discourse? Digital platforms have accelerated the spread of distorted narratives, amplifying their reach and impact while facilitating polarised debates that prioritise effect over accuracy. This doesn't mean the Internet is inherently negative The Slavery Meme spread online, it was also suppressed online, through albeit inaccurate, efforts. Both the effort to establish the Internet Meme, and to suppress it were post-historical use of the Internet as a medium. The Internet has made research easier in an almost immeasurable way. It also indiscriminately eases transmission of ideas, good or bad.

What does the evidence reveal about the use of these narratives in modern cultural battles? History has always been used to argue politics. In the past, people had less information, setting debates with only what was available in their time and space. But in the hyperreality of 2025, we have access to more information than any generation before us.

The questions surrounding the Irish in the Caribbean were solvable with existing evidence, yet the answers that emerged during the visibility period were unified in one thing: they were not supported by that evidence. They weren't supported by new evidence. In fact, the evidence was often ignored altogether in favour of commentary. This research reveals that the online narrative of Irish slavery is vastly distorted. The social Internet accelerates the transmission of ideas, scales their impact, and embeds history into political and cultural debates. As Barzun noted, history derives power from its use in arguing politics. This power, however, is both a strength and a vulnerability, as instrumentalisation often compromises the pursuit of truth.

In democratic systems, politics are market structures, and the social Internet, a convergence of political, commercial, and social marketing, amplifies the reach, influence, and speed of historical narratives, sometimes to the detriment of their accuracy.

This dynamic makes online history particularly vulnerable to instrumentalisation. The Irish Slavery Meme exemplifies this vulnerability, as the debate surrounding it shifted from seeking epistemic or ontological clarity to focusing on its use value.

This near post-historical shift underscores the vulnerability of historical discourse in digital spaces. It mirrors a deeper structural change in the that the social Internet has overlaid on the history that appears there. Internet content isn't just consumable, it's participatory. The cost of bad behaviour online is much different than offline. In the past, if someone had attempted to pass off a fraudulent historical narrative, gatekeepers would have intervened.

The Internet allows anyone to say anything, with almost no consequences. The social cost of spreading misinformation has been reduced to near zero. That's a fundamental shift. It's part of what could be considered a post-historical turn, at least online. It intersects but doesn't solely belong to post truth as an idea. And in the short term, we can see which force is more powerful. The easier, faster option dominates. It's an imbalance, one that rewards distortion over diligence. This imbalance doesn't make it impossible to do history online, but it is an added level of difficulty.

Ultimately, this case exemplifies a destructive synergy: digital echo chambers, historical oversimplification, and the post-historical shift all reinforce one another. Although the Irish slavery meme did succeed in attracting attention to early modern forced labour, it drowned much of the reality in polarised disputes. Scholars, especially journalists, and platform moderators alike have to make an effort to reconnect with striving for the ideal. They won't get there, but they could get close enough. Such an effort could, in time, push back against post-historical distortions without abandoning hope that robust and well-communicated scholarship is still worth the effort. Despite the severe challenges posed by speed, scale, and ideological fervour, there is still room for historians who insist that truth, context, and rigour are not optional extras.

In the end, this episode is not just about the Irish Slavery Meme but about how history itself is processed in a digital age. It is shaped less by facts than by function. If accuracy cannot compete with virality, historians must rethink how to defend historical methods and truth in a space that no longer assumes they matter.

Bibliography

- Akenson, Donald H. *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730*. London: Liverpool University Press, 1997.
- Allen, Theodore W., and Jeffrey B. Perry. *The Invention of the White Race: Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*. Second edition. London, New York: Verso, 2012. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=5177164>.
- Austin, Angela K. "Capitalism, Colonial Expansion, and Forced Child Indenture in the British Atlantic, 1618-1776." PhD, University of Texas, Spring 2024. Accessed March 11, 2024. https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/history_dissertations/1/.
- Banks, Taunya. "Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key's Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialised Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia." *Faculty Scholarship*, 2008. https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/fac_pubs/52.
- Barbados. *Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, from 1648, to 1718*. London: printed by John Baskett, Printer to the King's most Excellent Majesty, and by the assigns of Thomas Newcomb, and Henry Hills, deceas'd, 1721.
- Barbados Assembly. *Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Island of Barbadoes from 1648, to 1718*. London: Printed by John Baskett printer to the Kings most excellent Majesty and by the assigns of Thomas Newcomb and Henry Hills deceas'd, 721.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of the End*. Cambridge England: Polity Press, 1994.
- Beckert, Sven, and Katherine Stevens. "Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History." 1 (2011): 1–37. Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://www.harvardandslavery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Harvard-Slavery-Book-111110.pdf>.
- Beckles, Hilary. "Black Men in White Skins': The Formation of a White Proletariat in West Indian Slave Society." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 15, no. 1 (1986): 5–21. doi:10.1080/03086538608582726.
- Bently, William. *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados: Made and Enacted Since the Reducement of the Same, Unto the Authority of the Common-Wealth of England. And Set Forth the Seventh Day of September, in the Year of Our Lord God 1652, by the*

