RACIALIZED REALISM: DANIEL DEFOE’S MEDIATIONS OF THE HUMAN IN COLONEL JACK AND ROBINSON CRUSOE

A thesis presented

By

Param S. Ajmera

to
The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

In the field of

English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April 2017
RACIALIZED REALISM: DANIEL DEFOE’S MEDIATIONS OF THE HUMAN IN COLONEL JACK AND ROBINSON CRUSOE

A thesis presented

By

Param S. Ajmera

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English
in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of
Northeastern University
April 2017
ABSTRACT

I explore the relation between realism and racialization in Daniel Defoe’s *Colonel Jack* and *Robinson Crusoe*. I argue that at a formal as well as a thematic level, Defoe’s realism in these novels is predicated on mediating the contradictions of capitalist modernity, where the antagonistic rhetoric of liberty and that of oppression exist adjacent and in relation to each other. On the one hand, Defoe’s novels suggest of teleology of development where the white protagonist’s progress from bereft circumstances to middle class prosperity mirrors a national imagination that saw opportunities for social advancement through participation in a globalizing colonial and capitalist political economy. On the other hand, Defoe’s representations of slavery and colonized spaces, such as the New World plantation, highlight the centrality of African and indigenous slave labor to capitalist production, consequently underscoring the crucial position of institutionalized oppression to modern life. In mediating this antagonsim between liberty and subjection, I contend that Defoe’s realism is predicated on rendering racialized suffering and enslavement as necessary and normal to the formation of the white bourgeois subject.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been the result of many enlightening conversations that I have shared with my advisor, Prof. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. Prof. Dillon has been my introduction to Early American Studies and Transatlantic Studies, which has greatly informed the theoretical perspectives that I engage with in this paper, and which will continue to have far reaching resonances in my future work. Not only has she made me a better writer in the technical sense, but I believe that our conversations have helped me learn how to pose questions worth asking. I would also like to thank Prof. Nicole N. Aljoe, whose invaluable comments have given me directions on how to take this project ahead.

Without the support of my family in India, Seychelles, and the United States, I would have never had the opportunity to begin graduate school, nor would I have had the fortitude to complete it. For their sacrifices and their ceaseless generosity, I am always and forever grateful, and it is to the Ajmera and the Shah clans that I dedicate this thesis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 3

Acknowledgements 4

Table of Contents 5

Chapters

Introduction 6

*Colonel Jack* and Realist Mediations of Plantation Life 14

Between *Bildung* and Dispossession: Realism and Race in the Illustrations of *Robinson Crusoe* 26

Conclusion: Critical Interventions 38

Appendix: Quantifying the Racial Distribution of Illustrations in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-1800) 43

Works Cited 52
Racialized Realism: Daniel Defoe’s Mediations of the Human in *Colonel Jack* and *Robinson Crusoe*

What is the relation between racialization and realism in Daniel Defoe’s novels? I ask this question because both the genre of the novel and the culture of racialization took modern shape parallel to each other in the transnational geography of the early eighteenth-century Atlantic littoral, and they both signaled conflicting understandings of the contemporary moment.¹ On the one hand, the “rise of the novel” ushered in a form of writing that suggested a teleology of social development, where the protagonist’s progress from bereft circumstances to middle class prosperity mirrored a national imagination that saw opportunities for social


Addressing the relation between Atlantic modernity and racialized slavery in the long eighteenth century, C. L. R. James writes in *The Black Jacobins* (1963 ed.),

> When three centuries ago the slaves came to the West Indies, they entered directly into the large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation, which was a modern system … The cane when reaped had to be rapidly transported to what was factory production. The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloth the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported. The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life (392).

The production of sugar, which formed the economic rationale of most eighteenth-century Caribbean plantations was a modern system of industrial-scale production. However, given that the technology of industrial production at the time had not innovated machinery that could supply the vast amounts of labor necessary for sugar production meant that this labor had to be supplied through other means, namely, racialized slave labor. James writes that these concurrent realities of the necessity of African slaves to sugar production, the embeddedness of sugar in a modern capitalist commodities market, and the creation of transnational economy that connected the Atlantic littoral all signal how race and capitalism are deeply linked in the constitution of modernity.
advancement through participation in a globalizing colonial and capitalist political economy. On the other hand, the culture of racialization that justified the contemporaneous violence and degradation meted out to Africans and New World indigenous peoples seemed to counter this understanding of liberty with a logic of oppression. Whereas the narrative arc of Defoe’s protagonist-driven plot pointed towards new forms of individual freedom and political agency closely associated with the Enlightenment and its attendant philosophies of scientific reasoning, democratic representation, and sovereign citizenship, in contrast, the centrality of slave labor to plantation life, and hence capitalist production, at the time underscored how crucial the practice of racialized oppression was to modern life. The agency of the white protagonist of the novel and the subjection of the slave delimit a seemingly irresolvable contradiction that bears literary representation in the novel. Defoe’s fictional realist narratives were initially written, read, and set in this contradictory social climate where discourses of individual liberty gained as much traction as the voices that justified African slavery and settler colonialism in the New World. By exploring the relation between these adjacent yet contradictory understandings of the present, signaled by the emergence of realism and the general permeation of racial ideology, this study investigates how Defoe’s works specifically, and the realist genre of the novel more generally, negotiated and represented these antagonistic ends of the social imagination.

Two key terms emerge from my initial question -- racialization and realism. The relation between these two concepts is contingent on a wide variety of social and historical contexts, such as the popularity of abolitionist sentiments in the Anglophone imagination and the kinds of access that nonwhite peoples had to literacy and print culture. In order to provide a nuanced reading of the relation between racialization and realism, I restrict my focus in this thesis to the transatlantic novels of Daniel Defoe. Specifically, I explore two of his works, *The History and
Remarkable Life of the Truly Honorable Col. Jacque (1722) and The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), to argue that the genre of fictional realism can be thought of as an aesthetic mediator of the contradictions represented by the agency promised by capitalism and the adjacent realities of racialized slavery and genocide in the New World. I contend that placing the enslaved and the colonized at the forefront of our interpretive practice discloses how Defoe’s realism selectively constructs its representation of the “real” world in response to and in affirmation of the racial categorization of humanity that underpins capitalist modernity.

The foundational relation between racialized slave labor and capitalism is advanced by Cedric Robinson in his groundbreaking study Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition, which positions racial capitalism in “contradistinction to Marx’s and Engel’s expectations that bourgeois society would rationalize social relations and demystify social consciousness” where the “development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology” (2). Intervening in dominant conceptions of capitalism, Robinson’s theorization of racial capitalism places the enslaved and the colonized subject at the center of its analytic framework. It identifies the slave, and not the bourgeoisie, as the class that drives the engine of capitalism. Lisa Lowe further elaborates on Robinson’s concept by writing that racial capitalism includes,

the settler colonial dispossession of land and removal of indigenous peoples, the colonial slavery that extracted labor from people to whom it denied human being, and the racialized exploitation of immigrants from around the world -- making the political sphere of human rights and representation the precise location that
permits and sustains the violent inequality issuing from the longer history of
slavery, colonial settlement, and occupation, and capitalist exploitation. (150)

Racial capitalism thus refers to a form of social relations and associated genres of aesthetic and political representation that are based on constructions of race and racial difference. Lowe’s point that the politics of representation “permits and sustains” racial inequality emphasizes how the racial categorization of humanity into liberated subjects or commodified slaves translates onto the sphere of aesthetics as well, where the power to affect representation and, thus political agency, is distributed unequally along racial lines. Emphasizing this point, Lowe notes that the participants in the French revolution declared the “rights of man” yet disavowed liberty for free mulattoes, black slaves, and other people of color (152), which underscores how adopting a racial capitalist perspective allows us to see the profound role that racialization occupies in the negotiation and justification of social relations, where conceptions of race have direct bearing on who is given access to liberal freedom and who is consigned to subjected labor.

