A Response to the Commentators

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First, let me thank the three commentators for taking the time and trouble to read and discuss *Civilising Subjects.* Critical and constructive responses are what all authors want, and I am grateful that these scholars, whose work I greatly admire, have given my book their attention. To have the chance to reply is, of course, even better!

The central argument of *Civilising Subjects* is that being a colonizer was part of the construction of Englishness in the nineteenth century. Given my location as a white English woman formed through socialist and feminist politics, my task as an historian, as I defined it at the end of the 1980s, was to explore Englishness as a racial formation. The complex "race" politics of postcolonial Britain with its multicultural population posed a challenge to the national story, the "island story" of the homogeneity of the English-British nation. What were the possible chains of connection in racial thinking between imperial and postimperial times? I wanted to understand what difference it made to the English-British sense of self in the nineteenth century that Britain was at the heart of an empire. In the United States race was understood as an issue within from the moment of the inception of the nation: the Native American and African-American presence ensured this. Race was not present in the same way in British society, for empire was always at a distance and people of color had a relatively small presence in the metropole. Prior to decolonization and the arrival of large numbers of erstwhile imperial subjects in the metropole, issues of race were commonly conceptualized as belonging to the empire, outside of the nation. It was only in the wake of the migrations of the late 1940s and 1950s that race came to be seen as a problem of the "inside" rather than the "outside." Yet if, as Frantz Fanon argued, colonialism shaped the colonizers as much as the colonized then how was this expressed in everyday culture? How was it lived "at home" as well as in the empire? How did Englishmen and women become colonizers, and what kind of racialized and gendered selves were these? And if particular kinds of racial thinking were embedded in what it meant to be English, then what were the implications of this for postcolonial times?

I aimed to explore the construction of the colonizer and to break the binary of inside-outside through two case studies, one of Jamaica, the other of England. I focused on a relatively short period—between 1830 and 1867—in an effort to understand the shift in English racial thinking

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that many historians have documented, from the language of abolitionism to a harsher racial rhetoric. I wanted to know not only how colonizers fashioned themselves on particular sites of empire and legitimated their claims to rule over others, but also how this was translated "at home." What did ordinary Englishmen and women, those who never left their native shores, think about empire and its subjects? How did they see those subjects in relation to themselves? Does it make sense to think of them as colonizers even though they were far from the sites of empire? Were questions of race and empire inside the thinking about the nation long before the post–Second World War period? For my first case study, I chose to focus on a group of Baptist missionaries in Jamaica. My choice was determined by a long-term interest in English liberalism and radicalism, particularly its nonconformist variety. Many of the Baptist missionaries became committed to fighting the evils of slavery and claiming economic and political freedoms for black subjects. I wanted to understand their universalism, their belief in the equality of souls, and yet their assumptions as to their own superiority. This was a universalism that I needed to unpick if I was to understand the complexities of English liberal racial thinking and the relation between this and the making of white gendered subjectivities as colonizers. My second case study was the town of Birmingham, particularly its abolitionist and nonconformist public. Here my imperative was to look at an ordinary provincial town, one noted for its liberalism in the period that I consider, and attempt to grasp the ways in which its culture was inflected through empire. How did Birmingham men and women see themselves in relation to subjects of empire? Did they imagine themselves as "lords of human kind"? In both instances the purpose of the case study was to analyze the construction of the colonizer and the ways in which this fashioning took place across the metropolitan and colonial divide.

When Simon Gikandi asks me, therefore, where are the black subjects whose narratives are essential to the construction of a new colonial history, my reply is that this was not the subject of my book. Of course he is entirely right to argue that "a history of the wars of representations in Jamaica, as elsewhere in the colonial world, will remain incomplete until we make the accounts of these subjects, the ones confined to the margins of the discourse as it were, constitutive of it." The history also remains incomplete if it fails to account for the making of white subjectivities in colony and metropole and the links between these and modes of governance, both at home and "away." My contribution to this process of completion was to analyze the "racing," to use Toni Morrison's term, of white subjects, the ways in which Englishness needs to be understood not only as a formation of class and of gender, but also of race and ethnicity.

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My concern with the wars of representation between the plantocracy and the missionaries, the abolitionists and racial scientists, and colonial officials and their critics was to establish the imagined "African" as constructed in the minds of Britons both at home and abroad. This was "a Jamaica of the mind" as I put it in the title of one of my chapters. But these constructions had profound effects both on the ways in which the colonized were ruled and on the ways in which the United Kingdom imagined itself and was itself governed.