- Honourable Governour of the Said Island, the Worshipfull the Council, and Gentlemen of the Assembly. Together with the Charter of the Said Island, or Articles Made on the Surrender, and Rendition of the Same. Published for the Publick Good.* Will. Bentley, and are to be sould by him at the India Bridge, 1654.
- Berleant-Schiller, Riva. "Free Labour and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 539–64. doi:10.2307/1922355. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1922355>.
- Bernhard, Virginia. *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616-1782*. University of Missouri Press, 1999. <https://books.google.de/books?id=lpv6uT4k47kC>.
- Blackstone, William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. 4 vols. 4. Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon Press, 1765.
- Blackstone, William, Sir. *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book the First*. Project Gutenberg.
- Block, Kristen. *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*. Early American places. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Brady, William J., Killian McLoughlin, Tuan N. Doan, and Molly J. Crockett. "How Social Learning Amplifies Moral Outrage Expression in Online Social Networks." *Science Advances* 7, no. 33 (2021): eabe5641. doi:10.1126/sciadv.abe5641.
- Brandolini, Alberto. "'The Bullshit Asymmetry: The Amount of Energy Needed to Refute Bullshit Is an Order of Magnitude Bigger Than to Produce It.' / X." Accessed July 29, 2024. <https://x.com/ziobrando/status/289635060758507521>.
- Bridenbaugh, Carl, and Roberta Bridenbaugh. *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690*. The Beginnings of the American people, 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Brown, David. "Free, and Unfree: Ireland and Barbados, 1620-1660." In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Finola O’Kane and Ciaran O’Neill, 54–73. Manchester University Press, 2022.

- Brown, Matthew. "Fact Check: The Irish Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves." *USA TODAY*, June 18, 2020. Accessed August 27, 2024.
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/18/fact-check-irish-were-indentured-servants-not-slaves/3198590001/>.
- Butler, Anthea. "The Myth of the Irish Slave, White Supremacy and Social Media." 2019 Annual Horizons Lecture, Dublin, October 10, 2022. Accessed October 10, 2022.
https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/the-myth-of-the-irish-slave-white-supremacy-and-social-media/.
- Campbell, Bradley, and Jason Manning. "Microaggressions and Moral Cultures." *Comparative Sociology* 13, no. 6 (2014): 692–726. doi:10.1163/15691330-12341332.
https://brill.com/view/journals/coso/13/6/article-p692_2.xml.
- Carrick, Shane. "An Unconfirmed Screenshot from 2016: Possibly Posted by User Shane Carrick on Facebook." <https://imgur.com/irish-americans-were-most-oppressed-group-ever-YRHOYtV>. Accessed October 22, 2024. <https://imgur.com/irish-americans-were-most-oppressed-group-ever-YRHOYtV>.
- Chrystin, Royce. "The Irish Slaves - What They Will Never Tell You in History." Accessed July 29, 2024.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150304220453/http://yournewswire.com/the-irish-slaves-what-they-will-never-tell-you-in-history/>.
- Colamaga. "Irish Power American Slaves United – Cool Saying T-Shirt-CL." Accessed October 20, 2024. <https://colamaga.com/product/irish-power-american-slaves-united-cool-saying-t-shirt-cl/>.
- Corish, Patrick J. "The Cromwellian Regime, 1650–60." In *A New History of Ireland*. Edited by T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, 353–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Costello, Elvis. *Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink*. New York: Blue Rider Press, 2015.
- Curtis, Edmund. *A History of Medieval Ireland: From 1086 to 1513 (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge revivals. Abingdon, Oxon, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1923.
doi:10.4324/9780203116371. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781136298707>.