In resituating the emergence of the novel and realism within a racial capitalist political economy, I contend that Defoe’s transatlantic novels mediated the contradiction posed by the agency of the white subject and the oppression of the nonwhite enslaved. By presenting stories in a pattern that emphasized a white, British individual’s journey from criminality or low social status to wealth and respectability, fictional realism directly responded to the antinomies of freedom and slavery. While seemingly focused solely on a white protagonist, the novel charting the picaresque adventures of such a protagonist around the British colonial world became a vehicle for negotiating and articulating who is deemed worthy of being free and, importantly, who is written off the map of freedom, citizenship, reason, and subjectivity. As we will see in a
later section of this paper, in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, the protagonist’s rescue and subsequent enslavement of Friday reads on an allegorical level as a justification of England’s colonial campaign in the Americas, suggesting that England’s job in the New World is not only to generate wealth for the nation but also to “rescue” “primitive” cultures by acquainting them with the English language, science, and civilization through subjugation while simultaneously producing newly liberated and socially mobile white British subjects.

The practice of racialization, as a result, becomes a crucial register of difference that has a bearing on realist representation. In his book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye succinctly defines racialization as “on-going sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west” (3). Weheliye’s definition goes beyond biological description and stages racialization as a “conglomerate of sociopolitical relations,” continually locating the nonwhite subject within a fundamentally unequal power structure that excludes it from the category of the human (3).

Although Weheliye’s notion of racialization provides a compelling framework for theorizing race relations, it must be emphasized that the concept of race itself in the early eighteenth century is fluid and in negotiation. Addressing the unfixed boundaries of race at this time, Roxann Wheeler writes that *Robinson Crusoe* highlights how the “emergent racialized categories of difference are indeed produced but not stable in either the literary or social text, and the dynamics of the early colonial situation called rigid boundaries between servant and slave
into question” (852). Wheeler argues that *Robinson Crusoe* discloses how the construction of race is unstable because at various points in its narrative, white, African, and Amerindian characters are all subjected to slavery or other regimes of forced labor that only become explicitly racialized over the later eighteenth century and especially the nineteenth century. Rather than looking at the still amorphous category of race, Wheeler argues that other classifications such as “savage” or “Christian” provide better avenues for theorizing the proto-race relations at work in this novel. While I agree with Wheeler that the social understanding of race in Defoe’s time is not yet as concrete as it eventually becomes, I believe a nascent logic of race nonetheless operates in *Robinson Crusoe*. This is because the genre of Defoe’s fictional realism emphasizes individual experience and underscores the emergence of the white bourgeois subject; a practice that directly engages the mediation of who counts as human by adjudicating its terms of belonging and exclusion. In other words, I believe that *Robinson Crusoe* participates in the construction of race by indicating who gets to be included as an Enlightenment Subject and why through the formal conventions of fictional realism itself.²

In his foundational study of the novel, Ian Watt describes eighteenth-century realism’s conventions as striving to give a “full and authentic report of human experience” by providing the reader with “such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of times and places of their actions, [and] details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language” (32). Watt’s stress on individual experience, specific details vis-à-vis names of places and moments in time, as well as the referential use of language,

underscores how through a close and detailed correspondence to identifiable people, places, and commodities, realism constructs character, plot, and setting that present themselves as being reasonably believable. The crucial position of slaves as the core factor of production in colonized spaces, and their widespread presence on fields, in ships, and in households, consequently finds depiction in Defoe’s narratives about the New World because it represents the particular ways in which the material sustenance of the bourgeois subject depends on racialized forms of labor. The genre conventions of Defoe’s realism as well as the content of these narratives are thus deeply implicated in the business of barring blacks and other non-white people from laying claim to human status because they give literary representation to the practices of racialization and supply the logic that justifies it.

While Watt provides a useful definition of realism, he does not address the impact of colonialism and slavery in the shaping of realism. Although Watt argues that the eighteenth-century realist novel would not have come into being if contemporary conditions had not been favorable, he doesn’t include colonialism as a major circumstance that shaped English life at this time. The favorable conditions that Watt identifies as leading to the rise of the novel are all united by their geographical location within the boundaries of Western Europe: the advent of philosophical individualism as enshrined in the ideas of Descartes and Locke; a general acceptance of realist conventions that drew identifiable characters and settings from contemporary European life, as opposed to those originating from the classical or mythological.

---

tradition; and, lastly, an increase in English middle class wealth, literacy, and time for leisure. All of these factors focus on the European-specific context of the novel’s emergence, and in doing so they skate over the centrality of the transatlantic trade in slaves and commodities to the enrichment of the eighteenth-century European economy, and ignore the slave labor in colonial plantations that created the conditions of possibility for the middle class and the novel to “rise.” In short, by circumscribing his attention to England and English life alone, Watt fails to perceive the dependence of developments within England upon people and places outside its geographic boundaries.

In critiquing Watt for inadequately attending to the effects of colonialism and slavery in his exploration of the novel, I aim to identify a crucial gap in the scholarship on eighteenth-century literary history: realism’s imbrication in the contemporaneous processes of racialization and colonialism. I intend on drawing a connection between Defoe’s realism and the racialized dehumanization of the enslaved and the subaltern by recentering our attention on his representation of colonial America and the Caribbean. The first section of this paper explores *Colonel Jack* at the level of its narrative content, specifically its representation of plantation life, to argue that it discloses how black suffering and enslavement are rendered necessary and normal to the formation of the white bourgeois subject. My second section attempts to deepen this naturalizing relation by exploring the illustrations that accompanied eighteenth-century editions of *Robinson Crusoe* at the level of realist genre, and arguing for the crucial position of racialization in the formal construction of character and plot.
Colonel Jack and Realist Mediations of Plantation Life

First printed in 1722, the same year as his more famous Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack is another novel by Daniel Defoe in the vein of the criminal biography. In Colonel Jack, the human status of characters is constantly being torn down and built-up: the protagonist, Jack, is born under dubious circumstances, raised in poverty, educated in roguery, but guided by a lifelong quest to better his standing in society and become a “true gentleman” through honorable means. This novel is distinct from the many novels written by Defoe in that it gives more sustained narrative attention to American plantation life than his other works of fiction. While in the Virginia episodes of Moll Flanders, Defoe dwells on the domestic sphere and the life of the wife of a plantation owner, in Colonel Jack, contrastingly, Defoe focuses on the economic sphere and explores the management, growth, and profitability of the North American plantation. Whereas Moll’s dilemmas upon crossing the Atlantic stem from the fact that she has unknowingly married her half-brother and is guilty of incest, Jack’s dilemmas arise from the widespread practice of violently disciplining slaves and devising benevolent a system of plantation management.

This emphasis on the economic contingencies of plantation life in Colonel Jack gives Defoe occasion to represent Africans in the realist novel. Through the depiction of interactions between African slaves and English colonists, Defoe represents the plantation as located on the very brink of revolution and disorder. In such a context, Jack notes the necessity of violence in slave management:

Owing to the Brutallity, and obstinate temper of the Negroes, who cannot be mannag’d by Kindness, and Courtisy; but must be rul’d with a Rod of Iron, beaten with Scorpions, as the Scripture calls it … or they would Rise and Murther all
their Masters, which their Numbers consider’d, would not be hard for them to do, if they had Arms and Ammunition suitable to the Rage and Cruelty of their Nature. (174-175)

In stressing the possibility of black resistance and emphasizing the inhumane violence with which Englishmen treated Africans, this backdrop appears to frame colonial race relations with surprising frankness and clarity. However, while Defoe’s prosaic description might connote transparency, it also obscures a cruel irony. Even though “Scripture” and “Nature” are invoked to unequivocally attest to the Africans’ innate viciousness, the fact that the whip and rod are advanced as the most logical responses to the Africans’ supposed brutishness exposes the Englishmen’s own instinctive proclivity towards violence. The double standard defined around the axis of race in this description is apparent -- on the one hand, the Africans’ use of violent tactics to counter their subjugation is castigated, while on the other, the English use of the same techniques is upheld as justified and necessary. In this instance, white supremacy is built on an openly hypocritical line of thinking and is anchored by the assumption that Africans are governed by “Brutallity,” and not responsive to “Kindness and Courtisy,” which figures them as not being human and thus inferior to the white master class.