Gikandi is concerned about my emphasis on the place of the discursive in my discussion of anatomies of difference, an odd comment, as he himself notes, from a literary and cultural critic. But he seems to think that these discourses were confined to words not practices, things that were said and not things that were done. Yet colonial discourses shaped policy making and were constitutive of social worlds and lived experience. As has long been recognized, those things that men and women believe to be true are true in their effects. Governor Edward John Eyre, trapped in the specific view of the Afro-Jamaican that he had adopted by 1865, could not but think that a war between the races was the intention of the rebels at Morant Bay. He acted accordingly. But colonial discourse, I argue, has a significance in the politics and practices of the metropole as well as that of the colonies. The "manly citizen" who was enfranchised in the Reform Act of 1865 depended for his characteristics on his discursively constructed difference from "backward others" who, it was believed, could not represent themselves—whether in the colonies or at home. As John Stuart Mill argued, women and "less respectable" sections of the working classes would in time be ready for political representation. Similarly, colonial rule would eventually raise subject peoples to a point where they could enjoy the benefits of citizenship.[1] Till then, they had to stay in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls, in a felicitous term, the "waiting room" of history.[2]

Gauri Viswanathan argues that histories of the colonized may have to be written separately from the history of the colonizers. "How the native *actually* responds," she suggests, "is so removed from the colonizer's representational system, his understanding of the meaning of events, that it enters into the realm of another history of which the latter has no

[1] See Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 62–70. See also Catherine Hall, "The Rule of Difference: Gender, Class and Empire in the Making of the 1832 Reform Act," in *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century,* ed. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall (Oxford, 2000), pp. 107–36.

[2] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), p. 9.

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comprehension or even awareness. That history can, and perhaps must, be told separately for its immensely rich and complex quality to be fully revealed."[3] To write that history, very different work is required from the research that I did. Fortunately Jean Besson's *Martha Brae's Two Histories,* the product of a lifetime of anthropological fieldwork, archival research, and oral historical reconstruction, has just been published. It provides a fine counterpoint to *Civilising Subjects,* for it tells of the emergence of a distinctive creole peasant society on the north coast of Jamaica, the product of the encounter between Africa and Europe.[4] Here are the black subjects, outside of the entrapping framework of colonial discourses, negotiating their uneasy alliances with the Baptist church in their search for land and freedom; establishing new patterns of land-holding, especially the institution of "family land," which broke the mould of colonial expectations; and creating syncretic religious forms. Such work forms a vital part of the construction of new colonial histories. But from the position of dominance perhaps a different history is required to that suggested by Viswanathan and represented by Besson; that is, to show that the story of dominance cannot be written as a separate history if the project is to entrap the colonizers in the web of colonial discourses and thus reveal the traces of continued power.

Colonizers were made both in the metropole and on colonial sites. And, as C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) taught us, much can be gained through the analysis of metropole and colony in one lens. Yet why, I am asked by Philippa Levine and Thomas Holt, did I decide to split the main narrative of the book between Jamaica, in the first half, and Birmingham in the second? If the point was to insist on an integrated history, on the connections between people, ideas, and practices in these two places, why did I fall into the trap of telling the stories as if they were separate and produce two narratives of the shifts between 1830 and 1867?

This was indeed a difficult decision and one that I imagine will be faced by increasing numbers of historians as efforts are made to unpick the metropolitan-colonial divide and, furthermore, to work on more than one site of empire. Historical geographers may lead the way for us here for, by focusing on questions of space and place, they help us to rethink the differentiated relations of empire.[5] As we all know, one of the hardest

[3] Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 1989; London, 1999), p. 12.

[4] Jean Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002).

[5] See, e.g., Alan Lester, "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire," *History Workshop Journal* 54 (Autumn 2002): 25–48. For a helpful discussion of the concept of the web as a way of figuring relations of empire, see Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2002), esp. pp. 1–17.

