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A Genealogy of Poverty: Race and the Technology of Population

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Abstract

Genealogical investigations that attend to colonial rule reveal the intimate alliance between social welfare policy, racial slavery and modern power. In this paper, I intervene in the historiography of social welfare policy to disrupt a long line of academic study that severs studies on the poor from the history of racial slavery. This separation is enormously productive and conceals the ways in which knowledge systems and social policies are organized by and through racial ideologies, early liberalism and its use of population science. To illustrate this point, I show how concerns with knowing and targeting the bodies of poor and enslaved women helped formulate the new economy, white bourgeois power and the extension of empire.

Introduction

The historiography of social welfare in Canada often draws from the literature on the British poor laws. The New Poor Law of 1834 is viewed as a fundamental policy shift that ushered in a national capitalist labour force so critical to the rise of industrial capitalism in England. By cutting off outdoor relief, centralizing the administration of the poor laws and exacting brutal conditions in the workhouses, the New Poor Law introduced finer distinctions between the respectable labourer and degenerate pauper. Labourers would be forced to accept any job available. If they were without work, the able-bodied and their dependants would be required to enter the workhouse. To discourage improvidence and dependency, conditions in the workhouse were kept well below that of the poorest independent labourer (Englander, 1998). As we know, this rigorous separation between the deserving and non-deserving poor is not just about the past. In the last fifteen years many theorists in Canada and the United States have noted how the reduction of social welfare programs, the increased scrutiny of claimants, the reintroduction of workfare programs and the Spouse in the House Rule, harkens back to this time period. By drawing on a long line of scholarship that emphasizes class and gender struggles, contemporary theorists show how neo-liberal policies and forms of discipline operate today (Kern, 1998).

These important and enduring arguments, however, only tell part of the story. My interest is in looking at how racial ideologies were also active at this time. In part, because the poor law literature is so quiet on this point. Connections between race and social welfare are largely discussed as urgent contemporary problems that have no home in the historical record.

While the past is marshalled in order to critique current neo-liberal policies, it continues to overlook the types of racial thinking that has organized poor relief over time. By addressing this historical absence, we can de-naturalize categories of race and see how instead how race appears and disappears in various political moments. My inquiry relies on the work of many anti-colonial scholars, postcolonial scholars and imperial historians (Burton, 2001; Hall, 2000; James, 1938; Said, 1993; Scott, 1999; Williams, 1944) who demonstrate how domestic troubles are better understood in relation to events in the colonies. Their insights help me consider the ways in which the problem of poor relief and the New Poor Law were formulated in relation to the slave trade, emancipation, and the extension of empire. After all, the New Poor Law – the hallmark policy of social welfare history was enacted in the same year as the Total Abolition of Colonial Slavery (1834). As I've found, these enormous policy shifts greatly influenced one another in spite of the ways they remain in separate historical domains.

The history of poor relief fortifies a national story of Englishness that attends quite little to Britain's role as the world's leading slave trading nation. This absence is strengthened when adopted by white dominions like Canada who are remiss in recognizing the relationships between social welfare, colonial rule, and slavery on their own soil. The same parliamentarians, scientists, philosophers, utilitarians, and evangelicals implemented policies, conducted research and held overlapping debates about the problem of the pauper and the slave. These studies circulated racial ideologies about the apparent capacities of the pauper race and the slave in Britain and the colonies. Were they fully human, could they be civilized? The questions and debates about these problematic populations were tied into new forms of rule. As Foucault (1991) tells us, the definition and capacities of various populations took centre stage at this time, as a new form of government was emerging: early liberalism. These new ruling strategies focused on the productive capacity of bodies and technologies of normalization. McWhorter (2005) adds that during this period whiteness came to be identified as the norm of health and functionality, as red, black, yellow and brown people were construed as less developed or evolved and closer to savagery.