The dehumanization of Africans was central to the plantation’s success because it allowed for the extraction of bare labor, which Elizabeth Maddock Dillon describes as “a life stripped of official access to forms of social life, identity, and belonging” (27). By denying slaves the means of social reproduction as well as disavowing their existing social relations, bare labor creates a system whereby social death is twinned with an interminable source of life, thus providing an unending stream of human labor necessary for the economic sustenance of the
plantation (Dillon 132). In this regard, the very first reference to slavery in *Colonel Jack* is telling because it sheds light on how crucial bare labor was to the plantation. Here, Jack describes his first impressions of the master he serves upon reaching America as well as the conditions of the slaves on the plantation:

The Master whose service I was now gaged in, was a man of Substance and Figure in the Country … in all I think he had near 200, and among so many, as some grew every Year infirm and unable to Work, others went off upon their time being expir’d, and others died; and by these and other Accidents the Number would diminish, if they were not often Recruited and fill’d, and this obliged him to buy more every Year. (165-166)

This excerpt stresses the slaves’ importance to the plantation: when the slave is unable to labor, the master is “obliged” to purchase new ones. In the absence of slaves, the plantation workflow will come to a standstill, which is categorically unacceptable to the plantocracy. While the slave’s crucial role in the plantation is made apparent, it must also be underscored that the slave is represented as being replaceable and easily purchasable. The slave’s identity is thus determined by the dynamics of the slave trade, which indexes value solely through perceptions of the slave’s ability to provide bare labor. Jack’s master’s “Substance and Figure” can be read as a direct product of his ability to own and replace slaves.

In a state of affairs where English social life in the colonies is predicated on its ability to extract bare labor from African bodies, treating slaves too violently and impinging on their ability to labor undermines the economic objectives of the plantation as well as threatens the safety of the master class. When Jack works as an overseer in a plantation that straddles colonial
Virginia and Maryland, his master berates him for being too cruel in his disciplining of errant slaves and stresses,

beside the Blood which you would have to answer for, you would lose me a lusty Man Negro, which Cost me at least 30 or 40l. and bring in a Reproach upon my whole Plantation; nay, and more than that, some of them in Revenge would Murther me, if ever it was in their Power. (177)

I want to highlight how the master uses the first-person repeatedly in this one sentence, emphasizing his subjectivity and individuality. Contrastingly, Africans are given a price tag and commodified, which reinforces their sub-human status as objects to be used and sold. Despite this clear hierarchal division between the master and the slave, Jack’s master is well aware that the extent of his wealth and liberty is directly proportional to his dependence on his slaves; the more slaves the master has and the better their condition, the larger his capacity to extract bare labor and produce commodities that create wealth. As a result, treating slaves with too much violence, such that they are unable to work, contravenes the master’s interests.

The plantation in *Colonel Jack* is thus marked by the simultaneous operation of multiple contradictions that threaten its survival. While it functions a source of wealth and prosperity for the master class, the large presence of slaves is also perceived as a dangerous threat; whereas on the one hand Africans must be treated with violence to maintain order and extract labor, on the other hand treating them with too much cruelty leads to a costly reduction in working bodies or might even directly incite deadly revolution. Defoe recognizes and represents these contradictions in *Colonel Jack*, crafts his narrative content to persuade his readership that these tensions can be plausibly diffused to underscore how the opportunities of colonialism can be
positively leveraged to great effect—specifically, leveraged to move Jack from the status of a base prisoner to that of a free bourgeois English subject. What is at stake in the negotiation of these paradoxes is the justification of colonialism itself. If Defoe can provide a believable account of a benevolent plantation where the master and his slaves live in peaceful harmony, then he can also create a model where Britain can continue reaping colonialism’s benefits without resorting its contradictory means.

Defoe’s mediation of the contradictions of plantation life involves a re-conceptualization of the master-slave relationship in a manner that maintains the hierarchy between the two, but opens space for sympathy and consensual domination. His non-violent process of slave management involves scheduling harsh punishment for offending slaves, but then intervening at the last moment to cancel the punishment in a show of mercy designed to inspire gratitude from the slave, who in turn, agrees to rectify his/her behavior and then spreads word about the “benevolent” overseer among other slaves to cultivate a shared consensus that motivates all the slaves to serve in good faith. Jack emphasizes the efficacy of this stratagem by claiming,

the Gentle usage and Lenity, with which [the slaves] had been treated, had a Thousand times more influence upon them, to make them Diligent, than all the Blows and Kicks, Whippings, and other Tortures could have, which they had been us’d to, and now the Plantation was famous for it; so that several other Planters began to do the same. (193)

The stress on the general acceptance of this new modus operandi is telling because it constructs the slaves’ racial identity along the lines of consensual domination -- the slaves are portrayed as willing to accept their sub-human status and continue to labor under less harsh conditions. By
emphasizing that mercy had tremendous influence upon the slaves’ behavior, Defoe makes it sound like the slaves welcomed this new managerial regime.

Black life is thus given a fractured humanity, at once identifiable as sub-human and yet deemed worthy of sympathy. This representation is neatly captured in Defoe’s portrayal of an African slave named Mouchat, who is one of the first slaves to be put through this merciful style of slave management. Upon being pardoned the customary lashes for an indiscretion, Mouchat exclaims, “Yes, yes, Negroe be muchee better if they be Mercièè; when they whippee, whippee, Negroe muchee cry, … but when they makee de Mercy, then Negroe tell de great Tankee, and love to Worke, and do muchee Work; and because be good Master to them” (183). Mouchat’s idiosyncratic way of speaking, full of mispronounced words and broken syntax, flags him as being inferior -- one who is not capable of using proper English. However, his mangled English evidences deliberate construction. Mouchat is after all a figment of Defoe’s imagination, which in turn draws on and participates in the shaping of the larger English cultural imaginary. Mouchat’s narrative representation thus points towards contemporary cultural norms that legitimize racialized slavery and black sub-humanity by literally construing blackness as being unable to grapple with correct English. In responding positively to his “good Master” and taking a liking to labor, Mouchat not only upholds Jack’s strategy of slave management but also outlines a scenario in which English colonialism might be construed as a mutually beneficial relationship where even the enslaved benefit from English sympathy. Colonel Jack’s narrative content consequently dissipates the legitimacy of anti-white resistance by figuring whiteness as benevolence and blackness as the recipient of kind intentions.
Defoe’s ventriloquism of Mouchat points towards a further mediation that *Colonel Jack* performs in shaping his readership’s understanding of colonialism and race. If negotiating the paradox of plantation slavery involves instituting a new managerial style predicated on engineered acts of mercy and gratitude, then the success of this style depends on the slaves acclimating well to these new conditions. In this regard, the characterization of the slave becomes crucial for the whole scheme to work because Jack’s plan depends on the slaves’ cooperation. As such, characterization itself becomes akin to racialization, which Weheliye identifies as a set of imbricated social relations, that “must continuously articulate nonwhite subjects as not-quite-human” (19). Defoe’s staging of an ideal enslaved African through Mouchat, who comes to adore Jack so much that he even offers to sacrifice his own life in exchange for Jack’s in a test of loyalty, falls squarely within Weheliye’s framing of racialization. Mouchat’s manner of speaking, his ready acceptance of Jack’s show of mercy, and his ultimate loyalty to Jack are all narrative content designed by Defoe to indicate the racial nonhumanity of Africans; a strategy that ties neatly into his larger justification of colonialism that situates whiteness as civilized, free, and wealthy, and represents blackness as rightfully subjugated.