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things in the world is to narrate the historical material we collect in ways that produce the connections we wish to demonstrate. In my case this was particularly difficult since I aimed to tell a set of stories about a group of men and women in different places and the ways in which their lives connected over thirty plus years. How could I make a narrative that would give proper weight to the detail and specificity of the two locations, in some ways so different, and yet hold on to the connections? How could I evoke the economic, social, and political particularities of both places, the networks and friendship groups that characterized them, and the temporalities specific to them, if I was constantly moving between them?[6]

Perhaps I should have chosen instead to focus on particular moments and debates across the two sites, as Mrinalini Sinha does in *Colonial Masculinity.*[7] But my story concerned changes in particular individuals across a number of years, so that would have been difficult. Perhaps I should have split the pages, as has occasionally been done, and told the two stories alongside. After much heart searching, however, I made the decision to tell the two stories separately, with all the crisscrossing that inevitably entailed. This resulted in some necessary repetition, and the awkwardness of moving backward in time in the middle of the book: two parallel stories, yet one comes after the other. Perhaps Holt is right when he remarks that this weakens the ending, for there is no single climax.

But crucially, in making this split, I was reasserting the gap between metropole and colony as fundamental to the maintenance of metropolitan power. "They" were over there, they were different, and they were backward and incapable of ruling themselves. Metropolitan power, as Partha Chatterjee argues, was structured through "a rule of colonial difference" and "the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group."[8] This gap was critical to the structuring of difference between the one place and the other-at home and away. Hence the explosion for the British when the empire "came home" in the postwar period and decided to stay. In the nineteenth century the crossing of the gap disrupted expectations—as I explore in relation to James Williams, the Jamaican apprentice whose visit to England disturbed his patron, the abolitionist Joseph Sturge, or William Morgan, the Birmingham abolitionist and missionary enthusiast,

[6] It is perhaps worth remarking that Leonore Davidoff and I faced a similar problem when writing *Family Fortunes,* a book that was based on two case studies, one of Birmingham and one of East Anglia. We resolved this by integrating our material and telling a national story. But the differences between Birmingham and East Anglia were much smaller than the differences between Birmingham and Jamaica.

[7] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995).

[8] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), p. 10.

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whose visit to Jamaica at the end of a lifetime's commitment to being "a friend of the Negro" destabilized his assumptions as to Jamaica and its peoples. In both instances, the knowledges created by forms of colonial discourse, sustained at a distance, were challenged by a day-to-day physical proximity.

For all the crisscrossings, however, the gap mattered. It structured difference between white Englishmen and women and white West Indians as well as between white and black. The two places were understood as incommensurable. While parallels might be rhetorically drawn between subject peoples in the empire and the Irish in the Victorian city, or the teeming "mob" of late nineteenth-century London, no one, I would argue, really thought they were talking about the same people. Evangelicals believed the souls of "heathens" abroad were likely to take more winning than those of backsliders at home, especially if they were entrapped by false gods. Liberals thought that working-class men in Lancashire or the Midlands were likely to prove their worth as citizens long before Indians or Africans. These were the hierarchies and the incommensurabilities of empire, and these were the hierarchies that partially influenced the manner of governance of subjects and institutions "at home." While some colonists dreamed of making "little Englands" across the empire, they never could. In Jamaica, the tropical heat, the hurricanes, the mosquitoes, and most of all the black population made it very different from "home."

By putting the colonial site first I aimed to upset the usual story, to make the "waiting room" the first centerpiece of the action, and to disrupt the expectation as to the flow of power from London to the "periphery." I wanted to draw attention to the ways in which what was happening in Jamaica shaped what happened in the metropole. How the debates over slavery became key to debates over what it meant to be properly English in the early 1830s. Furthermore, I wanted my narrative to end in Britain in 1867. This was the moment when the fruits were reaped of thirty-plus years of debate and contestation over the character of "the negro." Jamaica was declared a crown colony to be ruled from London (which involved the disenfranchisement of both white and black men), and "respectable" working-class men in Britain gained the vote.

Holt asks me to clarify what I mean by metropolitan time, colonial time, and familial time. In drawing attention to the incommensurabilities yet the interconnections between Birmingham and Jamaica, I focused on the different temporalities of the two places. In part, as he notes, I was pointing to the distinction made between the colonies as backward and the metropole as modern and progressive and, indeed, the metropolitan claim to impose its homogenous time across the empire. Then there is the difference in the pulses, rhythms, and dynamics of everyday life. I wanted,

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furthermore, to emphasize the intersecting registers of temporality—the ways in which the marking of significant events in the register of the domestic, the ties of kinship and of household, crossed other, more public, times. I was also pointing quite simply to the different times at which things happened on the two sites. News took time to get from one place to another, crucially affecting, for example, Eyre's freedom of action in the aftermath of Morant Bay. He had to act without authorization from London. But I was also preoccupied with the ways in which these temporalities and spatialities were woven across individual lives, and I used the prologue, on the imperial career of Eyre, to highlight this.