Scholars have shown that in order to govern, the state had to define, count and discipline populations to ensure appropriate and normal conduct, across vast territories. The rise of population science and statistics along with their requisite experts were crucial to early liberalism, modern power and the security of empire (Hacking, 2002; Scott, 1999). In this paper, I show how policies related to poverty and slavery drew upon racial ideologies that targeted the productive and reproductive capacities of poor and enslaved women. These policies are often viewed as unrelated histories situated in academic disciplines that remain invested in telling a single story. Before I turn to this specific argument, I discuss some of the merits and challenges of genealogical methods in relation to my analysis of the Poor Law Report (Checkland and Checkland, 1974/1834) and the Report of the Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery (SCES, 1832) and their secondary literatures. I apply this approach to offer new insights into the scientific debates about population growth and natural reproduction.

Genealogical methods

Foucault's notion of genealogy challenges traditional historical methods that seek to uncover a real and enlightened account of the past. While his approach has been widely debated

in the literature, it remains influential and offers intriguing analytical tools for interrogating social problems by instead asking us to consider: how we know (McGowen, 1994). This method is closely aligned with my concerns about how the historical and contemporary literature on poverty is organized. Genealogical practitioners follow a variety of approaches in their work. A standard edict argues against a single method, and encourages a series of questions and a style of questioning that lays bare the workings of power. Instead of revealing a true or unspoken past, genealogies examine how certain histories and assertions operate as absolute truths (Chambon, 1999). Stories, narratives, and facts are arranged, located, and made understandable through networks of power that celebrate, ignore, repress, contort, and produce information.

Adopting this approach facilitates a view into the topic you are investigating and the ways in which knowledge about your topic is produced. Concerned with the deployment of power, the focus is not on the social problem but on the history of the ways in which things become a problem. This approach allows me to ask: how did the history of social welfare and racial slavery come to be studied in a particular way? Foucault asks us to look at the conditions of existence that make each problem occur in a specific way and not in another. Interrogations into the way knowledge is produced are embedded in the “relation between forms of discourse, the historical struggle in which they are immersed, the institutional practices to which they are linked, and the forms of authority they presuppose” (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003, p. 4). Genealogies are then concerned with discursive frameworks and how they organize institutions and forms of government.

Said (1978) extended and applied Foucault's project to the colonial context. In his view, British literature and knowledge practices were never just about the British. Said argues that knowledge practices and cultural representations were central to colonial rule and the making of the British Empire. European culture was able to create and manage populations at home and in its colonies politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively. Postcolonial thought invites genealogical inquiries to read various disciplines, policies and histories side by side to uncover the colonial and imperial ideologies that determined who has the right to rule. As Hall (2000) states, by the 19th century the west came to dominate the world; barely a corner of the earth was untouched by the British Empire. Colonial ideas and values were so internalized that decent men and women took it as their “metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples” (Said, 1993, p. 10). As Said (1993) reminds us, colonial knowledge systems arise through relations of power and a desire for conquest and domination.

Following these insights, I engaged in a reading practice of primary and secondary data with specific questions in mind. These questions emphasize how histories are organized, how they become severed from one another over time, and the productive effects of this ongoing separation. Re-reading the poor law literature alongside the emancipation literature makes racial thinking constitutive of the foundational knowledge of social welfare. This has many contemporary effects. As Foucault (1991) contends, genealogies are a history of the present. In relation to my project, this approach requires that we view race as something beyond a fixed measurement attached only to bodies of colour, which the whiteness literature has already demonstrated. It asks us to examine how race becomes normalized and productive in our research and pedagogical styles even as we challenge racism. If we engage in this critical

project, we can see how racial ideologies, especially whiteness, have operated over time and may even be present in studies on the new racialization of poverty. As Razack (2002) maintains, “white settler societies can transcend their bloody beginnings and contemporary inequalities by remembering and confronting the racial hierarchies that structure our lives” (p. 5).

