



Sepoys, Slavery and the Global Colour Line: The Indian Uprising of 1857 in Southern US Newspapers

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Within southern US newspapers, the Indian Uprising of 1857 was reported and read across a global colour line, which posited the superiority of whiteness against the “darker races,” thereby developing a framework through which white Southerners could amplify their own internal fears about the possibility of slave rebellion. News printed in southern newspapers about the events in India can be seen through a lens of the South’s racial hierarchy and can also be analysed as part of a wider global system of nineteenth-century white supremacy. Despite Anglophobia and fear of abolitionists, southern enslavers could also find it within themselves to support the British when it came to the maintenance of a global hierarchy of whiteness. The news from India could be read as a form of contextual substitution, in which southern slaveholders could see perceived racial parallels between themselves and the British in India, and between the “darker races” of the world, whether that was the enslaved African American or the Indian Sepoy.

INTRODUCTION

In the decades prior to the Civil War, the American slaveholding South witnessed numerous slave insurrection panics. After Nat Turner’s Rebellion of 1831, the South saw no actual large-scale slave rebellions, and yet, while enslavers tried to convince themselves that those they enslaved were faithful and trustworthy, rumours of poisoning, arson and planned slave rebellions continued to circulate.¹ The autumn and winter of 1856 in particular saw rumours and insurrection panics sweep the South as fear spread that the enslaved, inspired by the presidential election campaign of the Republican abolitionist

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¹ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197.

candidate, John C. Frémont, would rebel.² This article argues that just months after these panics gripped the southern states, stories printed in southern US newspapers about a rebellion of Indian soldiers against the British – the Indian Uprising – were used as a framework through which slaveholding southerners could amplify their own internal fears and anxieties about the possibility of slave rebellion, whilst simultaneously buttressing their belief in the system of racial hierarchy that allowed them to justify the enslavement of African Americans.³ As the uprising was led by Indian soldiers who violently rebelled against their white British “superiors,” news printed in southern newspapers about the events in India can be seen through a lens of the South’s racial hierarchy and can also be analysed as part of a wider global system of nineteenth-century white supremacy. The news from India was reported and read across a global colour line, which posited the superiority of whiteness against the “darker races,” and could be read as a form of contextual substitution, in which enslavers could perceive racial parallels between themselves and the British in India, and between the “darker races” of the world, whether that was the African American slave or the Indian Sepoy.

Historians and literary scholars have analysed the reception of news from India and the subsequent memory of the Indian Uprising in the American context and the ways it was “deployed as a mobile and contested sign in debating a range of national and imperial concerns.”⁴ Sangeeta Mediratta has

² Douglas R. Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election: Frémont, Freedom, and the Slave Conspiracies of 1856,” *Civil War History*, 61, 1 (2015), 35–63.

³ The Indian Uprising is otherwise known as the First War of Indian Independence, the Indian Mutiny, and the Sepoy Rebellion.

⁴ Sangeeta Mediratta, “The Affair of the Greased Cartridge: Travelling Stories, Unravelling Empires and the Sepoy Revolt of 1857,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 14, 3 (2012), 8–16, 8. See also, for example, Nikhil Bilwakesh, “‘Their Faces Were Like So Many of the Same Sort at Home’: American Responses to the Indian Rebellion of 1857,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism*, 21, 1 (2011), 1–23; Peter Putnis, “The International Press and the Indian Uprising,” in Marina Cartner and Crispin Bates, eds., *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume III, *Global Perspectives* (New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, 2013), 1–17; Elizabeth Kelly Gray, “Whisper to Him the Word ‘India’”: Trans-Atlantic Critics and American Slavery, 1830–1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28, 3 (2008), 379–406; Aaron Sheenan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion: War and Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020); Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 24; Harilaos Stecopoulos, “Indian Knives and Color Lines: Mark Twain from Hannibal to the Jim Crow Raj,” in Fred Hobson and Barbara Ladd, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Literature of the US South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 196–211, 196; Susan M. Ryan, “The Sepoy Rebellion and American Global Ambition,” in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nico Slate, eds., *The United States and South Asia from the Age of Empire to Decolonization: A History of Entanglements* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022), 51–68. There are a number of studies and edited volumes that analyse responses