- Daigle, Thomas. "Canadian Professor's Website Helps Russia Spread Disinformation, Says U.S. State Department." October 21, 2020. Accessed July 29, 2024.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/russian-disinformation-global-research-website-1.5767208>.
- Domise, Andray. "Original Photo by Lewis Hines: Posted by Twitter User Andray Domise on April 1, 2016 - Since Deleted." Accessed October 22, 2024.
- Donald, Leland. "The Study of Northwest Coast Slavery." In *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*. Edited by Donald Leland. 1st ed., 33–47. University of California Press, 1997. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.5973043.8>.
- Donoghue, John. "The Curse of Cromwell: Revisiting the Irish Slavery Debate." *History Ireland* 25, no. 4 (2017): 24–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90014565>.
- Downing College Cambridge. "Downing Publishes Legacies of Enslavement Report | Downing College Cambridge." Accessed September 5, 2024.
<https://www.dow.cam.ac.uk/news/downing-publishes-legacies-enslavement-report>.
- "Downing Publishes Legacies of Enslavement Report | Downing College Cambridge." Accessed September 5, 2024. <https://www.dow.cam.ac.uk/news/downing-publishes-legacies-enslavement-report>.
- Doyle, Roddy. *Commitments*. Ulverscroft, 2013.
- Dunn, Richard S. *Sugar and Slaves*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972.
- Dutton, William H. "The Internet and Social Transformation: Reconfiguring Access." In *Transforming Enterprise - the Economic and Social Implications of Information Technology*. Vol. 1. Edited by William H. Dutton et al., 361–97. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019.
- Eagan, Catherine M. "Still 'Black' and 'Proud': Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia." In *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*. Edited by Diane Negra et al., 20–63. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Edward B. Rugemer. "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean During the Seventeenth Century." *The William and*

- Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2013): 429–58. doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.70.3.0429.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.70.3.0429>.
- Emery, David. “Were There Irish Slaves in America, Too?” *Snopes.com*, September 23, 2016. Accessed August 5, 2024. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/irish-slaves-early-america/>.
- “Enquiries to the Governor of Virginia, 1670, 1671 the Statues at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in 1619.” Accessed September 11, 2024.
<https://www.virtualjamestown.org/exist/cocoon/jamestown/fha/J1062>.
- Fact Check. “More False Claims About “Irish Slaves” Spread on Social Media.” Accessed August 27, 2024. <https://factcheck.afp.com/more-false-claims-about-irish-slaves-spread-social-media>.
- Fanning, Ronan. ““White Nigger” Denial Poses a Real Dilemma - Analysis, Opinion - Independent.Ie.” Accessed September 29, 2024.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20111102120135/https://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/white-nigger-denial-poses-a-real-dilemma-488276.html>.
- Filloux, Frederic. “You Can’t Sell News for What It Costs to Make.” Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://medium.com/the-walkley-magazine/you-cant-sell-news-for-what-it-costs-to-make-7a4def964ffa>.
- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarised America*. Great questions in politics series. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.
- Foster, R. F. *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*. New York N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1989, 1988.
- Fracchia, Joseph, and R. C. Lewontin. “The Price of Metaphor.” *History and Theory* 44, no. 1 (2005): 14–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3590779>.
- Grenham, John. “Irish Roots: Were There Irish Slaves in Barbados?” *The Irish Times*, September 7, 2015. Accessed August 6, 2024.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/irish-roots-were-there-irish-slaves-in-barbados-1.2337597>.

Greven, Thomas. "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and the United States."

Accessed October 22, 2024.

https://dc.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/RightwingPopulism.pdf.

Groot, Jerome de. *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, 2009.

, , , . *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*.

Second edition. London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Gwynn, Aubrey. "Cromwell's Policy of Transportation." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 19, no. 76 (1930): 607–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094684>.

, , , . "Indentured Servants and Negro Slaves in Barbados (1642-1650)." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 19, no. 74 (1930): 279–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30094620>.

, , , . "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies." *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 4 (1932): 139–286. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25510930>.