Genealogical method

Genealogies are concerned with a few projects at once:

- (1) The first reading: the content and interpretation of the archive/literature/policy area/history
- (2) Reconciling the material and discursive: how the archive/literature/policy area/history is put together discursively and materially
- (3) Disciplines colonize: how the archive/literature/policy is part of a discipline, and in turn structures other disciplines discursively and materially
- (4) Rupturing our knowledge compartments: how our topic and discipline is produced over time, how disciplines become split apart from one another and remain on parallel tracks as separate parts of the social sciences

(1) The First Reading

Coming to grips with the historical content of an issue or a policy area is no small feat. The history of social welfare and racial slavery are discrete stories that first need to be understood on their own terms. The first swath at the past requires that we know the details and sequences of historical events, the actors involved, the politics of the time, and to somehow immerse ourselves in the setting of the time period. Initial investigations usually deal with archival and secondary literatures that require us to examine what the documents of the time period tell us, and how has this been written about over time. Old and new themes can be found that unearth overlooked and subjugated stories and data. For example, the Emancipation Act was long ensnared in a humanitarian trope, which positioned Britain as a righteous authority for abolishing slavery across its empire. Anti-colonial scholars like James (1938) and Williams (1944) quickly dismantled this view by exposing its excessive self-congratulatory tone. They showed how colonial wars, slave resistance, sugar boycotts and host of other political factors made slavery no longer tenable. These battles continued to play themselves out as Britain celebrated the bicentennial of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill (1807). As these examples show researchers become cognizant of how debates over the truth are structured, how different analytical strategies challenge what is taken as real, and how interpretations change over time. Well before researchers compare across histories, the presence of multiple and changing power relations and understandings about single topics are evident.

(2) Reconciling the material and the discursive

Like much of the social sciences, debates in the social welfare and slavery literatures often emphasize the economic realities or the discursive structures of their data. Theoretical struggles over the real / material are pitted against approaches that stress language, discourse, representation and cultural ideologies. For example, the slavery literature continues to quantify the economic impact of slavery by concentrating on specific industries like sugar, cotton, copper and their effect on industrialization. Others contend that cultural and racial ideologies have more explanatory force. Burton (2001) notes how the new imperial history has accentuated this division. Studies concerned with the material truth privilege the archive reality of 'facts' over secondary data or an examination of the discursive frameworks of the archive. Foucault's specific use of discourse analysis in genealogical studies brings these opposing ideas together. Unlike scholars that stress semiotics and linguistic styles or the role of elites, Foucault examines the discursive frameworks employed that create knowledge, truth, social and institutional practices, and subjectivities. In this view, discourses make up and are organized by social practices and institutions, and other non-discursive structures. When discourses operate as truth regimes they construct and manage the material. With this approach in mind, I am interested in drawing out the discursive frameworks of the data, the materiality of its organization, and the material-effects it produces.

So, the discourse on poverty becomes more than a discourse. It structures and activates the policies of institutions and inserts its measures into the daily lives of individual subjects. Threadgold (1997) shows how terms and language become a way "of categorizing and limiting, but also producing, the objects of which it speaks" (p. 59). For example, in the Poor Law Report, lone motherhood becomes identified as a legitimate topic of inquiry, requiring specific tactics and policies, such as the famous Bastardy Clauses. The Bastardy Clauses attempted to force mothers to accept full responsibility of their children, relieving fathers from all liability. This new term structured future debates and their respective institutional and material practices. The Bastardy Clauses made motherhood an ongoing object of inquiry that assumed a specific subjectivity into existence, now expressed through the figure of the single mother. As Carabine (2001) has documented, this colonial category is alive and well in contemporary social policy.

For my purposes, documents need to be situated in the power relations of the time period in which they were written. As well, we must ask how a document enables and is enabled by the historical moment it is located in and how that context changes over time. Power relations are manifest in the moment of writing, in the uneven processes that consider a document archival material, and in the ways in which these documents are taken up, circulated, and re-worked over time. Material conditions and power relations organize these possibilities. There is no pure archive, and at times, particular interpretations achieve a *real* status, usually reserved for the archive. What matters at a methodological level is that we focus on the discursive and material currency of the documents and literatures we scrutinize. My interest in any data lies not only in their discursive arrangements but also in the material conditions from which they emanate and the ones they generate.

