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Outlawing “Coolies”: Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation

Moon-Ho Jung

A vote for Chinese exclusion would mean a vote against slavery, against “cooly importation,” a U.S. senator from California warned in 1882. “An adverse vote now is to commission under the broad seal of the United States, all the speculators in human labor, all the importers of human muscle, all the traffickers in human flesh, to ply their infamous trade without impediment under the protection of the American flag, and empty the teeming, seething slave pens of China upon the soil of California!” The other senator from California added that those who had been “so clamorous against what was known as African slavery” had a moral obligation to vote for Chinese exclusion, “when we all know that they are used as slaves by those who bring them to this country, that their labor is for the benefit of those who practically own them.” A “coolie,” or “cooly,” it seemed, was a slave, pure and simple. Representative Horace F. Page (California) elaborated on the same point in the other chamber, branding the “Chinese cooly contract system” and polygamy the “twin relic[s] of the barbarism of slavery.” The United States was “the home of the down-trodden and the oppressed,” he declared, but “not the home for millions of cooly slaves and serfs who come here under a contract for a term of years to labor, and who neither enjoy nor practice any of our religious characteristics.”¹

Some of their colleagues demanded clarification. If the bill aimed to exclude “coolies,” why did it target Chinese laborers wholesale? New England Republicans, in particular, challenged the conflation of “coolies” and “laborers.” “All coolies are laborers,” inquired a Massachusetts representative, “but are all Chinese laborers coolies?” Somewhat flustered, Page claimed that they were synonymous in China and California, where Chinatowns overflowed with “coolies and women of a class that I would not care to mention in this presence.” His reply failed to sway the bill’s detractors, who assailed its indiscriminate prohibition of Chinese immigration. With the Civil War and Reconstruction fresh in everyone’s memory, Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts vowed never to “consent to a denial by the United States of the right

of every man who desires to improve his condition by honest labor—his labor being no man's property but his own—to go anywhere on the face of the earth that he pleases.” There were limits to “honest labor” though. Echoing a sentiment common among the dissenting minority, Hoar called for more exacting words that would strike only at “the evil” associated with “the coming of these people from China, especially the importation of coolies.” “It is not importation, but immigration; it is not importation, but the free coming; it is not the slave, or the apprentice, or the prostitute, or the leper, or the thief,” he argued, “but the laborer at whom this legislation strikes its blow.”²

These congressional debates remind us of the extent to which slavery continued to define American culture and politics after emancipation. The language of abolition infused the proceedings on Chinese exclusion, with no legislator challenging the federal government's legal or moral authority to forbid “coolies” from entering the reunited, free nation. Indeed, by the 1880s, alongside the prostitute, there was no more potent symbol of chattel slavery's enduring legacy than the “coolie,” a racialized and racializing figure that anti-Chinese (and putatively pro-Chinese) lawmakers condemned.³ A stand against “coolies” was a stand for America, for freedom. There was no disagreement on that point. The legal exclusion of Chinese laborers in 1882 and the subsequent barrage of anti-Asian laws reflected and exploited this consensus in American culture and politics: “coolies” fell outside the legitimate borders of the United States.

This consensus took root in the decades before the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, a result not so much of anti-Chinese rancor in California but of U.S. imperial ambitions in Asia and the Caribbean and broader struggles to demarcate the legal boundary between slavery and freedom. A year before Abraham Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, he emblemized this consensus by signing into law a bill designed to divorce “coolies” from America, a little known legislation that reveals the complex origins of U.S. immigration restrictions. While marking the origination of the modern immigration system, Chinese exclusion also signified the culmination of preceding debates over the slave trade and slavery, debates that had turned the attention of proslavery and antislavery Americans not only to Africa and the U.S. South but also to Asia and the Caribbean. There, conspicuously and tenuously at the border between slavery and freedom, they discovered “coolies,” upon whom they projected their manifold desires. “Coolies,” however, were not a people but a conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged worldwide in the era of slave emancipation.⁴ Ambiguously and then unfailingly linked with slavery and the Caribbean in American culture,

"coolies" would eventually make possible the passage of the nation's first restrictions on immigration under the banner of "freedom" and "immigration." The legal and cultural impulse to prohibit "coolies," at home and abroad, also enabled the U.S. nation-state to proclaim itself as "free" and to deepen and defend its imperial presence in Asia and the Americas. Outlawing "coolies," in short, proved pivotal in the reproduction of race, nation, and empire in the age of emancipation.

"Coolies" and Freedom

The word *coolie* was a product of European expansion into Asia and the Americas, embodying the contradictory imperial imperatives of enslavement and emancipation. Of Tamil, Chinese, or other origin, the term was initially popularized in the sixteenth century by Portuguese sailors and merchants across Asia and later was adopted by fellow European traders on the high seas and in port cities. By the eighteenth century, *coolie* had assumed a transcontinental definition of an Indian or Chinese laborer, hired locally or shipped abroad. The word took on a new significance in the nineteenth century, as the beginnings of abolition remade "coolies" into indentured laborers in high demand across the world, particularly in the tropical colonies of the Caribbean. Emerging out of struggles over British emancipation and Cuban slavery in particular, *coolies* and *coolieism*—defined as "the importation of coolies as labourers into foreign countries" by the late nineteenth century—came to denote the systematic shipment and employment of Asian laborers on sugar plantations formerly worked by enslaved Africans.⁵ It was during this era of emancipation and Asian migration that the term *coolie* entered the mainstream of American culture, symbolized literally by its relocation from the appendix to the main body of Noah Webster's American dictionary in 1848.⁶

By then, like the word, the idea of importing "coolies" as indentured laborers to combat the uncertainties of emancipation circulated widely around the world. Even before the permanent end to slavery in the British Empire in 1838, sugar planters from the French colony of Bourbon and the British colony of Mauritius, both islands in the Indian Ocean, had begun transporting South Asian workers to their plantations. These initiatives inspired John Gladstone to inquire into the feasibility of procuring a hundred "coolies" for at least five years of labor on his sugar estates in British Guiana. Doubting that black "apprentices"—the status forced upon former slaves for six years in 1834—would work much longer, Gladstone contended that planters had "to endeavor to provide a portion of other labourers whom we might use as a set-off, and

when the time for it comes, make us, as far as possible, independent of our negro population.” “Coolies” were his solution. A British firm foresaw no difficulty in extending its business from Mauritius to the West Indies, “the natives being perfectly ignorant of the place they go to or the length of voyage they are undertaking.” In May 1838, five months before “apprenticeship” came to a premature end, 396 South Asian “coolies” arrived in British Guiana, launching a stream of migrant labor that flowed until World War I.⁷

What happened to the “Gladstone coolies,” as they came to be known, exposed a contradiction inherent in coolieism that would bedevil and befuddle planters and government officials in the Americas for decades. Did the recruitment and employment of “coolies” represent a relic of slavery or a harbinger of freedom? Early reports decidedly indicated the former. Upon the complaints registered by the British Anti-Slavery Society, British Guiana authorities established a commission to investigate conditions on the six plantations to which the “Gladstone coolies” had been allotted. Witnesses testified that overseers brutally flogged and extorted money from laborers under their supervision. By the end of their contracts in 1843, a quarter of the migrants had died and the vast majority of the survivors elected to return to India. Only sixty remained in British Guiana. Undaunted, the colony’s sugar planters proceeded with plans to expand the experiment, but met resistance in India and London. The Indian governor-general prohibited further emigration at the end of 1838, a policy that the secretary for the colonies refused to amend in 1840. “I am not prepared to encounter the responsibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand,” the secretary explained, “or, on the other, to a new system of slavery.”⁸

Such inauspicious beginnings failed to derail the mission that Gladstone had inaugurated; West Indian planters soon found a sympathetic hearing in London. They could have their migrant laborers, as long as the state regulated all phases of recruitment, transportation, and employment. Applied to African “immigrants”—those “liberated” from slave smugglers and pressured into indentureship—and then to Asian “coolies” in the 1840s, state intervention was championed in British political circles as the guarantor of freedom. For a time, despite persistent protests and investigations, the employment of “coolies” appeared to signal a departure from the evils of the slave trade, from

Figure 1.