Haidt, Jonathan. "'Two Incompatible Sacred Values in American Universities" Jon Haidt, Hayek Lecture Series." Hayek Lecture Series. Accessed July 29, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gatn5ameRr8>.

, , , . "Where Microaggressions Really Come from: A Sociological Account." Accessed July 29, 2024. <https://righteousmind.com/where-microaggressions-really-come-from/>.

Hamilton, H. C., and Great Britain. Public Record Office. *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elisabeth: Preserved in the Public Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office. 1574 - 1585*. Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elisabeth: Preserved in the Public Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office. 1574 - 1585. Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1867.

<https://books.google.de/books?id=hdk9AAAACAAJ>.

Hand, G. J. *English Law in Ireland, 1290-1324*. Cambridge studies in English legal history. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

- Handler, Jerome S. "Custom and Law: The Status of Enslaved Africans in Seventeenth-Century Barbados." *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 2 (2016): 233–55.
doi:10.1080/0144039X.2015.1123436.
- Handler, Jerome S., and Matthew C. Reilly. "Contesting "White Slavery" in the Caribbean: Enslaved Africans and European Indentured Servants in Seventeenth-Century Barbados." *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 91, 1-2 (2017): 30–55.
doi:10.1163/22134360-09101056. https://brill.com/view/journals/nwig/91/1-2/article-p30_2.xml.
- Harlow, Vincent T. *A History of Barbados*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926.
- Harris, Leslie. "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me." Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>.
- Harte, Liam. *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel, 1987-2007*. Reading the novel. Chichester West Sussex U.K., Hoboken New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
doi:10.1002/9781118502334.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9781118502334>.
- Hening, William W., ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia,; From the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619. Published Pursuant to an Act of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed on the Fifth Day of February One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight*. Richmond: Pleasants, Samuel, 1823. Accessed August 2, 2024.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036018409&seq=455>.
- Hersch, Eitan D. "Political Hobbyism: A Theory of Mass Behavior: (Working Paper)." Accessed July 13, 2024.
https://www.eitanhersh.com/uploads/7/9/7/5/7975685/hersh_theory_of_hobbyism_v2.0.pdf.
- Hine, Lewis W. "Josie, Six Year Old, Bertha, Six Years Old, Sophie, 10 Years Old, All Shuck Regularly. Maggioni Canning Co. Location: Port Royal, South Carolina." Accessed July 29, 2024. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/nclc.00991/>.

- Hogan, Liam. “‘Irish Slaves’: The Convenient Myth.” Accessed August 5, 2024.
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/irish-slaves-convenient-myth/>.
- , , , . “Open Letter to Irish Central, Irish Examiner and Scientific American About Their ‘Irish Slaves’ Disinformation.” *Medium*, March 8, 2016. Accessed August 7, 2024.
<https://limerick1914.medium.com/open-letter-to-irish-central-irish-examiner-and-scientific-american-about-their-irish-slaves-3f6cf23b8d7f>.
- , , , . “All of My Work on the ‘Irish Slaves’ Meme (2015–’23).” *Medium*, March 12, 2017. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://limerick1914.medium.com/all-of-my-work-on-the-irish-slaves-meme-2015-16-4965e445802a>.
- , , , . “The Myth of ‘Irish Slaves’ in the Colonies: (Removed).” Accessed October 26, 2024.
https://web.archive.org/web/20151007070901/http://www.academia.edu:80/9475964/The_Myth_of_Irish_Slaves_in_the_Colonies.
- Hogan, Liam, Laura McAtackney, and Matthew Reilly. “The Irish in the Anglo-Caribbean: Servants or Slaves? - History Ireland.” Accessed March 8, 2024.
<https://www.historyireland.com/the-irish-in-the-anglo-caribbean-servants-or-slaves/>.
- Hogan, Liam, Matthew Reilly, and Laura McAtackney. “The Unfree Irish in the Caribbean Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves.” Accessed March 25, 2023.
<https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/irish-slaves-myth-2369653-Oct2015/>.
- Hogan, Liam, and Reilly, Matthew, McAtackney, Laura. “The Unfree Irish in the Caribbean Were Indentured Servants, Not Slaves.” Accessed August 5, 2024.
<https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/irish-slaves-myth-2369653-Oct2015/>.
- “HUSL Library: A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement.” Accessed October 22, 2024.
<https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM>.
- IFCN. “<https://www.Ifncodeofprinciples.Poynter.Org/the-Commitments>.” Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.ifncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/the-commitments>.
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York [u.a.]: Routledge, 1995.