(3) Disciplines Colonize

An examination of any social issue or policy reveals something about its respective discipline. I became preoccupied with the historical content of the poor relief and slavery debates, with how each literature / discipline is constructed, and why this occurs in ways that disavows linkages. In spite of the overlap between the social actors and the knowledge systems they employed it is only recently that researchers have looked across space and time. Attending to historical accounts and the boundaries it adheres to (thereby, structuring its own self-sustaining disciplines), runs throughout many genealogical projects. The examination of your topic is thus a look at the discipline it is located in and reproduces. For example, the study of poverty at the turn of the eighteenth century was indispensable to the rise of population science, statistics, political economy and how the British government might use them. As Polanyi (1994) stated, "pauperism, political economy, and the discovery of society were closely interwoven" (p. 85). Yet again, postcolonial theorists remind us that these new knowledge systems were active in metropolitan *and* colonial sites. These were not simply knowledge systems, but ways of ruling. As Kalpagam (2000) has illustrated, Britain's various forms of colonial knowledge produced a field of representation and intervention in the colonies.

The political problem of the pauper and the slave in London, Edinburgh, Ireland, Jamaica, Barbados, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand consumed political economists and abolitionists. Nonetheless, the history of the New Poor Law remains affixed to the discipline of political economy and social welfare while the Emancipation Act is attached to the history of slavery / anti-slavery and racism. The separation of these disciplines invites discussions that operate within its own parameters, providing a self-sustaining logic and economy of thought. The interconnected forms of domination get lost which tempers the violent history of empire and how colonial and imperial projects rely so closely on academic disciplines. How would Britain simultaneously manage pauper riots and slave resistance? Political science, history, statistics, geology, anthropology, and philology, were as significant in the maintenance of colonial rule, than political, economic and military policies. Not surprisingly, the Pentagon recently solicited the expertise of anthropologists and sociologists to assist American combat units in the 'tribal areas' of Afghanistan and Iraq (similar to Vietnam and Latin America). In September 2007, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates authorized a 40 million dollar expansion of these Human Terrain Teams.

The poor law and antislavery literature are embedded in disciplines that also change over time. Scholars examine topics that help sustain and at times, alter the discipline. The Poor Law Report of 1834 continues to be a central document to social welfare historians, as changing political worlds influence academic disciplines. As I read various accounts, it became evident that the report was instilled with a different kind of authority at the time of its production, compared to its relevance over time. Initially it was interrogated as a document that explicitly delineates class relations, while feminist historians have since read for gender, and theorists of governmentality discover the making of the liberal bourgeois subject (Dean, 1991). Identifying these changing analytical frameworks exposes the productive and political world of knowledge production.

Eric Williams' *Capitalism and slavery* (1944) provides a further illustration of these points. His anti-colonial seminal study explores the relationship between industrial capitalism and slavery. Williams showed how the slave trade, slavery and trade in sugar, cotton, indigo and cocoa were indispensable to the industrial revolution. His argument was a significant intervention into the manner in which the history of slavery and the history of industrialization had been told. It is an interpretation that is specific to and reflective of the anti-colonial movement he was part of, and re-organized the work of subsequent historians. Historians in the West spent the second half of the twentieth century attempting to overturn Williams' thesis. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, Western scholars argued that internal domestic dynamics not external factors like slavery ignited and sustained the industrial revolution (Inikori, 2000, p. 69-71). Agricultural productivity, population growth, and the increase in middle-class incomes lead to a higher demand for British goods at home. This highly charged response was an overt political battle, which, in turn, organized the terms of the historical debate and the discipline itself, opening up the field of political economy and theories on industrial capitalism. Williams' text and the subsequent critiques are part of a changing political environment. More recently, the exploration of popular anti-slavery movements, the role of gender, and slave revolts is being marshaled because of a language, political instinct, and imperative to make these kinds of arguments. So, when turning to texts or archives, we are simultaneously tracing changes in the discipline, the power relations of the time and in our contemporary setting.