Eyre's life was shaped by the discontinuities of time and place. His early encounters with the white settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand provided shocking revelations of what he saw as the archaic forms of Australian aboriginal life, the rich possibilities of Maori assimilation, the horrors of a white penal colony, and the brutalities of settlers across the Antipodes. His middle years were spent in the sugar islands of the Caribbean where the claims of white West Indians, the "coloured" middle classes, and, above all, freed Africans all seemed illegitimate to a man whose thinking continued to be rooted in English class society. His expectation was that home would always be England, his place of return and belonging. But as migrants find, home does not remain the same. His enforced retirement to the depths of Devon after his suspension by the Colonial Office in 1866 left him an embittered man—unable to understand the England that now (mis)judged him. And of course he too changed, affected by his experiences across the empire. His life cycle was critical to his experiences—his early departure from the familial home, a Yorkshire rectory; his years as a bachelor, travelling and exploring; the deaths of his parents and other close family members; and his difficult marriage. It was all of this that made him the man he was. While the intersections of metropolitan time, colonial time, and familial time can be drawn out relatively easily in the narrative of an individual life, I hoped to maintain these issues and tensions across the book—drawing attention whenever possible to juxtapositions in personal and public lives, being attentive to the particular timing of missionary returns to the metropole, for example, and to what a reencounter with England at a particular time might mean, or reflecting on how colonial encounters could alter metropolitan thinking.

Both Holt and Levine wonder, given the insistence on the gendering of my narratives, why men are so much more present than women? It is true that my primary focus is not on the relational formation of masculinities and femininities, but it is about men, masculinities, and the making of "raced" subjects. There is undoubtedly more that I could have done with

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the women—both in Jamaica and Birmingham. Of course the sources are much more fragmentary; there are none of the autobiographies and biographies, just the occasional memoir written perhaps by loving family members for private publication. The growing literature on missionary women across the empire demonstrates, however, what can be done, though the task is undoubtedly easier for the later nineteenth century when single women became such a major component of the missionary task force. Similarly in Birmingham—there is much more to be said about the links between women's philanthropic activities and the development of a feminist politics—a politics that was emerging explicitly in the late 1860s in the context of the debates over female suffrage and would have complemented the material on "manly citizenship."

I chose not to do this work, however, because my emphasis lay elsewhere. I focused on "imperial men" in their many varieties—from colonial officials and missionaries in Jamaica to abolitionists, nonconformist ministers, and the "public men" of Birmingham, the "fit and proper persons" who carried authority in the town. One of my self-appointed tasks was to demonstrate the ways in which the well-established narrative of British history, the national history, the one taught in schools and universities, needed to be rethought through the frame of empire. *Civilising Subjects* is not only cultural and social history, it is also political history. It argues that a small group of Baptist missionaries, precariously located in class terms in their own society, constituted new authority and new forms of masculinity for themselves in a colonial context, forms that in turn effected the metropole. Their visions of "the African" were central to the ways in which huge numbers of people were mobilized in support of emancipation. William Knibb, the representative of the Baptist missionaries in Jamaica, returned to Britain in the wake of the rebellion of the enslaved in 1831 to plead for abolition. On his tour of the major British towns and cities, speaking to packed audiences, he represented others. "There is nothing more delightful and interesting," he argued, "than to plead the cause of the injured, the degraded and the oppressed."[9] To be "a friend of the Negro" mobilized both English men and women to seek political change: in pleading for oppressed others, they empowered themselves. This is a story that cannot be told outside of gender, for abolitionists had elaborated ideas about the place of the family in a good life and about the proper realms of men and women, ideas that were challenged by female activists. But it is a story in which the main public actors were men, practicing gender as much as race. By 1865, I suggest,

[9] William Knibb, *Speech on the Immediate Abolition of British Colonial Slavery* (Newcastle, 1833), p. 13.

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the identity of "friend of the Negro" was no longer one that captured the imagination of the Birmingham public. The "manly citizen" who figured in the debates over the reform of the franchise, and who indeed won the vote, was a man no longer identified with the delights of pleading for the poor and the oppressed. Rather, he was convinced of the need for authoritative rule in the empire, and of the fundamental distinctions between Anglo-Saxons and others. Furthermore, while "friend of the Negro" was an identity open to both men and women, albeit always in differentiated ways, "manly citizens" were definitively not women. This then is my "basic narrative," one that puts gendered masculinities of empire at the heart of metropolitan politics.

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