highlighted the importance of understanding the reporting of the Indian uprising as a means of removing its “primary historical positioning as a geographically contained colonial event and focusing on its global trajectory and metaphorical career.”⁵ Whilst Mediratta’s work focusses on the uprising as a theme in writings about the Civil War and its aftermath, her work is useful in the way it highlights the Indian Uprising as a “colonial event with metaphorical and metonymic meanings that filtered into the popular imagination and served various social agendas.”⁶ This was certainly the case in the southern states in the years preceding the Civil War. Despite scholarship on the uprising’s importance in the American popular imagination, there has been no detailed analysis of the response to the uprising by the southern press. This article bridges this gap by considering the importance of analysing a distinctly southern response to the uprising and what this can tell us about the South’s internal anxieties and global outlook on the eve of secession.

In the same way that Paul Naish described how Latin America was used as a screen upon which to project both pro-slavery and abolitionist approaches to the southern system of slavery, India and the specific example of the uprising of 1857 were also used as a form of contextual substitution.⁷ Many contemporary Americans drew parallels between the British in India and America’s southern slaveholding states. Indeed, Elizabeth Kelly Gray notes that an already “apparent resemblance” between the system of racial hierarchy in British India and that of the American South “turned ominous” in 1857, with many Americans viewing the uprising as “akin to a huge slave rebellion.” Seeing this foreign event “through a domestic lens” meant that Americans’ differing views on the institution of slavery were reflected in how they interpreted the Indian Uprising.⁸ In her study of the responses to the Indian Uprising in various colonies of the British Empire, Jill Bender has shown how news of the perceived “mutiny” of colonized people created an atmosphere of intense anxiety and fear amongst British colonial authorities that

to and representations of the uprising in the British context and globally, both contemporarily and over time. See Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jill C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Astrid Erll, “Remembering across Time, Space and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the ‘Indian Mutiny’,” in Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, eds., *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 109–38; Carter and Bates, *Mutiny at the Margins*; Shaswati Mazumdar, ed., *Insurgent Sepoys: Europe Views the Revolt of 1857* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011).

⁵ Mediratta, “The Affair of the Greased Cartridge,” 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ Paul D. Naish, *Slavery and Silence: Latin America and the U.S. Slave Debate* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁸ Gray, “Whisper to Him the Word ‘India’,” 381.

colonized people would rebel elsewhere.⁹ The press, in reporting the news from India, played a crucial role in shaping the narratives of the uprising and inciting fear of populaces considered racially inferior rising against their white masters, not only throughout the British Empire, but also throughout other parts of the world, with the American South being a prominent example.

THE INDIAN UPRISING

By 1857, India had been controlled by the British East India Company for a century, with power maintained through the employment of thousands of Indian soldiers, named Sepoys. Many within the Indian population were deeply discontented by the ways in which the East India Company ruled over them. The Sepoys themselves were increasingly dissatisfied in their roles in the decades prior to the uprising, believing that the company's military procedures were a threat to their religion or caste status. Rumours about new ammunition being greased with cow or pig fat had significant religious concerns for both Hindu and Muslim Sepoys, and it is thought that these rumours played a significant role in precipitating the uprising. On 10 May 1857, Sepoys murdered their officers in the northern Indian city of Meerut, also killing all British and Christian civilians whom they came across. Continuing on to Delhi, which became the uprising's symbolic centre, the mutineers set off a chain of unrest that spread across northern India, in many places "taking on the character of a popular rebellion."¹⁰ A month later, the town of Kanpur, an East India Company garrison, was taken by the rebels, led by Nana Sahib, a Peshwa prince. Most fleeing men were killed, and the remaining 120 British women and children were captured and held by the Sepoy rebels. By July, in what has become known as the "Cawnpore massacre," these women and children were killed, and their bodies hidden in a local well.¹¹ The rebellion continued for almost a year with atrocities carried out by both sides, before the British brutally defeated the rebels in March 1858.¹² The British then reestablished power in the form of a far more centralised imperial structure under the Crown, rather

⁹ Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, 79.

¹⁰ Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

¹¹ For more on the Cawnpore Massacre see Barbara English, "The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857," *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), 169–78.