- International Labour Organisation. "Data and Research on Forced Labour." Accessed March 8, 2025. <https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/data-and-research-forced-labour>.
- Jacob, Giles. *A New Law-Dictionary: Containing, the Interpretation and Definition of Words and Terms Used in the Law, and Also the Whole Law, and the Practice Thereof, Under All the Heads and Titles of the Same Together with Such Informations Relating Thereto, as Explain the History and Antiquity of the Law, and Our Manners, Customs, and Original Government Abstracted from All Dictionaries, Abridgments, Institutes, Reports, Year-Books, Charters, Registers, Chronicles, and Histories, Published to This Time, and Fitted for the Use of Barristers, Students, and Practisers of the Law, Members of Parliament, and Other Gentlemen, Justices of Peace, Clergymen, &c.* London In the Savoy: Printed by E. and R. Nutt and R. Gosling (assigns of E. Sayer Esq.) for J. and J. Knapton [and 11 others], 1729.
- James, Carrie. *The Digital Disconnect: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap*. With the assistance of Henry Jenkins. John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2014. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=3339864>.
- Jensen, Richard J. "'No Irish Need Apply':- 36:2: A Myth of Victimisation." *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 405–29. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://rjensen.people.uic.edu/no-irish.htm>.
- Johnson II, Robert A. "The Irish as Caribbean Slaves?" *Imaginaires*, no. 22 (2020): 159–76; 159-176 Pages / *Imaginaires*, No. 22 (2019): How Popular Culture Travels. doi:10.34929/imaginaires.vi22.12. <https://imaginaires.univ-reims.fr/index.php/imaginaires/article/view/12>.
- Kasinitz, Basya. "Life Story: Dennis and Hannah Holland - Women & the American Story." Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://wams.nyhistory.org/early-encounters/english-colonies/dennis-and-hannah-holland/>.
- Kennedy, Liam. *Colonialism, Religion, and Nationalism in Ireland*. 1. publ. Belfast: The Queen's Univ. of Belfast The Inst. of Irish Studies, 1996.

- Kesselring, K. J. "Felony Forfeiture in England, C.1170–1870." *The Journal of Legal History* 30, no. 3 (2009): 201–26. doi:10.1080/01440360903353948.
- Knight, Peter. "Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States." *New German Critique* 35, no. 1 (2008): 165–93. doi:10.1215/0094033X-2007-024.
- Knobel, Michele, and Colin Lankshear. *A New Literacies Sampler*. New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies vol. 29. New York [i pozostałe]: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Kuo, Rachel, and Alice Marwick. "Critical Disinformation Studies: History, Power, and Politics." *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 2021. doi:10.37016/mr-2020-76. <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/critical-disinformation-studies-history-power-and-politics/>.
- Kwasnik, Brianna. "Marching on: Elizabeth Eckford of the Little Rock Nine Shares Her Traumatic Experiences Attending Central High School." *Arkansas Online*, September 5, 2021. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/sep/05/marching-on/>.
- Lane, Michael, ed. *Introduction to Structuralism*. New York: Basic Books, 1970.
- Larkin, J. F., and P. L. Hughes. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*. Clarendon Press, 1973. <https://books.google.de/books?id=Qni8swEACAAJ>.
- Lewis, Helen. "Culture Wars Cross the Atlantic to Coarsen British Politics." *Financial Times*, January 13, 2018. Accessed July 29, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/5ac4d090-f6f9-11e7-a4c9-bbdefa4f210b>.
- "Liam Hogan (@Limerick1914) / X." Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://twitter.com/limerick1914>.
- Lonergan, Dymphna. "Cultural Capital and Irish Place Names." In *The Irish in South Australia: Aspects and Insights*. Edited by Susan Arthure et al., 229–54. Mile End, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2019.
- Martin, John. "The Slaves That Time Forgot." Accessed March 14, 2024. https://www.opednews.com/populum/page.php?f=life_a_john_mar_080411_the_slaves_that_time.htm.