(4) Rupturing our Knowledge Compartments

Reading histories side-by-side reveals how disciplines become split apart from one another and remain on parallel tracks over time as separate parts of the social sciences. Another fascinating example is Polanyi's (1944) work *The Great Transformation*. Written in the same year as Williams' work, Polanyi makes the argument that the New Poor Law ushered in the industrial revolution. By cutting off outdoor relief, expanding workhouses and instituting the less eligibility rule, the New Poor Law was responsible for creating a national capitalist labor market. A seminal work for studying historical and contemporary views on social welfare, it emphasized the domestic focus that Williams was so determined to dismantle. Said's (1993) interest in exploring intertwined and overlapping histories / disciplines helps me see how these texts organized and changed their respective disciplines. As these examples show, the knowledge compartments we structure are politically active and offer fixed and static stories, along with the possibilities of rupturing epistemological practices and ways of knowing.

After familiarizing myself with the historical content and discursive structure of the two literatures, it became clearer how they might overlap. First of all, the same parliamentarians, evangelists, political economists, and philosophers were commenting on both political problems as the issues bled into one another. Much of the commentary overlapped with their attempts at quantitative measurements, statistical analysis, and the new political tactic of relying on facts. As the poor law literature tells us, many of the political reformers at the time were members of charitable and statistical societies that developed their methods by interrogating the habits and lifestyles of the poor. However, these methods drew from studies on the slave trade, slavery and emancipation. For example, in order to discredit the slave trade Prime Minister William Pitt recommended to William Wilberforce¹ in 1787, that he lead a parliamentary campaign for its abolition. Thomas Clarkson was the key collector of the evidence against the slave trade and

slavery. For decades statistics were gathered from an endless series of publications resulting in the multi-volume series of *Parliamentary Papers*. In *The State of the Poor* (1797), Sir Frederick Morton Eden, a disciple of Adam Smith, gathered his empirical data to attack relief programs by following the precedents of the slave trade investigations (Checkland and Checkland, 1974/1834). Eden's work is quoted at length in the Poor Law Report and had an enormous impact on the subsequent punitive reforms of the New Poor Law.

Targeting the poor and securing of the domain of the slave (ex-slave) were required in order to stabilize the new and unsure economy. Slave revolts, colonial wars, pauper riots, and political reform threatened the economic and political stability of the British Empire. Studies about poor relief often compared the pauper's reluctance to work to that of a slave, while investigations about emancipation expressed concerns about the rise in pauperism and indolence of the slave population if labour became free (Checkland and Checkland, 1974/1834; SCES, 1832). Together, we see how racial ideologies structured both political problems. In the poor law literature, the pauper is demonized and portrayed as a degenerate race. As Bonnett (1998) tell us, Victorian hyper-whiteness was set against the antisocial pauper and the Irish in London who were viewed as non-white subjects destined to contaminate the English worker. Black settlers, loyalists and slaves who were denied poor relief in London, were further down the racial hierarchy. Instead, settlement projects to send them 'back to Africa' were organized by abolitionists, evangelicals, and black leaders themselves who struggled under very different terms over these issues.

If we turn to the slave colonies, the policing of racial divides through poor relief measures becomes even more severe. In Barbados and Jamaica, only the poor with white skin would qualify for poor relief. The presence of impoverished whites put the rationale of white supremacy at risk. Attempts to alleviate poverty and strengthen ties with white paupers increased as antislavery activities grew and white colonial society was beginning to disintegrate (Newton, 2003). In this setting, the extension of welfare measures was designed to bolster the slavocracy and white supremacy, as planters were desperate to appear as civilized and modern as their British counterparts. Attempts at managing the pauper and slave in London and in the colonies increasingly relied on population science as a new technology. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the usage of population and its effects on re-arranging the productive and reproductive capacities of women.

The Government of Superabundant and Depleted Populations

My practice of reading histories and policies side by side is underscored by an interest in the formation of modern liberal power. Foucault and others document the way in which a new rationality of government emerged in the late eighteenth century: early liberalism (Osborne & Rose, 1997). Modern forms of government are marked "by new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go *beyond the state* and its apparatus" (Foucault as in cited Cruikshank, 1999, p. 55). As scholars contend sovereign power, which carries the threat, or practice of torture, violence, and physical punishment, begins to overlaps with liberal government, operating through technologies of normalization. This new political rationality can be found in the rise of statistics and population

in the eighteenth century (Hacking, 2002). Scott (1999) states: "it is in fact only with the emergence of 'population' as an object of political calculation at the end of the eighteenth century that there comes into being the historical conditions for the displacement of the problematic of sovereignty by 'government'" (p. 38).