Woodcut of a plantation manager’s house in British Guiana by “a clever Chinese immigrant” that conveys “the grievances likely to arise under the Coolie system.” Groups of South Asian and Chinese migrant workers sit bound, supplying their blood to the manager and his family up above and the plantation owners in Britain. From Edward Jenkins, *The Coolie: His Rights and Wrongs* (New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1871), 8.



coercion and servitude, sanctified by voluntary contracts, legal rights, and public subsidies and enforced by the imperial and colonial state apparatus. In practice, however, the system placed a preponderance of power in the hands of planters and their allies, to the detriment of indentured workers who faced criminal prosecution for violating civil contracts. State enforcement on behalf of employers—along with rampant extralegal practices like kidnapping, deception, and corporal punishment—more often than not eclipsed state protection of workers. These contradictions notwithstanding, London and the colonial regimes in India and the West Indies worked together, albeit contentiously at times, to institute the mass migration of laborers bound to five-year indentures as a mainstay of postemancipation life by the 1860s. Coolieism thus became associated with emancipation, but not even the highest aspirations of numerous inquiry commissions and reform measures could erase its roots in slavery and “apprenticeship.”⁹

Meanwhile, Cuba, the Caribbean’s premier sugar-producing colony in the nineteenth century, magnified the contradictions presented by British West Indian coolieism. Sugar planters there demanded laborers in numbers and conditions that the illicit trans-Atlantic slave trade—prohibited in Anglo-Spanish treaties in 1817 and 1835 and in Spanish law in 1845—could no longer supply by the 1840s, at least not without deep political and economic costs. Following the British example, a Spanish merchant engaged in the slave trade suggested the procurement of Chinese laborers in 1846, four decades before slavery would be abolished in Cuba. Within a year, his firm had made arrangements for two shiploads of “coolies” bound to eight-year contracts with wages fixed at four pesos per month. This experiment initiated and defined a migrant labor system that Cuban planters found indispensable over the next two decades, especially as their recruiting forays in Africa, Mexico, the Canary Islands, and elsewhere failed to yield the results they had hoped for. Ultimately, almost 125,000 Chinese laborers landed in Cuba between 1847 and 1874 to work under conditions approximating slavery, unbeknownst to them and despite legal distinctions and safeguards. Enslaved and indentured labor flourished side by side in Cuba, casting chattel slavery’s dark shadow over the “free” aspects of coolieism.¹⁰ British authorities, in response, laid claim to moral superiority through state intervention, in Africa and India as well as in China, whence 17,904 laborers arrived in the British West Indies under conditions similar to the larger system involving close to half a million South Asian migrants.¹¹

These developments on the other side of the Gulf of Mexico immediately captured the notice of Americans engaged in their own struggles over slavery.

As in British denunciations of the Gladstone experiment, abolitionists wasted no time in vilifying "coolie" labor as a new variant of slavery. New England periodicals related to readers in the 1840s that "coolies" in the British West Indies were "in a state of nudity and hardly any of them decently clothed" and "suffering from severe sickness," with many complaining vociferously and running away. The plight of the early "coolies" was so miserable that "their belief is, that they are slaves" and "the negroes appear sincerely to pity them." Trinidad's officials received and distributed "coolies" like slaves "in pure Baltimore or Cuban style," *Littell's Living Age* reported, while "coolies, half naked, scabby, famishing, helpless from ignorance, and overrun with vermin, infest the highways" of British Guiana. "Coolies" faced a cycle of coercion in that colony, where "the authorities have hounded on them . . . drive[n] them into the lock-up house, (surely an illegal act,) and the planters cry out for permission to conclude contracts of indenture, that is, with beguiled strangers, who cannot comprehend the signification thereof." William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* hoped that "the abolitionists of Great Britain will succeed in their efforts to break up entirely a system that produces so much cruelty and misery."¹²

Within a few years though, Caribbean planters' and European officials' propaganda campaigns had their desired effect on American reports, many of which began touting "coolie" labor as a means to expedite and effect emancipation. Chinese emigration heralded a new era across the world, exclaimed an advocate of Chinese labor, that would benefit "both the Chinaman and the Negro, if you can at once relieve the hunger of the former and preserve the freedom of the latter." Four years of Chinese migrants residing in Cuba had proved them to be "laborious, robust—almost as much so as the best Africans—more intelligent, and sufficiently docile, under good management." Similar results prevailed in British Guiana and Hawai'i, but would "prejudice or a mistaken philanthropy" prevent a migration beneficial to all parties? Chinese dispersion across the globe and American expansion across the Pacific and Asia would proceed apace, he concluded. "Instead of the labor-market of the new empires of Oceanica being supplied, like that of Eastern America, by means of violence, and with the captive savages of Negroland, it will be voluntarily occupied by the free and industrious outpourings of China." By 1852, the *New York Times* was imploring U.S. slaveholders to emulate their competitors in the British West Indies, Cuba, and Hawai'i, presenting "coolies" as a conduit toward abolition. "Some happy medium must be struck," an editorial insisted, "and the only medium between forced and voluntary labor, is that offered by the introduction of Orientals."¹³ Neither free nor enslaved labor, "coolies" signified an ambiguous contradiction that seemed to hold the potential to advance either.