In defending colonialism, Defoe identifies a cultural logic that, Cedric Robinson writes, “helped transform England into a bourgeois democracy with a capitalist and commercial trading economy” (114). With the founding of the Bank of England in 1694 and the circumventing of Christian prohibitions against usury, bourgeois society evidenced its ability to coopt the legal

---

4 Offering his life in exchange for Jack’s, Mouchat exclaims, “Yes, yes, me be hang, for de poor Master that beggeé for me, *Mouchat* shall hang … anything to save the poor Master” (Defoe 186).
powers of the state for mercantilist purposes, thus underscoring a continuing transfer of power from the landed aristocracy to the middle class. Addressing this shift of power, Robinson writes,

The bourgeoisies of the sixteenth century accumulated in the interstices of the state. And as the state acquired the machinery of rule -- bureaucracies of administrative, regulatory, and extractive concerns, and armies of wars of colonial pacification, international competition, and domestic repression -- those who would soon constitute a class, settled into the proliferating roles of political, economic, and juridical agents for the state. And as the state necessarily expanded its fiscal and economic activities, a new merchant and banking class parasitized its host: State loans, state monopolies, state business became the vital centers of its construction. (20)

At the dawn of English transatlantic colonialism, the monarchy, considered beholden only to divine authority under feudalism, was increasingly becoming obligated to advance bourgeois interests as well. The pervasive manner in which the bourgeoisie entered the functioning of the state empowered them to carve administrative and entrepreneurial roles that directly fed off national policy and the exchequer. State sponsored colonial expansion created bountiful opportunity to support private industries as diverse as mining, agriculture, transportation, security, banking, and insurance, among others, drawing together the bourgeoisie and the government in activities entirely dependent on slavery to provide the necessary amount of labor to make this economy function.

These sweeping changes in the functioning of the state and economic life also manifest a corresponding shift in aesthetic conventions. Jacques Rancière refers to the intersection between
politics and aesthetics as the “partage du sensible” or “the distribution of the sensible,” which he describes as “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts” (12). Rancière uses the word “sensible” in two connotations of the word: that which presents itself to sense experience, as well as the interpretive codes that “disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community” (13). His framing of the aesthetic embeds art and politics by identifying the norms and “sensations” that enforce a shared judgment of value through control over what is made visible for sense perception and the logics that undergird the common ways in which it is made legible. As English society was experiencing an upsurge in bourgeois power in economic and political life, Rancière’s conception of the “partage du sensible” allows us to see how aesthetics enforced a bourgeois ideology determining “what is seen and what can be said about it” and “who has the ability to see and the talent to speak” (13).

Colonel Jack’s realist narrative content participates in the creation of a bourgeois inflected “partage du sensible” in order to naturalize the contemporary ascendance of bourgeois power through control over what is rendered apprehensible by the senses and how that material is structured to be understood. This point is underscored when Jack decides to return to his plantation and reflects on his experiences in the New World:

I thought Heaven summon’d me to retire to Virginia, the Place, and as I may say, the only Place I had been bless’d at, or had met with any thing that deserv’d the
Name of Success in, and where indeed my Affairs being in good Hands, the Plantation were increase’d to such a Degree, that some Years my return here made up eight Hundred Pound, and one Year almost a Thousand, so I resolv’d to leave my native Country once more… (287)

Jack’s reasoning begins with divine invocation, draws on his past experiences, underscores the systems of support (i.e. slavery) already in place for his livelihood, and finally discloses outright the particulars of his finances. This framework of thought emphasizes certain constructs -- god, the individual, socio-economic institutions, money -- as being legitimate measures of value that inform crucial decisions. The picture of Virginia that is brought forward is one that makes visible individual prosperity and a society where social rank is negotiated to enable white progress and security. The forms of visibility accorded to colonial Virginia and the ways in which these are structured to be commonly interpreted reflect a bourgeois aesthetic that asserts values of individual liberty and progress as indexed by wealth, and, implicitly, whiteness, ultimately naturalizing the view that racialized enslavement is normal and necessary to the construction of the white subject.

***

How does a narrative of white individuation and material progress account for the dehumanization and subjection of black bodies on which it depends? Focusing on the representation of colonial spaces, such as the plantation in *Colonel Jack*, allows us to work towards addressing these questions because it reveals the terms of enslavement as well as liberty. The boundaries of freedom are characterized in *Colonel Jack* via the master’s agency and the slave’s subjection. In arguing that realism mediates colonialism in a manner that represents such...
antagonistic components, but diffuses these tensions through its naturalization of white supremacy and black nonhumanity, I aim to stress the role that negotiations of race played in the emergence of the eighteenth-century fictional realist novel. As such, my claims echo and reaffirm Lisa Lowe’s thesis in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* that “liberal philosophy, culture, economics, and government have been commensurate with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire” (2). In representing how Jack’s agency is built in the colony through his embrace of plantation life, Defoe crafts his narrative content to show how slave labor underpinned his transformation into a “true gentleman.” Consequently, race emerges as a crucial mark of colonial difference that designates who is worthy enough to be categorized as human and qualify for associated legal and economic privileges and who is not.

This negotiation of social rank in the colonies is a major point that Defoe impresses through *Colonel Jack* in order to frame colonialism in a positive light. A case in point is seen when Defoe explicitly interrupts *Colonel Jack*’s narrative to digress on how the legal practice of transporting convicts across the Atlantic is a most wonderful opportunity for criminal reform. He writes that, first, the convict works as an unpaid laborer on a plantation till the “Master’s certifying that he had serv’d his time out faithfully,” typically lasting 5-7 years. Then the convict is given 50 acres of land and capital such as livestock, tools, and lines of credit to plant tobacco, which functions as their “Coin.” The convict now acquires a new identity as a hardworking planter, increasing his operation “till at length he gets enough to Buy Negroes, and other Servants, and then never Works himself any more” (196-197). In a succinct sequence of events, Defoe describes how the colony permits and enables white men at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, with literally nothing to their name and a publicly checkered past, to reinvent themselves in such a fashion that leads to a life of absolute respectability. Not only is colonialism
framed in a good light because it affords convicts a renewed chance at wealth and comfort, but it is positioned as doubly beneficial because it teaches convicts how to live within the law and contribute positively to the economic life of the larger British nation. Yet, the casual mention of Africans at the end of this narrative of progress underscores how one cannot separate the formation of the individual white subject from the dehumanization of the slave. *Colonel Jack* reminds us that colonialism and racialized domination are imbricated with notions of progress, liberty, and prosperity.

In *Colonel Jack*, the function of realism in racialization is that it figures black suffering and enslavement as being a necessary and normal component to the formation of the white subject. This role is hinted at in the preface to *Colonel Jack*, where Defoe stresses that he has made a judicious attempt to honor the “Virtue and the Ways of Wisdom” and attend to “all Kinds of Wickedness” with “Misery,” “Reproof and Reproach,” and “Abhorrence” (59). Here, we can see a very clear instance of dichotomizing taking place as the narrative content encourages what was considered to be positive morality and punishes negative ones. Thus, Jack is kidnapped and forcibly transported to the New World as punishment for having deserted his regiment, but his subsequent industry and repentance in the plantation are rewarded with prosperity. In the process, the regime of enslavement that sustains plantation life is rendered acceptable because it directly builds Jack’s enrichment, and consequently, his transformation from lowly criminal to sovereign individual.
Between Bildung and Dispossession: Realism and Race in the Illustrations of Robinson Crusoe

Defoe’s narration of the race relations between Jack and Mouchat in *Colonel Jack* follows a trope from his earlier novel initially published in 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (hereafter referred to as *Robinson Crusoe*), whose eponymous protagonist (in)famously “rescues” a Caribbean tribesman from being cannibalized by his kin, conscripts him into slavery instead, and christens him Friday. As subaltern characters, Friday and Mouchat share noticeable parallels: not only are their masters “benevolent,” in the sense that both Crusoe and Jack adopt a generally nonviolent disposition towards their slaves, but both Friday and Mouchat are depicted as being incredibly loyal to their masters, serving their owners without fail and, on occasion, going as far as risking death to save their masters. The character of the slave therefore occupies a prominent position in Defoe’s transatlantic realist novels by providing essential labor that contributes to the protagonist’s *bildung*, or maturity into sovereign liberal individual, while also pointing towards the historical realities of chattel slavery, as well as the genocide and dispossession experienced by indigenous Amerindians through which the New World was colonized.