Foucault extended the notion of government beyond the fields of politics and ideology to encompass the broad and diffuse techniques for shaping behavior and ways of being. How could power insert itself into the daily lives and activities of individuals? The term government in this case refers to a form of activity aiming to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of some person or persons. Foucault's term the rationality of government explicates "a way or system of thinking about the nature and practice of government... capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practiced" (Gordon, 1991, p. 3). Tactics and strategies are arranged such that people following their own self-interest will do (and labor) as they ought. In order to govern and intervene in ways beyond obedience, and in relation to the emergence of a new economy, population assumed center stage. Examinations of the pauper and slave were coincident with this new form of government.

The voracious demand to know populations emerged out of political problems simmering throughout the poor law and slavery debates. This 'value-free' technology could count and identify those who stood outside of white bourgeois standards of civilization and economic rationality. According to philosophers and political economists, the 'superabundant' poor at home were placing the new economy at risk, while the 'depleted' populations in the colonies were threatening the stability of the slavocracy. As Britain was still developing its census at home, the slavocracy already had accounts of its slave numbers. In the slave colonies, the "statements of deaths and births were kept privately for individual estates to give absentee planters a means of ensuring that estate capital was being properly managed" (Ward, 1988, p. 119). Population counts, however, are never simply a numerical exercise. They remain infused with categories that reveal networks of power, become attached to specific political debates, and targeted bodies. Only certain population counts were required to restructure the economy at home and in the colonies. The concept of 'natural reproduction' within the notion of population provided a coherent argument to examine the bodies and conduct of poor and enslaved women.

For decades prior to the passing of the New Poor Law and the Emancipation Act, writers, economists, evangelists, parliamentarians, and the planters published a flurry of studies and reports on population growth and depletion. In Joseph Townsend's *A dissertation on the poor laws by a well-wisher of mankind* (1787; 1971), and Thomas Robert Malthus' *An essay on the principle of population*, (1798; 1993) population growth was viewed as a liability that causes widespread poverty. Townsend argued that the poor law itself led to poverty and population growth. Malthus blamed the poor laws for encouraging improvident marriages and the proliferation of children, which led to lower living standards and high relief levels. The superabundant poor in Britain were positioned as an unnatural intrusion and drain on the accumulation of capital (O'Connell, 2009). As Sherman (2001) argues, the poor were abstracted and homogenized into quantitative units of mouths and hands. The endless lists produced by political economists and politicians helped structure a debate about what to do with this contaminated race, instead of questioning whether pauperism or the rise in the number of paupers actually existed. By the 1830s, the discursive framework attached to the counting of the

poor had become entrenched and normalized. This, however, was not the only target of modern government and its new technologies.

As mentioned earlier, Townsend's dissertation appeared in the same year as Wilberforce's parliamentary campaign for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787). One of the main arguments put forth by Wilberforce and Prime Minister Pitt centred on population and the move towards 'natural fecundity.' The overwhelming importation of male slaves to the colonies produced an imbalance of the sexes and the slave system itself (including the regular use of corporal punishment, torture, and flogging) produced low fertility levels and high infant mortality rates. As Beckles (1999) reports depletion rates throughout the eighteenth century ranged from twelve to fifty per cent. Abolitionists argued that abolishing the slave trade would allow the differences in the sexes to be diminished, and the forms of torture that were responsible for the losses. The slave trade was unnecessary; parliament was legislating for a system in the West Indies that "would soon revert to the natural order of population and civilization" (Drescher, 2002, p. 45). Not for the regard of African lives, this argument hoped to show that no economic damage would result from the ending of the trade. In a strategic attempt to defuse the burgeoning support for abolition, the plantocracy put forward and won a policy of gradual improvement known as the Amelioration Laws. The push to delay the abolition of the slave trade relieved a parliament that was distressed about the influence of the French Revolution and the slave revolt in St. Domingue (Haiti).