“Coolies” and Slavery

Humphrey Marshall, the U.S. commissioner to China, likewise felt that “coolies” would spell the end of American slavery. “Should that power [Britain] seriously undertake to populate her West India possessions and her colonies on the coast of South America with Chinese laborers, who have no idea, however, of the right of popular participation in the direction of government,” he informed the secretary of state in 1853, “the effect . . . upon the industrial interests of the planting States of the United States, and upon the institutions of the republics of South America, must necessarily be most disastrous to them.” Marshall, a Kentucky planter and a future member of the Confederate military and congress, estimated that each Chinese contract laborer cost \$80 per year to employ, “far below the cost of slave labor, independent of the risk which the planter runs in his original investment.” The Chinese were “patient of labor, tractable, obedient as a slave, and frugal . . . [and] will compel from the earth the maximum production of which it is capable, and, under whatever circumstances, will create a competition against which it must be difficult to struggle.” On behalf of American slaveholders, Marshall hoped the president would establish a policy to prevent American ships from advancing the profits of British interests, against whom the United States was competing in the production of tropical goods and Asian commerce. “Coolies,” he was convinced, threatened both American imperial ambitions and American slavery.¹⁴

Marshall articulated a short-lived ideological convergence between U.S. diplomats and slaveholders that would decisively bind “coolies” with slavery in American culture. In the years following his appeal, U.S. officials stationed abroad cast “coolie” labor not only as cheaper than slavery but as a brutal form of slavery that demanded federal intervention. Proslavery ideologues heartily agreed, even as they bristled at the notion of federal meddling in the domestic institution of slavery. The advent of a new system of slavery after emancipation in the Caribbean, they argued, warranted international scorn and laid bare the duplicity of abolition. American slavery, in their view, deserved protection more than ever. On the eve of the Civil War, New England abolitionists and Southern fire-eaters could find common ground in the “coolie” problem, issuing equally strident condemnations that clarified and blurred the limits of slavery and freedom in the process. American calls for the prohibition of “coolie” labor abroad, in turn, also justified and fueled U.S. expansionism in Asia and the Caribbean. Joining the international movement to suppress the “coolie” trade legitimized the U.S. diplomatic mission in China; the abuse of “coolies” in Cuba seemed to affirm the need for American annexation of the

Spanish colony, for many, as a slave state. In and through “coolies,” American diplomats and slaveholders found ways to promote the U.S. empire, as a beacon of freedom and slavery in the age of emancipation.

Marshall’s admonition against the “coolie” trade conveyed America’s longstanding commercial aspirations in China, an economic motive that was in full display in response to the tragedy aboard the U.S. ship *Robert Bowne*.¹⁵ In 1852, Captain Lesley Bryson transported a cargo of contract laborers to Hawai‘i and then returned to Amoy the following month to carry another 410 “coolies,” ostensibly to San Francisco. On the tenth day out at sea, the Chinese passengers rebelled against the officers and crew, killing Bryson and six others and ordering the surviving crew members to guide the ship to Formosa. Instead, the ship ran aground near a small island on the Ryuku archipelago, to which American and British ships were dispatched to round up as many of the “pirates” as possible. Most of the Chinese passengers were never accounted for—only about a hundred were captured—and hundreds probably died from gunshot wounds, suicide, starvation, and disease, in addition to the eight who had been killed during the original insurrection. Peter Parker, the chargé d’affaires of the U.S. delegation in China, conceded that Bryson had administered “injudicious treatment of the coolies”—such as his order to cut off their queues—but insisted that recent mutinies by “this class of Chinese” aboard French and English ships indicated that the uprising might have been “premeditated before the vessel left port.”¹⁶

The mounting evidence against the American captain and the “coolie” trade in general had no effect on Parker’s blind defense of his deceased compatriot and U.S. national honor. Bryson’s ship was involved in an intensifying trade in Chinese workers around Amoy operated by European and American shippers and their local suppliers, Chinese brokers (or “crimps”). The insatiable global demand for “coolies” manifested locally in an upsurge of kidnappings and fraudulent schemes in the early 1850s, coercive tactics that drove Chinese residents to equate the trade to “pig-dealing.”¹⁷ The growing infamy of the “coolie” trade in Amoy could not deter Parker’s quest for justice on Bryson’s behalf. Although he claimed U.S. jurisdiction over the entire affair, Parker agreed to hand over seventeen individuals, those deemed the “principal actors” by a court of inquiry aboard a U.S. frigate, to Chinese authorities for a speedy trial and punishment. A month later, however, Parker regretted the “most flagrant breach of good faith” committed by the Chinese commissioners who, from the testimony of the accused, had censured Bryson for engaging in “the style of thing called *buying pigs*” and treating his passengers in a “tyrannical” manner. Only one man was found guilty. The U.S. official angrily de-

fended Bryson as “a kind and humane man” and dismissed the suggestion that the passengers had been coerced into signing contracts. “Hereafter the United States will execute their own laws in cases of piracy occurring upon the high seas,” Parker declared.¹⁸

But the violence aboard *Robert Bowne* turned out to be no exception. U.S. officials in Asia dispatched frightening accounts of the trade that Americans back home read about, including the infamous case of the Boston-based *Waverly*. In September 1855, the *Waverly* left Amoy with 353 “coolies” and added 97 others in Swatow before embarking on its chartered voyage to Peru. Within a short span, four passengers had “sprung overboard” and drowned, while a “good many” fell ill, among them the captain, who died soon afterward. Under the circumstances, the first mate, now the acting captain, decided to switch course to the Philippines. Two more “coolies” died before the ship reached Manila, where Spanish authorities placed it under quarantine. Difficult to control from the outset, the new captain wrote in his log, “all of the coolies came aft, with the intention to kill” him two days later. The crew killed “about four or five” in the ensuing struggle and “drove them all down below, between decks”; the captain later killed another “very impudent” passenger. When the other “coolies” attempted to break through the forward hatch, the crew “shoved them down again and shut the hatches on again.” When the captain finally decided to allow the passengers on deck eight hours later, he discovered a grisly scene below. Only 150 “coolies” remained alive. The captain’s account of “coolies” attacking him and then killing one another, however, could not be corroborated by witnesses, who testified that he had killed and injured the passengers without provocation. The U.S. consul in Manila reported that “the unfortunate beings had perished by suffocation.”¹⁹

Amid such calamities, U.S. officials moved to prevent American citizens from transporting “coolies,” a trade that appeared to threaten America’s commercial access to China and its international standing. Four years after his defense of the *Robert Bowne*, Peter Parker heard about the *Waverly* disaster en route to take up his appointment as the new U.S. commissioner to China. Armed with verbal instructions from the secretary of state to “discountenance” the “coolie” trade, he wasted no time in issuing a strong “public notification” in January 1856. Parker denounced the trade as “replete with illegalities, immoralities, and revolting and inhuman atrocities, strongly resembling those of the African slave trade in former years, some of them exceeding the horrors of the ‘middle passage,’ . . . and the foreign name has been rendered odious by this traffic, hundreds and thousands of lives having been inhumanly sacrificed.” Parker instructed U.S. citizens “to desist from this irregular and im-

moral traffic" that imperiled "amicable relations" and "honorable and lawful commerce" between the United States and China, whose government prohibited it. Parker's proclamation generated immediate public outcries back home that further coupled "coolies" with the banned African slave trade. The abolitionist *Liberator* featured articles on the "new slave trade" and chastised Northerners engaged in it as "doughfaces." And departing from its earlier depiction of "coolies" as a vehicle to free labor, the *New York Times* now hoped the federal government would sustain Parker's declaration "with corresponding vigor" and suppress "this abominable trade."²⁰

William B. Reed would reinforce Parker's views shortly after being appointed the new U.S. minister to China in 1857. Reed, too, found that shippers blatantly disregarded his public intimidations and general allusions to Chinese and U.S. laws and treaty obligations. In January 1858, he decided to fortify his warnings with a federal statute already on the books, an 1818 law that prohibited U.S. citizens and residents from transporting from Africa or anywhere else "any negro, mulatto, or person of colour, not being an inhabitant, nor held to service by the laws of either of the states or territories of the United States, in any ship, vessel, boat, or other water craft, for the purpose of holding, selling, or otherwise disposing of, such person as a slave, or to be held to service or labour, or be aiding or abetting therein." Despite "some uncertainty" of its applicability and its original intent for "a different evil," Reed argued for the law's relevance. A "Chinese cooly," he rationalized, was surely "a man of color, to be disposed of to be held to service in Cuba."²¹