- , , , . “The Irish Slave Trade – the Forgotten “White” Slaves - Global Research.” Accessed February 13, 2024. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>.
- , , , . “The Irish Slave Trade – the Forgotten “White” Slaves | Global Research.” Accessed February 12, 2024. <https://web.archive.org/web/20121127184855/https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves/31076>.
- McCormick, Ted. “History in the Toilet: Memorious.” Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/29/history-in-the-toilet/>.
- , , , . “Memorious: How to Change History: William Petty, Irish Slavery, and a Fake Debate.” Accessed November 10, 2024. <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/13/how-to-change-history-william-petty-irish-slavery-and-a-fake-debate/>.
- , , , . “Memorious:: How to Change History: William Petty, Irish Slavery, and a Fake Debate.” Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://memoriousblog.com/2017/09/13/how-to-change-history-william-petty-irish-slavery-and-a-fake-debate/>.
- McD. Beckles, Hilary. “Plantation Production and White “Proto-Slavery”: White Indentured Servants and the Colonisation of the English West Indies, 1624-1645.” *The Americas* 41, no. 3 (1985): 21–45. doi:10.2307/1007098. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1007098>.
- McDonald-Beckles, Hilary. *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.
- , , , . “A “Riotous and Unruly Lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1990): 503–22. doi:10.2307/2937974. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2937974>.
- McIntyre, L. *Post-Truth*. MIT Press, 2018. <https://books.google.de/books?id=9e1LDwAAQBAJ>.
- Mcparland, Conor. “Holy Cross 20 Years on: Mother Still Gets Flashbacks of “Nightmare” Days.” *Belfast Media*, September 10, 2021. Accessed October 1, 2024.

<https://belfastmedia.com/holy-cross-dispute-twenty-years-on-mother-still-gets-flashbacks-of-nightmare-days>.

- Menard, Russell R. *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*. First paperback edition. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.
- Mitchell, Travis. "Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality." *Pew Research Center*, January 9, 2020. Accessed October 22, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.
- Morgan, Jennifer L. "Partus Sequitur Ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (2018): 1–17. doi:10.1215/07990537-4378888.
- Mucci, Nicola, Gabriele Giorgi, Mattia Roncaioli, Javier Fiz Perez, and Giulio Arcangeli. "The Correlation Between Stress and Economic Crisis: A Systematic Review." *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 12 (2016): 983–93. doi:10.2147/NDT.S98525.
- Negra, Diane, ed. *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=1169347>.
- Newman, Simon P. *A New World of Labour*. 1. ed. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- ., ., . *A New World of Labour: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*. The Early Modern Americas. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2016. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=3442229>.
- Ó Dochartaigh, Fionnbarra, and Bernadette D. McAliskey. *Ulster's White Negroes*. Edinburgh, San Francisco: AK Press, 1994.
- O'Carroll, Eoin. "No, the Irish Were Not Slaves in the Americas." *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 16, 2018. Accessed August 8, 2024. <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2018/0316/No-the-Irish-were-not-slaves-in-the-Americas>.

- Ogles, Jacob. "Ray Blacklidge Feels Backlash to "Irish Slaves" Meme." *Florida Politics*, August 6, 2018. Accessed July 29, 2024. <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/270842-ray-blacklidge-feels-backlash-to-irish-slaves-meme/>.
- Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982.
- Paulus, Ioannes. "Veritatis Splendor (6 August 1993) | John Paul II." Accessed March 4, 2025. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.
- Perry, Jeffrey B. "There's No Basis for the Claims That John Punch Was "Indentured" -- or That His Fellow Escapees Were "White"." Accessed September 11, 2024. <https://www.hnn.us/article/theres-no-basis-for-the-claims-that-john-punch-was>.
- Phillips, Richard H. *Without Indentures: Index to White Slave Children in Colonial Court Records [Maryland and Virginia]*. Paperback edition. Baltimore Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2013.
- Pogatchnik, Shawn. "AP FACT CHECK: Irish "Slavery" a St. Patrick's Day Myth." *AP News*, March 16, 2017. Accessed August 5, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/920e1c738df04555bccd56c09770b36d>.
- Power, Orla. "Beyond Kinship: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Community at Saint Croix, Danish West Indies." *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, no. 5 (2007): 207–14. Accessed February 2, 2024. www.irlandeses.org/imsla0711.htm.
- Prince, Simon. "'Ulster's White Negroes': Rhetoric of Race at the Start of the Troubles." In *Race in Irish Literature and Culture*. Edited by Malcolm Sen and Julie M. Weng, 172–89. Cambridge themes in Irish literature and culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/4632AE10849CB8A4ABB84DB4860BA240>.