Ideas and policies about 'normal' population growth continued to mingle with the continued threat or practice of violence and torture. The amelioration laws targeted the productive and reproductive capacities of enslaved women in obvious and stark market terms (Beckles, 1999). As property, her worth was calculated in terms of material output and childbearing—a child being accounted for at birth in the plantation inventories as an additional capital unit. The managerial shift in the slave colonies from 'buying to breeding' became the new labour supply strategy. The new breeding policies included reduced working hours for pregnant women, improved natal care, the encouragement of Christian marriages and nuclear families, and material incentives for bearing more enslaved infants as capital. In addition, common practices such as dismemberment were prohibited and minimum feeding standards were laid down (Drescher, 2000; Ward, 1988). It was argued that the gradual improving of conditions would slowly lead to a 'natural' increase in slave populations.

The West India Committee itself undertook the responsibility for the co-ordination of all activities that dealt with amelioration policies, which in the end sustained the slave trade and delayed the fight for emancipation (Luster, 1995). Abolitionists saw amelioration and creolization as a way to lower the cost of slave labour and to reduce the cost of producing sugar. In this configuration, the African slave was targeted as a separate race, unlike creole slaves who were believed to be more submissive and cooperative (Fergus, 2000). This new focus was enormously productive for entering into and attempting to discipline women and re-organize their daily lives. Britons who expressed horror over the brutalization of female slaves capitalized on this opportunity to impose to Christian values and civilize the enslaved and ex-slave populations. In this way, inventing and entering into the realm of the social in the colonies could extend white supremacy and racial thinking yet now in relation to building families. Obviously, populations re-worked these policies to build unrest and resistance to slavery.

Measures that targeted the conduct of women and enforced family formations were attempts to reorganize the social world of enslaved populations; this would only increase and intensify after emancipation. As Cooper and Stoler (1997) point out, “antislavery arguments defined slaves first as potentially civilizable—making European intervention a liberating phenomenon—and then as potentially resistant to the civilizing mission—making European intervention a necessity for global progress” (p. 31). These political usages of population science were able to reduce impoverishment, dislocation and racial and sexual terror to debates about the arrangement of ‘facts.’ We must uncover the economic and political history of making and measuring populations given our contemporary ease with researching population(s). Population technologies naturalize groupings of people while erasing the local and global conditions through which they are imagined. If poor relief interfered with the new economy ‘at home,’ the slave population viewed as capital proper was a depleting resource in need of natural increase.

The problem of the superabundant poor continued to frame the direction of domestic policies. The restriction of marriage among the poor in England was required for the wealth of the nation, while the amelioration policies encouraged marriage for the economic benefit of the plantocracy. While achieving natural increase was the concern in the slave colonies, domestically the problem was the reverse: how to regulate and contain the unnatural population increase among the poor. Again, the ‘value neutral’ science of population made these claims and policies possible. While the plantocracy used the amelioration policies in order to increase the numbers of unfree labourers, the New Poor Law had to consider how the numbers of the poor could be contained and reduced. By attempting to limit the reproductive capacities of poor white women, the policy could shore up proper race and class boundaries at home.

Not surprisingly, those resisting the New Poor Law charged that the workhouse conditions were meant to reduce fertility and extinguish the poor (Englander, 1998; Rose, 1971). The apparent rise of pauperism and poor white women’s reproduction threatened the emerging order at home. Poor white women were vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, prostitution, and enforced transportation as criminal wenches (Bush, 2000). Unmarried mothers in the Poor Law Report were depicted as a concern that should be “distinguished from the rest in principle and in the evil it has produced” (Checkland and Checkland, 1974/1834, p. 260). According to the report, poor women view their children as a source of positive profit, and so breed without restriction to acquire monies when they falsely claim a young man is the father of a bastard child. Again, this powerful narrative has managed to weave its way through time, providing the same rhetorical and moral weight to arguments that continue to de-humanize some women.