In contrast to Parker, who had distinguished between the illegality of the "coolie trade" and the legality of "voluntary emigration of Chinese adventurers," Reed felt that "coolies" raised questions far more significant than coercion. It was, to him, a matter of U.S. racial, national, and imperial interests. Beyond "the practical enslavement of a distant and most peculiar race," the prospect of mass migrations of "free" Chinese male laborers also troubled Reed. Such a demographic shift, he believed, would strengthen "the decaying institutions of colonial Spanish America" that ran contrary to U.S. interests. The Chinese would "either amalgamate with the negro race, and thus increase the actual slave population, or maintain a separate existence, their numbers only to be recruited by new arrivals." Reed thought the latter more likely and envisaged a "bloody massacre" borne from the oppression of "a vast aggregation of troublesome populace" in a foreign colony. Driven to prevent such a scenario, he stressed to shippers that "whether the coolies go voluntarily or not to Havana" did not make "the least difference" under the law, if they were transported "under a contract 'to be held to service.'"²² In his search for a law to

suppress the coercive and corrupt trade in “coolies,” Reed turned to a slave trade prohibition that, in turn, defined a “coolie.” A “coolie,” in his mind, was “a man of color” shipped to labor abroad, a gendered, racialized, and classed figure whose migration, voluntary or not, signified the bounds of slavery.

Reed left his post in November 1858, months before federal officials in Washington rescinded his application of the 1818 statute to the “coolie” trade. Secretary of State Lewis Cass, who criticized British and French efforts to obtain “coolie” and African labor for their colonies, had referred Reed’s concerns to Attorney General J. S. Black in April 1858. Black finally ruled almost a year later that he considered the “coolie” trade outside the purview of slave trade prohibitions and other “existing laws.” “The evil is one which Congress alone can remedy,” he concluded. Washington’s delayed and deflective reply provided little comfort or direction to the U.S. legation in China that continued to witness the horrors of the trade firsthand. The “cooly trade to the West Indies,” Reed had pleaded repeatedly, was “irredeemable slavery under the form of freedom,” with results worse than the African slave trade. The “Asiatic” faced a doomed fate in the Caribbean, he prophesied, marked by racial isolation and “a certain and fatal struggle, in which the Asiatic, as the weakest, fails.”²³ To U.S. diplomats in China, it was a matter of life and death, a matter of slavery and freedom.

By 1859, the “coolie” trade from China, in which U.S. clippers had become increasingly involved, generated diplomatic crises that both undermined and bolstered Western imperial designs in China. Popular outrage in southern China against kidnapping and deception, sometimes boiling over into mass antiforeigner riots, drove the Chinese imperial court to request assistance from Western diplomats to suppress a trade that flagrantly violated its prohibition against all emigration. The British—motivated by West Indian planters’ demand for labor and London’s desire to protect its international image—requested a legalized and regulated system of migration instead. The military occupation of Canton (Guangzhou) by British and French troops beginning in 1858 allowed them to exact such a system. Long aware that the imperial decree on emigration carried no weight among Western shippers, Chinese officials in Canton felt empowered and compelled to collaborate with the British to implement a more pragmatic policy. In November 1859, British and local Chinese motives coalesced into a system of voluntary contract migration to the British West Indies from licensed depots in Canton, with regulations intended to avert the violence heretofore employed in the recruitment of “coolies.” Lao Ch’ung-kuang, the provincial governor general of Guangdong, then called on other foreign consuls to instruct their citizens to conduct all



Figure 2. Many U.S. news accounts condemned the inhumanity of the “coolie” trade. From Edgar Holden, “A Chapter on the Coolie Trade,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 29 (June 1864): 5. Courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW23640z.

Figure 3. They also dehumanized “coolies.” From Edgar Holden, “A Chapter on the Coolie Trade,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 29 (June 1864): 10. Courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW23641z.



emigration through Canton under the same guidelines. British and French troops subsequently headed north to Peking (Beijing) and pressured the imperial court to recognize the right of Chinese subjects to emigrate to foreign lands in October 1860.²⁴

The regulatory promise of freedom, however, proved illusory, driving U.S. diplomats to lobby more than ever for a new federal law to suppress what they considered a new slave trade. At Lao's insistence, John E. Ward, a Georgia Democrat who replaced Reed, lent his support to inspecting U.S. vessels docked near but beyond Canton's city limits. The testimony of hundreds of Chinese aboard one particular ship, the secretary of the U.S. legation reported, "exhibited a dismal uniformity of the acts of deception, violence, intimidation, and crafty devices practiced by native crimps, to beguile or force them to go on board boats where they were compelled to assent to the demands of their captors, and go with them on board ship or to the barracoons at Macao." Although these particular passengers won their release, Ward and his consuls could do nothing as the American captain proceeded to Macao, a Portuguese colony, and picked up another shipload of "coolies" for Cuba, a Spanish colony. Ward wished for a law to place such cases under his authority, since neither the Canton system nor consular inspection seemed adequate to the task. "When the consul visits the ships to examine into their condition," he noted, "they are questioned under the painful recollection of what they had already suffered, and what they must still endure if a ready assent to emigrate is not given."²⁵ The United States had an obligation to outlaw "coolies" to American ships, Ward and his predecessors urged, for the sake of free labor and free trade.

Excepting U.S. diplomats in China, no group of Americans studied and criticized the transport of "coolies" to the Caribbean more assiduously than Southern proslavery ideologues. They, however, drew conclusions that had little to do with ending coercive practices in Asia and the Caribbean; rather, their obsession with the Caribbean and "coolies" developed into a defense of slavery and a rebuttal to abolitionism. The racial and economic failings of emancipation and coolieism, proslavery forces argued, confirmed the natural order of slavery, an order that fanatical abolitionists and politicians had destroyed in the Caribbean. While U.S. officials in China appealed for a federal legislation to suppress the "coolie" trade, slavery's supporters emphasized the futility of state intervention in matters concerning race and labor. American slavery, they asserted, protected the nation from the utter decay experienced in the Caribbean and thereby justified its renewal through new importations from Africa and its expansion southward to Cuba and beyond. Their argu-

ments led to neither but contributed to the emerging consensus in antebellum America that "coolie" labor was an evil to be expunged from America's ships and shores.