Thus far in this paper I have argued that *Colonel Jack* discloses how a realist narrative naturalizes racialization, i.e. how this novel makes normal and acceptable the belief that Africans are inferior to Englishmen. In this section, I would like to deepen this relation to the level of realist form by arguing that *Robinson Crusoe* discloses how the genre conventions of realism are predicated on racialization. In shifting the discussion to realism’s generic apparatus, specifically its conception of character and plot, I explore how racialization gives formal realist shape to
narrative content. My previous arguments about the naturalizing tendencies of realism locates the construction of race as providing the narrative content to resolve the pressing contradictions of plantation life in *Colonel Jack*. Positing that Defoe’s realist character and plot in *Robinson Crusoe* are also predicated on racialization extends the impact of race to a structural level. To make this claim, I examine the illustrations in *Robinson Crusoe* that were printed over the eighteenth century because these woodcuts and engravings give recognizable visual shape to the adjacent story being told through words, functioning to scaffold the realism of the narrative text. I argue that these illustrations underscore how realist character and plot requires racialization to satisfy its generic requirement of corresponding to the particularities of capitalist modernity.

Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel*, as we have seen, describes realism as “a serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people” (60) that attempts to “portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one literary perspective: the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it” (11). Watt here frames realism as an epistemological exercise in verisimilitude, where the “problem of the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates” is approached through the Cartesian notion that the individual uncovers truth via sensory-perception. Consequently, realism rests on the assumption that the external world is knowable and individual experience is the means to access and apprehend its truths (Watt 11-12). As a result, the formal elements through which realism presents the external world emphasize the individual subjective experience of it via reference to “particular people in particular circumstances, rather than, as had been done in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention” (Watt 15). Such generic practices distinguish the fictional realist novel’s focus on the quotidian from, say, the medieval romance, which is marked by the use of
archetypal or mythical character and setting, and a plot heavily guided by the all-powerful hand of divine fate that restores the order of the “great chain of being” doctrine governing pre-capitalist Anglo-European social relations. Whereas the medieval romance was concerned with maintaining a theologically sanctioned royalist feudal order, the fictional realist novel responds to and represents Enlightenment-era notions of liberal individualism, race, and capitalism through its rejection of archetypes and use of particular and identifiable characters and settings.

These formal impulses of fictional realism are captured in the title page and frontispiece of the first edition of Robinson Crusoe (Figure 1 below), which describes the novel as a true account of a mariner from York, “who lived all alone in an un-inhabited island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an account of how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates.” The reference to identifiable geographies in the New World, Crusoe’s intimate ties with York, as well as the act of giving the protagonist a relatively commonplace name, all disclose a realist formal apparatus that frames the narrative as an extraordinary account of an ordinary man set in the contemporary world. By highlighting Crusoe’s solitary survival in a yet unknown corner of the New World, and his eventual rescue by pirates—a class of state sponsored mercenaries created to enforce the expropriation of lands, commodities, and human bodies in the Atlantic world—the title page embeds this work within the particular realities of the contemporary age of discovery and colonization of the New World.

A frontispiece portrait of Crusoe, similar versions of which have been re-printed at least 69 times over the eighteenth century, reflects the title page.\(^5\) This portrait features Crusoe at its

\(^5\) For further information on how this information was collected, please see the Appendix below.
front and center, dressed in makeshift island garb with two guns slung over his shoulder and a cutlass at his waist. While he is depicted as being barefoot, Crusoe is still shown wearing a hat -- an indication of the compromises that he has had to make on the island, which nonetheless underscores the fact that he has still managed to retain a sense of bourgeois respectability. The background depicts a ship sinking in a violent tempest, as well as Crusoe’s improvised dwelling on a tropical beach, visually narrating the tale of how he became stranded and how he took ownership of his new abode. By presenting Crusoe as the largest and most prominent aspect of the illustration, the frontispiece brings Crusoe himself to attention and inflects the reader’s expectations with ideologies of Enlightenment individualism that emphasize Man’s sovereign ability to govern himself and apprehend the reality of the island through his wits and his weapons.
Figure 1: Frontispiece and title page from the first edition of *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: W. Taylor, 1719).

Such a paratextual apparatus points towards a reliance on realist formal elements, such particularly and identifiable character and setting, that situate the fictional within the realities of the contemporary historical moment to present a tale of interest to an audience that, perhaps, gained the most from the burgeoning racial capitalist political economy of the Atlantic world --
the entrepreneurial middle class of merchants, bankers, planters, and adventurers. The bourgeois aesthetics of the fictional realist novel are captured in this genre’s formal preference for quotidian characters, where the plot is driven by secular conceptions of desire and chance that underlie the protagonist’s progress up the social hierarchy. *Robinson Crusoe’s* frontispiece evokes these formal signs of realism by representing Crusoe’s claim to ownership of the island where he shipwrecked. Crusoe himself symbolizes the hardworking middle class Englishman, who like many of his national kin took a bold risk in the Atlantic world of sugar, slaves, and ships only to find himself in dire circumstances. Despite the odds, however, Crusoe survives and pursues his right as an Englishman to colonize and pull himself up by his metaphorical bootstraps.

By framing the narrative as one of freedom and progress, *Robinson Crusoe’s* frontispiece and title page reflect the bourgeois desire for freedom while simultaneously downplaying the complex undercurrents of the transatlantic world within which the narrative is set. What is elided by this paratextual teaser-trailer is the fact that Crusoe’s island is actually not “un-inhabited.” Defoe writes that a Caribbean tribe uses this space for their ritual practices; Crusoe did not live “all alone”; rather, his survival as well as his eventual rescue are made possible through Friday’s slave labor. Further this work was not “written by [Crusoe] himself,” but is a fictional narrative crafted by a man who has written at length on the political economy of the Atlantic world. As outlined by the frontispiece and the title page, the narrative of Crusoe’s *bildung* overshadows the violent histories of colonial encounter within which it is set. Moreover, that this text was

---

6 Prior to writing his novels, Defoe supported himself by writing for and self-publishing a periodical, *A Review of the State of the British Nation* (1704-13), where he discussed the Atlantic world at great length. For a stronger account of the Review’s coverage of Britain’s Caribbean plantations and its need for the slave trade, see my digital exhibit [Centering the Caribbean in Defoe’s Review](bit.ly/CenteringCaribbeanReview).
marketed as an autobiography firmly situates it within the liberal tradition of narratives of individual self-making that stand in for the development of the nation, as will come to be epitomized later in the century by another transatlantic narrative -- Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*. That this emergence of the bourgeois individuated subject is represented as taking place in the New World suggests how the colonial geography and its attendant practices of racialized slavery and sanctioned dispossession were absorbed into the dominant narrative of English nationalism and white supremacy.