Arguments about natural population and civilized conduct were also crucial to defining white bourgeois femininity. Non-white immigrant and impoverished populations in London and elsewhere provided the backdrop for the articulation and instruction of civilized conduct. In the new language of “what can be termed ‘domestic colonialism’ explorers, travellers, and domestic missionaries went slumming down among the poor in London who lived in the parishes as dark as Africa” (Mooney, 1998, p. 57). White bourgeois femininity was also constructed by the amelioration policies.

At one time, black female field slaves were contrasted with the tenderness and graciousness of white womenⁱⁱ, which negated black motherhood, devalued maternity, and

justified a brutal social and material environment. Black women were viewed as passive to justify slavery, and then as 'She Devils' to explain women's resistance and their leadership in slave revolts. However, as Bush (2000) maintains, the amelioration laws transformed earlier ideological representations of black women as non-feminine, muscular, and punishable into the natural nurturer—everyone's nanny, granny, and auntie. Constructions of a pure white femininity were refined through contrasts with black women and poor white women in Britain and in the colonies who were racially coded as non-white. The ability to measure and discipline populations provided government with new policy directions that attempted to organize the conduct of vulnerable women. Social welfare histories are deeply tied to racial slavery. By setting these contrary yet interlinked policies and histories side by side, we can see how racial ideologies shift and operate in different spaces, as conquest and domination intermingled with the emergence of liberal government.

Conclusion: Disassembling Histories and Populations

The history of social welfare is attached to the invention, study, and reform of populations in Britain and the colonies. If we view histories and social policies separately we lose the ways in which racial thinking becomes gendered and targets women's bodies in different spaces, and across time. Genealogical examinations that embrace postcolonial insights are critical to interrogating how populations are invented in the eye of imperial and colonial politics. The pauper and slave subject were central to the formation of early liberalism and white bourgeois power, yet the history of social welfare has little to say about racial thinking. Now that race is increasingly viewed as a research variable we must teach against the view that this is new and that categories of race are either natural, static, or exist outside of modern power. As we participate in anti-racism struggles and the fight for social justice, these political projects are undermined if disciplines and histories stay in tact and continue to tell a sanitized version of social welfare. Dominant histories continue to make whiteness and white settler societies invisible or natural while bodies of colour are viewed as more recent or temporary subjects. This work seeks to dismantle these types of arguments about the past because they organize so many contemporary views about what bodies belong in certain spaces.

Altering our histories and pedagogical norms changes how we view and act upon contemporary social issues. If we alter the foundation of social welfare history we are also required to adjust our views on neo-liberalism. While contemporary arguments about social assistance critique neo-liberalism, it is important that we address the racial antecedents of earlier liberalism and their contemporary manifestations. A sustained accounting of racial thinking, white supremacy, and white bourgeois power is urgently required in order to see how racism continues to thrive through the exercise of modern power and our critiques of neo-liberalism. Important studies on the new racialization need to be situated in the colonial and historical record. What kinds of categories and forms of 'value-free' measurement may we reproduce even in our attempts at exposing racism? We must continue to ask how we re-enact the deeply liberal and colonial project to invent, count and govern 'problematic' populations in many locations, so expertly developed in the early 1800s.

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ⁱ William Pitt (the younger) was Tory Prime Minister from 1783-1801 and 1804-1806. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was an independent MP for Yorkshire, and sat with the Tories and was a close friend to William Pitt. Wilberforce was part of the Clapham Sect, who were social reformers, evangelical Anglicans and members of Parliament. He is known for the parliamentary victory of ending the British slave trade in 1807.

ⁱⁱ Beckles notes how propertyless white women (viewed as loose wenches and suited for field labour) in the seventeenth century were significant in the ganged labour force of the sugar estates. By the early eighteenth century, as their migration to the colonies contracts and Black women become the majority in the labour gangs of Antigua, St Kitts, Martinique, St Domingue, and Barbados, it is now the shortage of white women that is said to threaten the colonial mission (1999).