Not long after the legal end of slavery in the British Empire, American slavery's defenders charged again and again that abolition heralded a new era of duplicity and hypocrisy, characterized by semantic games rather than genuine humanitarianism. British imperial authorities had imposed the slave trade and slavery upon their colonies in North America, the *United States Magazine* claimed, and now ruled over millions of "absolute slaves" in India and elsewhere. Worse yet, they continued deceptively to sell "negroes" into slavery as "immigrants" and inaugurated "the blackest and worst species of slavery" by transporting "Indian Coolies" to the West Indies. "Humane and pious contrivance!" James Henry Hammond accused the British in his widely circulated letters in defense of slavery. "To alleviate the fancied sufferings of the accursed posterity of Ham, you sacrifice, by a cruel death, two-thirds of the children of the blessed Shem, and demand the applause of Christians, the blessing of Heaven!" Under the ruse of "immigration," Hammond added emphatically, "THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE HAS BEEN ACTUALLY REVIVED UNDER THE AUSPICES AND PROTECTION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT." West Indian emancipation was a "magnificent farce" that his "humanity" and American slavery's "full and growing vigor" could not allow on U.S. soil. Reverend Josiah Priest likewise castigated the British for "inveigling . . . a yellow, swarthy race" to labor on the other side of the world, a system at odds with "their seemingly noble generosity in manumitting their slaves" but consistent with their recent indenturing of "the negro"—"ignorant" of legal contracts as a "monkey"—in Africa.²⁶

New Orleans-based journalist J. D. B. De Bow was perhaps the most influential figure to incorporate British hypocrisy, conspiracy, and degeneracy into the proslavery argument. Great Britain had been the greatest slave dealer in history, he argued, whose conscience turned to "philanthropy" only out of economic self-interest. His conspiracy theory of emancipation was straightforward: "*Liberate your West India slaves; force them [other nations], as you can then, to liberate theirs, and you have the monopoly of the world!*" And exposés of the "wide-spread evils" of Caribbean coolieisms became integral to De Bow's derision of British emancipation and defense of American slavery. Emancipation reverted former slaves to "a state of Pagan cannibalism" in the West Indies and drove up the prices of tropical products in Europe, conditions that "made fillibusters [*sic*] and buccaneers of more than half of christendom." British and Northern abolitionists, De Bow reported, were now shipping "Coolies and

Africans” in a “new system” that was “attended with ten times as much of crime and sacrifice of human life” as the slave trade and slavery. Government and newspaper reports on the *Robert Bowne*, *Waverly*, and other disasters, which he quoted extensively, illustrated the “enormities” being committed everyday in Asia and the Caribbean.²⁷

To De Bow, the Caribbean demonstrated the moral superiority of the U.S. South and the dire consequences of interfering in the racial order. The “humane conduct” of American slaveholders, he argued, “preserved” human life and the four million American slaves deserved to be spared “the risk of being exposed to evils” characteristic of other plantation societies. After surveying the various migrant contract labor systems of British, French, and Spanish tropical colonies, particularly the “truly frightful” mortality rates on ships and plantations, De Bow asked how they could be accorded “the specious title of *free labor*”: “What is the plain English of the whole system? Is it not just this?—that the civilized and powerful races of the earth have discovered that the degraded, barbarous, and weak races, may be induced *voluntarily* to reduce themselves to a slavery more cruel than any that has yet disgraced the earth, and that humanity may compound with its conscience, by pleading that the act is one of *free will*!” Platitudes on “humane principles” and “righteous decrees” might be “all very plausible and very soothing to the conscience” but the truth, he believed, exposed the unconscionable hypocrisy of abolitionism. De Bow demanded that “decisive means” be taken “to arrest this evil in its infancy,” lest the entire world be cursed with the “ineradicable evils” of the “coolie” trade, including the specter of race wars between “half savages and half-civilized idolators” in the tropics. Although slavery protected the South for the moment, he concluded, “a successful insurrection of the negroes” incited by abolitionists would prove “an enormous impulse” toward the introduction of “coolies” to the United States.²⁸

If freedom could be worse than slavery, as De Bow insisted, other proslavery propagandists such as Daniel Lee wondered how “immigration,” as understood and practiced in the Caribbean, might revitalize the institution of slavery in the United States. “Without making the disastrous sacrifice that ruined the planting colonies,” Lee proposed, “we may, if it be wise to do so, import Coolies or Africans, under reasonable contracts to serve for a term of years as apprentices, or hirelings, and then be conveyed back to the land of their nativity.” The system would not only fill the South’s demand for “a muscular force worthy of its destiny,” he argued, but also civilize Asia and Africa as these “pupils” returned home, enlightened. His ultimate objective, however, was to reopen the trans-Atlantic slave trade, a movement that witnessed a

resurgence in the late 1850s. By 1858, Lee abandoned the idea of recruiting new races of laborers and advocated the sole importation of "African immigrants" under fourteen-year indentures or longer, as Louisiana legislators were then considering. He claimed that the system, once begun, would convert Northerners to the wisdom of Southern ways, allowing the extension of "the term of the African apprenticeship from fourteen years to the duration of his natural life." Lee's reasoning was, in effect, the mirror image of William Reed's attempt to apply the slave trade laws to the "coolie" trade: since the "coolie" trade and African "immigration" to the Caribbean were like the banned African slave trade, the slave trade itself ought to be legalized. Prominent proslavery thinkers such as George Fitzhugh agreed wholeheartedly.²⁹

The drive to enslave peoples, at the same time, did not stop proslavery forces from imagining themselves and their nation as liberators—would-be liberators of "coolies" across the oceans as much as U.S. diplomats. U.S. expansionism in the Caribbean, they suggested, would result in the deliverance of slaves and "coolies" from backward despots. Representative Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina, for example, attempted to shed light on "how this system of transporting and selling into slavery these Coolies is managed by Great Britain and Spain," to drum up congressional support for a more aggressive policy toward "our American Mediterranean" in peril. The mass importation of Chinese "coolies," Mayan Indians, and Africans intermixing with "the present black and mongrel population," he argued, threatened to make Cuba and other islands "desolate," the permanent "abode of savages." Instead, some "*Norman or South-man fillibuster [sic]*" ought to go down and force "Cuffee" to produce tropical goods, "which Providence seems to have intended these islands to yield for the benefit of mankind." Senator John Slidell of Louisiana likewise called for the U.S. acquisition of Cuba. In January 1859, he presented a bill to that effect on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Relations, whose accompanying report forecast the humanitarian and financial benefits to come. The United States would put an end to the slave and "coolie" trades—the latter of which resulted in mortality rates and suffering "far worse" than slavery—and thereby improve the value and treatment of Cuban slaves and allow American slaveholders to dominate the world sugar market.³⁰

The proslavery argument's critique of Caribbean coolieisms, in the least, frustrated abolitionist attempts to draw sharp contrasts between slavery and freedom and revealed the complex global ties that slavery and coolieism had forged. Developments in Europe, the British West Indies, Cuba, India, China, and Africa produced new anxieties and hopes that informed and challenged universalizing notions. Were the British West Indies really free after emanci-

pation? Weren't Asian and African immigrations merely legalized slave importations? The transport and employment of "coolies" in the Caribbean rendered such questions—whether in diplomatic correspondence from Asia or proslavery pronouncements from the Old South—beyond a black-and-white issue. Initially cast as the "free" advancement from coerced labor, "coolies" came to epitomize slavery in the United States at a time when the national crisis over slavery was about to erupt in open warfare. On the eve of the Civil War, the "coolie" and slave trades had become so intertwined in American culture that an encyclopedic entry for "Slaves and Slave-Trade" devoted a section exclusively to the "Coolie Trade."³¹ The project of outlawing "coolies" could not be extricated from the national war over slavery.