While Crusoe’s portrait on the island is the most widely seen illustration in eighteenth-century editions of *Robinson Crusoe*, the second most popular illustration, printed 64 times, depicts Crusoe “rescuing” (or enslaving) Friday. I find it quite telling that the two most popular scenes illustrated from the narrative enact depictions of modernity as a triumph of whiteness over the New World, because these scenes underscore how the idea of being modern is expressed in the context of racialization and colonial settlement. If the frontispiece portrait discloses an understanding of modernity as the formation of the individuated white sovereign subject, then the illustrations of Crusoe’s first encounter with Friday present an understanding of modernity as an antithesis to “barbaric” Caribbean tribal culture. As is highlighted by Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5, below, very little changes in the *mise en scène* of Friday’s enslavement as it is re-presented over the eighteenth century. Crusoe’s fenced in dwelling contrasts the communal bonfire of the Caribbean tribe, and his clothes and rifle are in polarity with the tribe’s penchant for nudity and the bow-and-arrow, indicating a decisive split between modern and pre-modern conventions of individualism and property relations, as well as underscoring how differences in technology and accouterment stood in as evidence for the advanced development of British culture relative to the primitiveness of New World indigeneity. The illustrations present whiteness as singular and
recognizable through Crusoe’s iconic hat initially seen in the frontispiece, whereas each member of the tribe is indistinguishable from his kin -- they are often depicted without faces -- further cementing the notion that New World inhabitants were not as human as their Western counterparts. Moreover, as the scattering of dead tribal bodies in these illustrations suggest and as Friday’s kneeling posture in Figures 4 and 5 drives home, a singular embodiment of whiteness is represented as rightfully defeating a clan of Caribbean tribesman, with the ensuing subjugation of Friday positioned as a rescue mission seeking to “free” the “captive” from his “kidnappers.” The naturalizing ideology of realism, invoked in the earlier section where Mouchat’s dehumanization and enslavement is framed as both justified and necessary, is re-enacted through the tale of Friday’s subjection.
Figure 2: Friday's "Rescue" London, 1724

Figure 3: Friday's "Rescue," 1753
Figure 4: Friday's “Rescue,” 1773

Figure 5: Friday's “Rescue,” 1790 (Campe edition)
These illustrations of violent colonial encounter represent an instance of primitive accumulation, which Dillon, paraphrasing Karl Marx, describes as a process dedicated to extracting raw materials, labor, and life from the colony. Dillon writes that Marx’s German phrase *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* translates as “original accumulation” and refers to the capital acquired by “theft or violent disappropriation,” which forms the initial capital investment required for the system of capitalism to be established (34). Whereas Marx relegates primitive accumulation in the colony to the distant past, Dillon proposes that we replace Marx’s temporal logic with a spatial framework when discussing the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, where the “colony is not a long-ago scene of primitive accumulation but is a contemporary scene of violent disappropriation, institutionalized in the form of slave labor” (35). In Dillon’s reconceptualization, primitive accumulation transforms from an exhausted process to an ongoing, active system that enables capitalism to function in the New World. The illustrations of Crusoe enslaving Friday represent this process as being real and Crusoe’s encounter with Friday’s tribe tells a tale of colonial modernity that situates liberal bourgeois conceptions of self-making and sovereignty adjacent to the realities of primitive accumulation.

Contextualizing Friday’s enslavement within the history of primitive accumulation allows us to see that “the relationship between slave labor, the slave trade, and the weaving of early capitalist economies is apparent. Whatever were the alternatives, the point remains: historically, slavery was a critical foundation for capitalism” (Robinson 116). The formal elements of plot and character in *Robinson Crusoe* give literary shape to this fundamental relation between slavery and capitalism articulated by Cedric Robinson by presenting the reader with an imagined account of the initial encounter between the colonizer and the natural geography of the New World, as well as the initial encounter between the liberal modern subject
and the “barbaric” or “primitive” Amerindian that masquerades as truth. The logic of character
and plot driving Crusoe’s conversion of the island from an “un-inhabited” space that exists
outside capitalism into a settled plantation, as well as his transformation of Friday from a
Caribbean tribesman to a slave capable of conversing in broken English, can be read as an
allegory of modernization through primitive accumulation, wherein a piece of the New World
and a member of one its many indigenous communities are conscripted into the fold of Western
civilization. Modernity as described in Robinson Crusoe is therefore a condition of racial
capitalism activated by primitive accumulation, where the white bourgeois subject uses his tools
and his capacity for reason to cultivate the land as he sees fit and subjugate its non-white peoples
to serve his interests, all in a bid to establish his sovereign identity: a formal schema that narrates
a tale of bildung enabled by racialized dispossession.

The realism of these illustrations emerges within this modern matrix of Enlightenment
individualism, a rising middle class with aspirations of social advancement through economic
opportunity, settler colonialism in the New World, and the use of slave labor as the primary
agent of production in the colonies. By attempting to represent these contemporary realities in a
manner that is so believable that it registers as truth, the generic work of realism is predicated on
giving aesthetic representation to the justifying contemporary philosophies of liberal freedom,
which, as the violent continuing history of primitive accumulation attests to, is enabled by
racialized dispossession. As I have argued, that the two most widely printed illustrations
accompanying British eighteenth-century editions of Robinson Crusoe depict scenes of white
supremacy, speaks to how the narrative established a plausible correspondence to reality through
its re-presentation of the logic of racialization. In emphasizing and giving added visual detail to
these two pivotal moments of the narrative – one of Crusoe alone, suggesting the construction of
character as affirmation of white liberal individualism, the other of Crusoe in action, highlighting an understanding of plot that is guided by the belief that white life is inherently more valuable – the choice of reproducing these illustrations underscores how the confirmation of racialized social relations is written into the very structural elements of realist form as captured in the construction of character and plot.

**Conclusion: Critical Interventions**

By drawing a relation between Defoe’s realism and the adjacent history of racialization, I hope to counter a teleology of progress that has characterized the literary history of the novel since Watt’s inaugural *The Rise of the Novel*. Following Watt’s argument that emphasizes, both an ascendance of the novel as the dominant literary form over the eighteenth century as well as a corresponding uptake of white middle class values that signals a decisive shift forward from pre-modern genres of storytelling, Jürgen Habermas also views the cultures of readership that took shape alongside the realist novel as emblematic of historical progress towards engaged democratic citizenship. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* he writes that the eighteenth-century novel permitted a belief that “allowed anyone to enter into the literary action as a substitute for his own, to use the relationships between the figures, the author, the characters, and the reader as substitute relationships for reality” (50). According to Habermas, the genre of fictional realism created a common ground facilitating individual reflection and public discussion of popular novels. In deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction and thereby sparking debates on the representation of subjectivity and the nature of reality, the novel gave private citizens a public forum on which to discuss matters of social and political consequence. This promotion of civic discussion thrived on a print culture that helped
disseminate ideas, which acted as a public check to the power of the absolute state by giving ordinary citizens a platform to engage debate. In Habermas’s theorization, the novel’s bourgeois realism as well as its advocacy for the quotidian ultimately marks a progressive step away from monarchy towards a modern representative democracy. Similarly, in her book Nobody’s Story, Catherine Gallagher traces the rise of the professional women writers to the eighteenth-century novel, whose innovations with the very concept of fiction “allowed increasing numbers of women writers to thrive as the eighteenth century wore on” (xiii). For Gallagher, the eighteenth-century realist novel discloses a literary history of the establishment of female authorship that underscores another teleology of progress: social advancement away from dominant patriarchal forms of authorship towards a more inclusive culture of print that accommodates the interests of women writers as well. In jettisoning the adjacent histories of racialization and primitive accumulation from their arguments, Watt, Habermas, and Gallagher, are able to provide literary histories of the novel that account for the rise of modern liberal subjectivity, the print-public sphere, and female authorship by excluding the racial organization of colonialism that contextualized the British eighteenth century from their scope of analysis.