- Rathje, Steve, Jay J. van Bavel, and Sander van der Linden. "Out-Group Animosity Drives Engagement on Social Media." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 26 (2021): e2024292118. doi:10.1073/pnas.2024292118.
- Reuters. "Fact Check: First Slaves in North American Colonies Were Not "100 White Children from Ireland"" *Reuters Media*, June 19, 2020. Accessed September 5, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-fact-check-irish-slaves/fact-check-first-slaves-in-north-american-colonies-were-not-100-white-children-from-ireland-idUSKBN23O2BS/>.
- Rodgers, Nini. *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865*. Basingstoke England, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Ryzewski, Krysta, and John F. Cherry. "Struggles of a Sugar Society: Surveying Plantation-Era Montserrat, 1650–1850." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 356–83. doi:10.1007/s10761-015-0292-7.
- Sacco, Nick. "Serfdom: - Exploring the Past." Accessed October 22, 2024. <https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/tag/serfdom/>.
- Sheppard, Jill. *The "Redlegs" of Barbados, Their Origins and History*. The Caribbean, historical and cultural perspectives. Millwood N.Y.: KTO Press, 1977.
- Smith, Abbot E. *Colonists in Bondage*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1947.
- Smith, Dinitia. "The Irish Are Ascendant Again." *The New York Times*, October 3, 1996. Accessed June 25, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/03/movies/the-irish-are-ascendant-again.html>.
- Spreadshirt. "Irish Power First American Slaves United" Men's Premium T-Shirt | Spreadshirt." Accessed October 20, 2024. [.com/shop/design/irish+power+first+american+slaves+united+mens+premium+t-shirt-D5a5eddb25d52cd51f2f45f27?sellable=MLo8kxyARjHLbxXyLvOm-812-7](https://www.spreadshirt.com/shop/design/irish+power+first+american+slaves+united+mens+premium+t-shirt-D5a5eddb25d52cd51f2f45f27?sellable=MLo8kxyARjHLbxXyLvOm-812-7).
- Stack, Liam. "Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too." *The New York Times*, March 17, 2017. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/us/irish-slaves-myth.html>.
- The Globe and Mail. "NATO Research Centre Sets Sights on Canadian Website over Pro-Russia Disinformation." Accessed July 29, 2024.

- <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/nato-research-centre-sets-sights-on-canadian-website-over-pro-russian-disinformation/article37015521/>.
- Thompson, Willie. *What Happened to History?* London: Pluto, 2000.
- Thurloe, John. "State Papers, 1655: September (3 of 4)": In a Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe." <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/thurloe-papers/vol4/pp31-47>.
- Unattributed. "BBC News | NORTHERN IRELAND | School Dispute Strikes a Chord." Accessed October 1, 2024.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1531582.stm.
- United Nations. "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime: United Nations Treaty Collection." Accessed October 7, 2024.
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=_en.
- United States Department of State. "GEC Special Report: Russia's Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda - United States Department of State." Accessed July 29, 2024.
<https://www.state.gov/russias-pillars-of-disinformation-and-propaganda-report/>.
- Wang, Lin, and Brendan C. Wood. "An Epidemiological Approach to Model the Viral Propagation of Memes." *Applied Mathematical Modelling* 35, no. 11 (2011): 5442–47. doi:10.1016/j.apm.2011.04.035.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0307904X11002824>.
- Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Council of Europe, 2017.
- White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 5–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343174>.
- Wilkey, Robin. "Tea Party Leader's Tweet Suggests Blacks Stop "Bitching and Moaning" About Slavery." *HuffPost*, December 18, 2013. Accessed October 22, 2024.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tea-party-racist-tweet_n_4467221.

Williams, Eric E. *Capitalism & Slavery*. Chapel Hill u.a.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Wood, Betty. *The Origins of American Slavery*. 1. paperback ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.

Zacek, Natalie. "How the Irish Became Black: 321-336." In *Ireland, Slavery and the Caribbean: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Finola O'Kane and Ciaran O'Neill. Studies in imperialism. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023.