Importation and Immigration

The convergent and contrasting denunciations of "coolies" by American diplomats and slaveholders generated simultaneous but distinct initiatives to outlaw "coolies" on U.S. vessels and on U.S. soil. Representative Thomas D. Eliot, a Republican from Massachusetts, led the legislative campaign in the U.S. Congress to ban American participation in the "coolie" trade, beginning with the publication of his report on behalf of the Committee on Commerce in 1860. Encapsulating the frustrations and aspirations of U.S. diplomats in China far more than those of proslavery critics, Eliot and his associates took great pains to distinguish between the status of "coolies" in the British colonies and Cuba. The transport and employment of "East Indian coolies" in British Guiana, Trinidad, and Mauritius, the report argued, were characterized by voluntary contracts and government supervision that obviated outside interference. Chinese migration to California was also "voluntary and profitable mutually to the contracting parties" and, in any case, already subject to federal statutes on passenger ships. The "Chinese coolie trade" to Cuba, on the other hand, was categorically unique and warranted immediate congressional action. That particular trade was "unchristian and inhuman, disgraceful to the merchant and the master, oppressive to the ignorant and betrayed laborers, a reproach upon our national honor, and a crime before God as deeply dyed as that piracy which forfeits life when the coasts of Africa supply its victims." Though targeting "American shipmasters and northern owners" engaged in a trade "as barbarous as the African slave trade"—not Southern slaveholders—the timing and language of the report obviously underscored Eliot's broader antislavery message.³²

Consistent with a longstanding American rebuke of Cuba as morally backward, the report's geopolitical boundaries also reflected the Republican Party's

growing faith in nation-state authority and enduring hope for a peaceful end to slavery. The British Empire stood for state protection, progress, and freedom; the Spanish Empire exemplified state failure, stagnation, and slavery. Antislavery forces therefore vigorously contrasted what the *New York Times* called the "Chinese Coolie-trade" to Cuba and Peru and the "Hindoo Coolie-trade" to the British West Indies, which was "not the ally, but the enemy of Slavery." The "East-India Coolies, taken to the British Islands," John S. C. Abbott wrote in his antislavery tract, seemed to "have their rights carefully protected by the British government," whereas "in Cuba the Coolie trade is merely a Chinese slave-trade under the most fraudulent and cruel circumstances." Juxtaposing the "human misery" in Cuba against the "joy and gratitude" in postemancipation British West Indies, Abbott prayed that "the execrable institution" of slavery would "speedily go down" in the United States, "but not in a sea of flame and blood."³³ State regulation and supervision, it seemed, would guarantee and, in essence, define freedom for all.

Slavery's defenders had no patience to draw distinctions among Caribbean coolieisms and demanded the exclusion of "coolies" from America's shores so as to preserve domestic slavery. Between Lincoln's election and inauguration—and during the secession of one state after another—proslavery unionists desperately turned to the Caribbean and "coolies" to sustain their lost cause, with President James Buchanan going so far as to propose the acquisition of Cuba. At a convention called to draft a constitutional amendment to avert a war in February 1861, a delegate from New York recommended the preservation of slavery as a state institution and ridiculed its abolition in England and France. "True, they have abolished slavery by name," he argued, "but they have imported apprentices from Africa, and Coolies from Asia, and have placed them under the worst form of slavery ever known." In considering a provision to prohibit the importation of slaves from abroad, the convention added the phrase "or coolies, or persons held to service or labor" upon the suggestion of a Kentucky delegate, who contended that "the importation of coolies and other persons from China and the East" was "the slave-trade in one of its worst forms."³⁴

In a fracturing nation, those who were fighting hardest to uphold slavery attempted to criminalize "coolie" importations first. In March 1861, congressional leaders of the compromise movement proposed multiple drafts of a constitutional amendment that included the retention of slavery below the 36°30' parallel line and the prohibition of the "foreign slave trade" involving "the importation of slaves, coolies, or persons held to service or labor, into the United States and the Territories from places beyond the limits thereof." At the same moment in Mobile, Alabama, the constitutional convention of the

Confederate States of America considered an identical clause against “the importation of slaves, coolies, or persons held to service or labor into the Confederate States and their Territories, from any places beyond the limits thereof.” Politicians on opposing sides of the secession crisis figured that the preemptive exclusion of “coolies” would shore up slavery in the South.³⁵

Antislavery Republicans also moved to put a stop to “coolie” importations during the first year of the Civil War. After settling for congressional resolutions requesting more documents from Buchanan and then Lincoln, Eliot and his allies renewed their attempt to disengage Americans from the “coolie” trade in the now Republican-dominated Congress. Upon the receipt of the Lincoln administration’s report on the “Asiatic coolie trade” in December 1861, which attested to the violence of the trade and the failure of government inspection, Eliot proposed an amended bill (H.R. 109) for the House’s consideration and pleaded for its passage. Aside from procedural objections to his earlier bill, Eliot argued, he had heard only “a solitary objection” to it from his colleagues. “I refer to Mr. [Henry C.] Burnett [of Kentucky], who is now doing what he can to pull down the Government which he was then under oath to sustain and support,” he explained, “and that objection, as I recollect it, was based simply upon the assertion that . . . it might by possibility affect some of his constituents who, as he declared, had some cooly laborers upon their plantations.” The House passed the bill.³⁶

The Senate then made a significant modification to Eliot’s bill. Senator John C. Ten Eyck of New Jersey recommended on behalf of his chamber’s Committee on Commerce that the phrase “against their will and without their consent” be stricken from H.R. 109. “The committee are of opinion that the cooly trade should be prohibited altogether,” Ten Eyck argued. “They are of opinion that persons of this description should not be transported from their homes and sold, under any circumstances; being, as is well known, an inferior race, the committee are of the opinion that these words will afford very little protection to this unfortunate class of people.” His racial and moral argument carried the day. The Senate passed the bill with Ten Eyck’s amendment; the House concurred two weeks later. And in the throes of military and political battles over slavery, Lincoln signed “An Act to Prohibit the ‘Coolie Trade’ by American Citizens in American Vessels” in February 1862.³⁷

The final version of the bill reproduced the racial logic of the age of emancipation that made the practical enforcement of prohibiting the “coolie” trade a confusing and impossible endeavor. What exactly constituted a “coolie”? And could one ever be emancipated from the status of a “coolie”? The new law answered neither question. Its first section prohibited U.S. citizens and resi-

dents from acting as “master, factor, owner, or otherwise, [to] build, equip, load, or otherwise prepare, any ship or vessel . . . for the purpose of procuring from China . . . or from any other port or place the inhabitants or subjects of China, known as ‘coolies,’ to be transported to any foreign country, port, or place whatever, to be disposed of, or sold, or transferred, for any term of years or for any time whatever, as servants or apprentices, or to be held to service or labor.” It was from this section that Ten Eyck removed the words “against their will and without their consent,” a clause that might have classified “coolies” more conclusively. Instead, the legislation simply outlawed any shipment of Chinese subjects “known as ‘coolies’” abroad “to be held to service or labor.” Virtually all Chinese subjects leaving China were known as “coolies.” But another section of the law left the door open to Chinese migrations, proclaiming that “any free and voluntary emigration of any Chinese subject” should proceed unabated so long as a U.S. consul attested to the voluntary status of the migrant through a written certificate.³⁸ The two sections presumably went hand in hand. The United States deplored the importation of human beings; it embraced immigration.