The importance of colonial relations in the history of the early realist novel is only recently being addressed by works such as Srinivas Aravamudan’s Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel (published in 2012), Lisa Lowe’s chapter “Autobiography Out of Empire” in her work The Intimacies of Four Continents, George Boulokos’s The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture (first published in 2008), and Nancy Bentley’s 2009 article “The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative.” All of these works challenge the Eurocentric framing of eighteenth-century literary culture as well as the dominant teleology of progress by adopting transatlantic or global
approaches to their lines of inquiry. They underscore how placing the racial history of colonial conquest parallel to the shaping of literary genres requires expanding the geographic scale of analysis to attend to the explicitly racialized forms of social relations that are found in colonized spaces. In transatlantic or global contexts, the finance that sustained print culture in metropolitan centers such as London, Paris, and Amsterdam becomes traceable to plantations and slaves in Virginia, Haiti, and Sumatra. Far from being seen as a century of social progress and technological innovation, the history of the eighteenth century attests to how the subjection and genocide of nonwhite peoples stands in stark antagonism to the agency of the white liberal subject, how the disavowal of blacks and mulattoes from the print-public sphere undermines its claims of speaking for the “people” as a whole, and how the genealogy of professional female authorship is contextualized in the shadow of the slave trade.

I seek to contribute to this larger movement in literary studies through my focus on the American plantation episodes in *Colonel Jack* and the illustrations of the Caribbean in *Robinson Crusoe* in this paper. By arguing for the necessity of contextualizing the eighteenth-century novel within the implications of primitive accumulation and settler colonialism in the New World, I highlight how Defoe’s realist novels find meaning within an already racialized context of social relations, where the narrative content in *Colonel Jack* and the formal elements of *Robinson Crusoe* assume meaning within a cultural imaginary that equates whiteness with agency and subjectivity but relegates other races to justified subjection. Through my analyses I hope to underscore how the function of race in shaping literary genres is made most legible when engaged through transatlantic, hemispheric, or global approaches that relate metropolitan practices of reading to the far-away colony. As such, spaces such as the plantation and the colonial settlement, where the negotiation of racial difference actively takes place, can be said to
have a constitutive role in influencing the formal and thematic conventions of Defoe’s novels. These spaces facilitate moments of colonial encounter where the practices of racialization, such as the disciplining or sale of the enslaved and the construction of African or Amerindian identity as implicitly inferior to the European Man, are performed and reified. The plantation and the settlement enact the racial external reality that shapes Defoe’s sense of narrative content, character, and plot. Thus, race and realism exist in affirmative relations in Defoe’s novels.

By way of conclusion, I offer a provocative quote from C. L. R. James that captures the crucial place of race in the study of the West:

Now talk to me about black studies as if it’s something concerned black people is an utter denial. This is the history of Western Civilization. I can’t see it otherwise. This is the history that black people and white people and all serious students of modern history of the world have to know. To say it’s some kind of ethnic problem is a lot of nonsense. (Quoted in Weheliye 17)

Through inscribing the experiences of black people and the significance of black thought to western modernity as a whole, James calls for a crucial rearticulation of the very understanding of “Western Civilization” itself. The existence of “Western Civilization” within a set of relations that links the histories, the representations, and the epistemologies of many races and cultures on a transcontinental scale is evidenced in *Colonel Jack* and *Robinson Crusoe*. In giving representative force to the intimacies between liberal subjectivity and racialized slavery, Defoe’s novels unsettle accounts of the construction of the white subject within the geographic boundaries of Europe. To separate Defoe’s innovations with fictional realism from this adjacent history of racialization is to adopt a blinkered perspective to the eighteenth-century novel: one
that refuses to acknowledge how this literary genre mediates and naturalizes conceptions of the human along racial lines.
APPENDIX: QUANTIFYING THE RACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN

ROBINSON CRUSOE (1719-1800)

Research Questions and Background

Over the course of researching these relations between realism and racialization in Defoe’s writings, I found myself visiting the Trent Defoe Collection in the Boston Public Library to look at the physical artifacts of Defoe’s texts that circulated in the eighteenth century. These visits helped me see how, in addition to the dimensions of generic form and verbal content, racialization could be observed in the textual apparatus as well, such as the woodcut and intaglio illustrations that often accompanied Robinson Crusoe. The diverse proliferation of racialized bodies in these illustrations immediately struck me as scaffolding Robinson Crusoe’s narrative by aiding the readers’ imaginations with pictorial images of New World cultures and settings. By reflecting the story being told through pictorial representation, I believe that these illustrations are imbricated in the racialized logic that I argue undergirds Defoe’s realism. These observations and the fact that Robinson Crusoe’s illustrations are seldom discussed in the context of racialization led me to ask three related questions:

• How frequently do illustrations accompany eighteenth-century editions of Robinson Crusoe?
• How often are subaltern subjects represented in these illustrations?
• Which scenes from Robinson Crusoe are given most frequent illustrative representation?

In addressing these questions, I explore how realism and racialization manifest at a textual level.
Even though *Robinson Crusoe* continues to be re-printed in the twenty-first century (often with illustrations), I have restricted the historical scope of my inquiry to the eighteenth-century editions of this work because of two reasons. Firstly, as the technologies of print and illustration become more refined and cost-effective over the nineteenth-century, and as the popularity of *Robinson Crusoe* continues to warrant its reproduction, the proliferation of illustrations accompanying this text take exponential growth. The number of nineteenth and twentieth century editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and the number of illustrations found therein simply become too much to account for, given the purposes of my framing argument in the thesis, which concerns itself with the eighteenth century. Secondly, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO), a database for the study of primary texts from the eighteenth century, contains a digital facsimile of nearly every existing English copy *Robinson Crusoe* with an interface that allows quick and easy navigation to the illustrations contained in these texts. As a result, by historically framing my work in the eighteenth century, I have been able to utilize the resources of an existing digital archive while strategically bracketing the scope of research to relate to my thesis.

**Methods and Data Modeling**

To address my research questions, I created a spreadsheet of every edition of *Robinson Crusoe* in ECCO. This spreadsheet was made by first querying ECCO’s collection for every text containing the string “robinson crusoe” in its title. I then copied this query’s search results pages

---

7 Link to spreadsheet - [https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B9onqYPXh6foc0s1MiZTbmU1TU0](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B9onqYPXh6foc0s1MiZTbmU1TU0). Sheet 1 and Sheet 2 in the spreadsheet contain the same data that is visually organized differently. Sheet 2 is simply Sheet 1 transposed, i.e. rows from Sheet 1 are rearranged to constitute columns in Sheet 2. I have provided these two different ways of looking at the data to aid in the visual discernment of patterns.
into a blank spreadsheet. LibreOffice, the spreadsheet editor that I used, recognized that I was pasting listed items into the spreadsheet and so it automatically separated each item (effectively, each edition) into a different row within the same column. Through the simple act of copying and pasting, I managed to collect bibliographic information for 162 editions of Robinson Crusoe in the eighteenth century. However, all this information was condensed into one column, and so I used a number of regex commands to separate this data into multiple columns for title, publication place, publication date, and number of pages. I then manually read through this list to weed out texts such as library or booksellers catalogues, other books written by Defoe, and miscellaneous texts that just happened to mention the words “robinson crusoe” in their title.

This initial process gave me an overview of how many editions of Robinson Crusoe are held in ECCO. I started looking through these editions, trying to come up with a sense of the range of illustrations and how they might change over time. Given my interests in race and realism, I kept searching for representations of subalternity in these illustrations. After looking through random selections from the data, I came up with 7 categories to organize the illustrations:

1. **Crusoe Solo** - where I include illustrations where Robinson Crusoe is the sole human being in the figure.

2. **Friday Solo** - where I include illustrations where Friday is the sole human being in the figure.

3. **Subaltern Characters with European Characters** - where I include illustrations of colonial encounter between subaltern and European characters.
4. **Subaltern Characters without European Characters** - where I include illustrations of subaltern subjects without any Europeans in the same picture.

5. **Groups of only European Characters** - where I include illustrations of groups of only European characters.

6. **Map** - where I include illustrations of a world map.

7. **No Humans** - where I include illustrations of ships, natural geographies, cityscapes, etc. that do not depict any human beings.

In developing these categories, I found myself drawing on Michael Sperberg-McQueen’s conception of data modeling as a “way of making explicit our assumptions about the nature of a text / artifact” (Quoted in Flanders and Jannidis “Modeling in the Humanities,” 1). In my readings of the illustrations in *Robinson Crusoe*, I operate under the assumption that representations of race are integral to Defoe’s realist apparatus. Thus, as I developed these seven categories I specifically use the axis of race to distinguish among the many similar-yet-different illustrations that are found in various editions of *Robinson Crusoe*. Moreover, if as Julia Flanders and Fotis Jannidis posit, modeling is to be understood as a way of “determining which aspects of the subject will be computable and in what form” (“Data Modeling,” 229), then my racially-inflected language to categorize the illustrations outlines a strategy for making the abstract subject of racial representation parsable for computational analysis. By creating a formal structure that is sensitive to the language of racial representation my categories allow me to quantitatively engage with the questions of race and representation that lie at the heart of my thesis.

After developing these categories, I observed every single one of the illustrations in my dataset and organized the illustrations into these discrete categories. Following an initial round of
categorizing, I went through the process again to see if I had missed / wrongly categorized any illustrations. I then compared the first spreadsheet of categorized images with the second version of the same to see where their data didn’t match up; in cases where the two spreadsheets gave me conflicting information, I went back to the images on ECCO to make sure that I entered the correct values for each edition.

By this point I had seen all of these illustrations multiple times, so I knew that a number of illustrations were being reprinted in different editions and often the same scenes from the narrative were illustrated in multiple editions. In an effort to record this culture of re-use and re-interpretation, I combed through every illustration yet again to color-code the spreadsheet for keeping track of editions with no illustrations (brown), when certain sequences of illustrations are reprinted (these are the various shades of green, with each different shade indicating a separate sequence of illustrations), when Crusoe’s portrait is printed (orange), when the scene of Friday’s enslavement is illustrated (purple), and when a world map is printed (dark blue). Finally, I used the “Count” function to tally how many times each color-code was appearing, and the “Sum” function to add up my seven categories of illustrations.

**Results**

The results of this simple, yet exhaustive, process of data tabulation provide compelling answers to my three research questions:
How frequently do illustrations accompany eighteenth-century editions of Robinson Crusoe?

Figure 6: Frequency of Illustrations accompanying Eighteenth-Century Editions of Robinson Crusoe

As the graph above highlights, illustrations very frequently accompanied eighteenth-century editions of Robinson Crusoe. Of the 162 editions that were a part of this search, only 36 editions were printed without any narrative illustrations, making it almost 3 times more likely that an edition of Robinson Crusoe was printed with illustrations, than without; suggesting that eighteenth-century readers and publishers viewed the use of illustrations as being normal to the telling of a literary narrative.
How often are subaltern subjects figured in these illustrations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subaltern Subjects with Europeans</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusoe Solo</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups of Only Europeans</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NoHumans</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subaltern Subjects Without Europeans</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday Solo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Illustrations</strong></td>
<td><strong>890</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Thematic Distribution of Illustrations in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-1800)
When all the illustrations are classified into the seven categories that I outlined in previous section, we see that the most popular illustrations, by far, are the 475 illustrations of subaltern subjects with European subjects, followed by the 246 illustrations depicting only Crusoe. There is only one illustration of Friday solo, and only six illustrations that feature groups of subaltern characters without Europeans. Moreover, there are 102 illustrations of Europeans in groups, 43 illustrations that feature no humans, and 17 maps.

*Which scenes from the narrative are given most frequent illustrative representation?*

The most frequent moment from the narrative that bears illustrative representation is the portrait of Crusoe alone on the island, which is printed 69 times. Crusoe’s rescue and subsequent enslavement of Friday, comes a close second by getting printed 64 times.

**Conclusion**

The data that I have gathered supports the core argument of my thesis that the racialized mediation of agency and subjection is fundamental to Defoe’s transatlantic realist novels. The fact that scenes of colonial encounter between European and subaltern characters are the most widely illustrated trope, underscores that racialization and realism are closely linked. That Crusoe’s portrait on the island, symbolizing the emergence of the liberal white subject in the colony, and Friday’s enslavement, underscoring the history of primitive accumulation in the settlement of the New World, are the most frequently illustrated moments from the narrative, highlights how the formation of the white subject is imbricated in colonialism and indigenous dispossession. This thematic distribution of illustration underscores how construction of race in the early eighteenth-century imagination took place not only through the vehicles of fictional
realist form and content, but through the choice of textual features, such as the illustrations, as well.

At a methodological level, the exercise of modeling the illustrations helped me understand how to move from the text to a conception of data. In this transition, the issue of semantics, or coming up with the language to describe the aspect of the illustration that I am interested in proved to be the trickiest step. I found myself torn between viewing the exercise of collecting the data as crude reductionism at my most pessimistic moments or as strategic abstraction when I felt more confident. On the one hand only looking for race doesn’t help us account for the many illustrations that feature no humans at all, or read other nonhuman aspects of each illustration such as their representations of natural geography and architecture; hence my fears of reductionism. On the other hand, in coming up with a racially sensitive language to categorize these illustrations I found a way to create a formal notation that is amenable to computational analysis. This process of abstraction has allowed me to explore the trend of racialization across over a large batch of texts and make a claim speaks to my thesis. The information that I lost in focusing on race was compensated by the ability to analyze the racial content of these illustrations at scale. Ultimately, I realized that data modeling in literary studies necessitates understanding and leveraging the constructed nature of data: rather than the viewing humanistic data as reflective of objective truth, it is more strategic to treat data as a form of interpretation situated in a particular context and serving a particular research agenda.
WORKS CITED


*For the use of children of both sexes. Translated from the French.* Printed at

Boston, MDCCXC. [1790]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Boston Public Library. 27 Mar. 2017

Defoe, Daniel. *Colonel Jack.* Ed. Gabriel Cervantes and Geoffrey Sill. Peterborough, Ont:


Defoe, Daniel. *The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner:*

*Who lived eight and twenty years, all alone in an uninhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoque; having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself. With an account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by pyrates. Written by himself.* London, MDCCXIX. [1719]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Boston Public Library. 27 Mar. 2017

Defoe, Daniel. *The life and most surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner.*

*Who lived eight and twenty years in an uninhabited island on the coast of America, lying near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoque: Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men were drowned, but Himself: As also a Relation how he was wonderfully deliver'd by Pyrates. The whole three volumes faithfully abridg'd, and set forth with Cuts proper to the Subject.* The second edition. London, 1724. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Boston Public Library. 27 Mar. 2017

Defoe, Daniel. *The life and strange surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe; of York, mariner: who lived eight-and-twenty years all alone in an uninhabited island on the coast*
of America, near the mouth of the great river Oroonoque; having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but Himself. With an Account how he was at last as strangely delivered by Pirates. Written by himself. Vol. Volume 1. The tenth edition, adorn'd with cuts. In two volumes. London, M.DCC.LIII. [1753]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Boston Public Library. 27 Mar. 2017

Defoe, Daniel. The life and most surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner; who lived eight and twenty years in an uninhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river Oroonoque. With an account of his deliverance thence, and his after surprising adventures. The tenth edition. Edinburgh, MDCCLXXIII. [1773]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Boston Public Library. 27 Mar. 2017