Anti-“Coolie” Legacies

Reflective of the 1862 anti-“coolie” law’s origins in wider debates over slavery, postbellum legal battles over its application took place in the U.S. South and its leading antebellum slave market and port city, New Orleans. With the abolition of slavery and the prospect of black enfranchisement, former slaveholders and their allies now looked to the Caribbean and “coolies” for political and economic salvation. A refrain uttered across the region after the war, a journalist reported, was: “We can drive the niggers out and import coolies that will work better, at less expense, and relieve us from this cursed nigger impudence.” Alarmed by such brash talk, federal officials responded without delay when the U.S. consulate in Havana reported in 1867 that “certain parties in the State of Louisiana . . . [were] engaged in the business of importing into that state from this Island Chinese or coolies under contracts to serve on stipulated wages for a specified time.” The U.S. attorney in New Orleans was dispatched immediately to intercept an American brig en route that was reportedly carrying passengers “purchased” from their Cuban “masters” and signed to contracts establishing “the relation of slavery or servitude.” Although the vessel was unquestionably transporting twenty-three Chinese subjects “known as ‘coolies’ . . . to be held to service or labor” in Louisiana, the U.S. attorney eventually decided to dismiss the case. The failure to obtain

consular certificates notwithstanding, he decided, the brig's captain had believed the "coolies" to be "free agents."³⁹

The law's creators never contemplated a conflict between the two provisions on "coolies" and "immigrants," rendering its legal enforcement ineffective but its cultural effects enduring. When a labor recruiter from the South requested consular certificates to ship nearly two hundred Chinese workers from Hong Kong to New Orleans in 1869, the local U.S. consul was baffled. "*What constitutes a free and voluntary emigrant?*" he asked the secretary of state. ". . . What is a 'Coolie' as here defined, and what is a free emigrant?" Discovering that his superiors knew no better and that the passengers appeared to be voluntary, he issued the certificates.⁴⁰ If the law did little to stem Chinese migrations to the United States, including to a region vocally demanding "coolies," the racial and cultural logic behind it—that "coolies," in contrast to "immigrants," embodied slavery after emancipation—suffused almost every political debate on Chinese migration. When Senator Charles Sumner tried to remove the word *white* from U.S. naturalization laws in 1870, for instance, his opponents dwelled on the racial image of "coolies" overwhelming the United States back to slavery. "These people are brought here under these infamous coolie contracts," a Nevada Republican exclaimed, "the same contracts that have disgraced humanity in the taking of these poor people to the West India islands and various portions of South America as slaves." As Sumner's resolution went down in defeat, unanimous condemnations of "coolies" echoed universal applause for "immigrants," defined explicitly and implicitly as hailing solely from Europe. The act of outlawing "coolies" racialized "immigrants" as decidedly white and European in American culture, negating the legal space afforded to "free and voluntary" Chinese migrants.⁴¹

For decades preceding and following the passage of the 1862 law, "coolies" occupied the legal and cultural borderland between slavery and freedom, signifying and enabling critical transitions in U.S. history. The 1862 law, unambiguously framed as an antislavery measure by Eliot and others, established a precedent that few politicians would or could resist. What was, in effect, the last slave trade law would lead to a litany of immigration laws ostensibly targeting "coolies" (and prostitutes) in the name of "immigrants" and freedom, including the Page Law of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. And the perceived existence of coolieism and other forms of bondage—and the moral imperative to prohibit slavery—infected and rationalized U.S. expansionism abroad, from China and Cuba in the 1850s to the Philippines in the 1890s.⁴² Locating, defining, and outlawing "coolies" ultimately evolved into an endless and indispensable exercise that facilitated and justified a series of

historical transitions—from slave trade laws to racially coded immigration laws, from a slaveholding nation to a “nation of immigrants,” and from a continental empire of “manifest destiny” to a liberating empire across the seas. The violent and mythical legacies of those transitions would go a long way toward defining race, nation, and empire in the twentieth century and beyond.

Notes

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1. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st sess., 1482, 1581, 1932, 1936.
 2. *Ibid.*, 1934, 1517.
 3. On the figure of the prostitute, see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 218–63.
 4. Scholars of Asian American history all too often stress that Asians in the United States were “immigrants” and not “coolies,” presumed to be those coerced to move to the Caribbean (see, for example, Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989], 35–36). The habitual assertion of this false binary—“coolies” versus “immigrants”—not only reifies “coolies” and American exceptionalism but ironically reproduces the logic and rhetoric of nineteenth-century debates on whether or not Asians in the United States were, in fact, “coolies.” No one, in the United States or the Caribbean, was really a “coolie.”
 5. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 891–92; Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 41–43; Robert L. Irick, *Ch'ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade, 1847–1878* (Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982), 2–6; Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 71–72.
 6. The term *coolie*, defined as an “East Indian porter or carrier,” had first appeared in 1842. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: White and Sheffield, 1842), 953; Noah Webster and Chauncey A. Goodrich, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield: George and Charles Merriam, 1848), 264.
 7. Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838–1904* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 41–42 (Gladstone quote on 41); Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 61–63 (quote on 63).
 8. Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, v (quote), 69–70; Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves*, 42–43; Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 109, 156–57; Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950), 8–21.
 9. See, for example: Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves*, 44–56, 104–53; Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, 16, 50–86, 107–35; Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 61–287; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 33–42.
 10. See, for example: Denise Helly, “Introduction” to *The Cuba Commission Report: A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba: The Original English-Language Text of 1876* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 5–27; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Chinese Coolie Labour in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labour or Neo-slavery?” *Slavery and Abolition* 14.1 (April 1993): 67–83; Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 29–35, 89–110.

11. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, 19, 37–49, 58–61, 70–75, 87–106; Wally Look Lai, “Chinese Indentured Labor: Migrations to the British West Indies in the Nineteenth Century,” *Amerasia Journal* 15.2 (1989): 117–35.
12. “Slavery in Jamaica, W.I.,” *Littell’s Living Age*, May 30, 1846, 429; “Miscellany: West-India Immigration,” *Littell’s Living Age*, September 19, 1846, 582; *The Liberator*, April 23, 1847.
13. “The Celestials at Home and Abroad,” *Littell’s Living Age*, August 14, 1852, 289–91, 297–98; *New York Times*, April 15, May 3, 15, June 14, December 10, 1852.
14. Jules Davids, ed., *American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The United States and China*, ser. 1, vol. 17, *The Treaty System and the Taiping Rebellion, 1842–1860: The Coolie Trade and Chinese Emigration* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1973), B13–B15; M. Foster Farley, “The Chinese Coolie Trade, 1845–1875,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 3.3–4 (July and October 1968): 262; Humphrey Marshall to Secretary of State, March 8, 1853, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., House Executive Document (HED) 123, 78–82.
15. John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3–59.
16. Robert J. Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams: Maritime Relations between China and the United States, 1850–1915* (Tucson, Ariz.: Westernlore Press, 1988), 30–37; Irick, *Ch’ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade*, 32–34; Peter Parker to Secretary of State Daniel Webster, May 21, June 19, 1852, 34th Cong., 1st sess., HED 105, 94–96, 108–10.
17. Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams*, 29–30; Ching-Hwang Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China’s Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch’ing Period (1851–1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), 41–52.
18. Peter Parker to Commodore [J. H.] Aulick, June 5, 1852; J. H. Aulick to [Peter] Parker, June 19, 1852; Peter Parker to Chinese Commissioners, June 22, 1852; Peter Parker to [Secretary of State Daniel] Webster, July 20, 1852; [Chinese Commissioners’ Reports], July 9, August 1, 1852; Peter Parker to Seu and Pih, Commissioners, &c., July 12, August 10, 1852; 34th Cong., 1st sess., HED 105, 121–22, 127–28, 130–36, 144, 148–49.
19. T. Hart Hyatt to William L. Marcy, June 1, 1856 (including log excerpts), in Davids, *American Diplomatic and Public Papers*, ser. 1, vol. 17, 356–60; H. N. Palmer to Thomas R. Rootes, February 15, 1856 (including log excerpts), 34th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Executive Document (SED) 99, 8–10; H. N. Palmer to Secretary of State W. L. Marcy, November 9, December 6, 1855, 34th Cong., 1st sess., HED 105, 71–73.
20. Peter Parker to Messrs. Sampson & Tappan, September 8, 1856; Public Notification, January 10, 1856; 35th Cong., 2nd sess., SED 22, 1129–30, 625–26; Irick, *Ch’ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade*, 53; *The Liberator*, April 18, 25, May 9, 16, 1856; *New York Times*, April 21, 1856.
21. William B. Reed to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, January 13, 1858, 36th Cong., 1st sess., SED 30, 59–65. The 1818 law is quoted in Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South: A People without a History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 37–38.
22. Public Notification, January 10, 1856, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., SED 22, 625–26; William B. Reed to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, January 13, 1858; William B. Reed to E. Doty, February 15, 1858; 36th Cong., 1st sess., SED 30, 59–65, 203–4.
23. *Harper’s Weekly*, April 24, 1858; Lewis Cass to J. S. Black, April 28, 1858; Domestic Letters of the Department of State (National Archives Microfilm M40, roll 46); J. S. Black to Lewis Cass, March 11, 1859; Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State (National Archives Microfilm M179, roll 168); General Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59; National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C.; William B. Reed to Lewis Cass, September 1, 1858, 36th Cong., 1st sess., SED 30, 422–25.
24. Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams*, 47–55, 60–61, 195; Irick, *Ch’ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade*, 57–60, 67–104, 148–49; Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, 84–100.
25. Governor General Laú to John E. Ward, January 30, February 5, 18, 1860; minutes of an interview between Governor General Laú and U.S. officials, February 1, 1860; John E. Ward to Governor General Laú, February 3, 24, 1860; S. Wells Williams, secretary of the U.S. legation, to John E. Ward, February 7, 20, 1860; John E. Ward to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, February 24, 1860; 36th Cong., 1st sess., HED 88, 29–37, 40–46, 48.
26. “Slaves and Slavery,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 19 (October 1846): 243–55; “Gov. Hammond’s Letters on Slavery—No. 3,” *De Bow’s Review* 8 (February 1850): 128–31; Josiah

- Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery; and Origin, Fortunes, and History of the Negro Race*, 5th ed. (Glasgow, Ky.: Rev. W. S. Brown, 1852), 359–60.
27. "The West India Islands," *De Bow's Review* 5 (May and June 1848): 455–500 (quote from 488, emphasis in original); "The Coolie Trade," *De Bow's Review* 23 (July 1857): 30–35.
 28. "Asiatic Free Colonists in Cuba," *De Bow's Review* 24 (May 1858): 470–71; "The Coolie Trade; or, The Encomienda System of the Nineteenth Century," *De Bow's Review* 27 (September 1859): 296–321.
 29. D[aniel] Lee: "Agricultural Apprentices and Laborers," *Southern Cultivator* 12.6 (June 1854): 169–70; "The Future of Cotton Culture in the Southern States, No. II," *Southern Cultivator* 16.3 (March 1858): 90–92; "The Future of Cotton Culture in the Southern States," *Southern Cultivator* 16.5 (May 1858): 137–39; and "Laborers for the South," *Southern Cultivator* 16.8 (August 1858): 233–36; [G.] Fitzhugh, "The Conservative Principle; or, Social Evils and Their Remedies: Part II—Slave Trade," *De Bow's Review* 22 (May 1857): 449–50, 457.
 30. Thomas L. Clingman, "Coolies—Cuba and Emancipation," *De Bow's Review* 22 (April 1857): 414–19; "Monthly Record of Current Events," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 18 (March 1859): 543–44; "Continental Policy of the United States—The Acquisition of Cuba," *The United States' Democratic Review* 43 (April 1859): 29–30. On the antebellum movement for the annexation of Cuba, see Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and Its Relations with the United States*, vol. 2, 1845–1895: *From the Era of Annexationism to the Outbreak of the Second War for Independence* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 9–124.
 31. J. Smith Homans and J. Smith Homans Jr., *A Cyclopaedia of Commerce and Commercial Navigation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 1726–29.
 32. 36th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 443, 1–5, 24.
 33. *New York Times*, April 21, 1860; John S. C. Abbott, *South and North, or, Impressions Received during a Trip to Cuba and the South* (1860; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 47–52, 184, 352. A Creole newspaper in British Guiana, on the other hand, described indentured migration as "the enemy, instead of the auxiliary, of freedom" (Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, 180).
 34. Foner, *A History of Cuba*, vol. 2, 121–22; L. E. Chittenden, *A Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the Secret Sessions of the Conference Convention, for Proposing Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, Held at Washington, D.C., in February, A.D. 1861* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864), 268, 379.
 35. 36th Cong., 2nd sess., Journal of the Senate, 373–87 (esp. 382, 386); "Monthly Record of Current Events," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 22 (April 1861): 689–90; *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861–1865*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 868.
 36. 36th Cong., 1st sess., HED 88, 1; 37th Cong., 2nd sess., HED 16, esp. 1, 3–16, 21–36; *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd sess., 350–52. Burnett might have been referring to the Chinese laborers who worked in Kentucky in the 1850s, mostly at iron-refining factories (Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 16–19).
 37. *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd sess., 555–56, 581–82, 593, 838, 849, 855, 911; *Harper's Weekly*, February 15, March 1, 1862.
 38. The full text of the 1862 law can be found in Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 177–79.
 39. Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, 1865–1866*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (1866; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 417; Thos. Savage to William H. Seward, July 12, 1867, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Havana, Cuba (NA Microfilm M899, roll 49), RG 59, NA; Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 58–61.
 40. C. N. Goulding to Hamilton Fish, November 19, 1869, February 9, 1870, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Hong Kong (NA Microfilm M108, rolls 6 and 7), RG 59, NA.
 41. *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2nd sess., 5121–25, 5148–77 (quote from 5151). These postbellum developments are discussed in greater detail in my *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
 42. For the full text and a discussion of the law named after Representative Horace F. Page of California, see George Anthony Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 32–37, 115–17. On how the antislavery ideology shaped the debates surrounding the U.S. conquest of the Philippines, see Michael Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).