¹² For more on the Indian Uprising see Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*; William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). For an overview of the historiography of the Indian Uprising see Kim A. Wagner, "The Marginal Mutiny: The New Historiography of the Indian Uprising of 1857," *History Compass*, 9, 10 (2011), 760–66.

than the previous, somewhat informal, control exercised by the East India Company.¹³ In August 1858 the Government of India Act was passed, leading to direct British colonial rule under the British Raj.

The American press followed the Indian Uprising closely, with the first report appearing in the *New York Daily Times* on 6 July 1857, only two months after the outbreak of the uprising. There was widespread interest across America in the news from India, with many newspapers reprinting sensationalist stories from the British press.¹⁴ Antebellum newspapers were compiled with both “scissors and the quill,” through an exchange system that allowed editors to easily receive and reprint from other publications.¹⁵ Through this form of “textual borrowing,” newspaper networks circulated content whose original authorship was often unclear – in this sense “circulation often substituted for authorship.”¹⁶ Importantly, the reprinting of news from the British press meant that Anglo-Indian newspaper narratives were “highly influential in framing perceptions” of the events in India throughout the rest of the world and led to a specific discourse within the newspaper press in which the sensational atrocity narrative, whether based on primary accounts or rumour, took centre stage.¹⁷

It is important to consider whether what was printed in the British press about the deaths of white civilians was actually true. It is certainly the case that many white civilians were killed in the uprising and that this included women and children. These civilians were largely killed with swords or were shot.¹⁸ There were many cases of extreme brutality in the ways in which violence was used by the rebels to kill. Discussing one such event, the killing of Europeans at Meerut, Kim Wagner notes that “Europeans were set upon and cut, stabbed, and clubbed to death,” and that the brutality “reflected the vengeful anger of the crowd” in relation to their resentment of colonial rule.¹⁹ Whilst we know that brutal violence was used to kill white civilians, many of the press reports included specific narratives of torture and sexual violence towards white women, which does not seem to have happened in reality.²⁰ As Jenny Sharpe has argued, magistrates who were commissioned to investigate apparent eyewitness accounts of the uprising could “find no

¹³ Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, 7.

¹⁴ Mediratta, “The Affair of the Greased Cartridge,” 11.

¹⁵ Ryan Cordell, “Reprinting, Circulation and the Network Author in Antebellum Newspapers,” *American Literary History*, 27, 3, (2015), 417–45, 434. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 417.

¹⁷ Putnis, “The International Press and the Indian Uprising,” 6.

¹⁸ Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India, 1857–58: Untold Stories Indian and British* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 57. Llewellyn-Jones notes an estimate of between 1,000 and 1,500 European civilians killed in the first year of the uprising.

¹⁹ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 170.

²⁰ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India*, 57.

evidence to substantiate the rumours of rebels raping, torturing and mutilating English women.”²¹ Wagner also highlights that “later investigations [by officials] reached the conclusion that generally British women had not been raped before their death, although there were some exceptions.”²² A British official at the time commented on how the British press were sensationalizing the violence:

The statements which appear in the English newspapers regarding the atrocities perpetrated by the rebels ... are, in many instances, grossly exaggerated, as in the case of Riding-master Langdale’s child of the 3rd Cavalry, who was actually killed with one blow of a *tulwar* while sleeping on the *charpoy*; whereas she is stated to have been cut in pieces by little and little, with every refinement of gradual torture.²³

Such sensational atrocity narratives, reprinted from the British press, could be found in many southern newspapers.

The American media response to the events of 1857 varied across the fault lines of US society. Across the American newspaper landscape, solidarities either with the British or with Sepoy rebels were nuanced and could shift quickly as groups responded to events and to one another in print. Sympathy and support, or otherwise, were often based upon self-interest, competing aims and shifting goalposts. Susan Ryan has shown how many northern media responses reflected on the global ambitions of the US. In these responses, the rebellion was a forewarning to Protestant America’s global ambitions not to repeat Britain’s focus on profit over religion through its extension of religious tolerance. Many commentators believed that failure by the British to fully Christianize India, their tendency to “cater to native religious practices and biases,” and their inability to understand the Indian caste system had led to the uprising.²⁴

Northern-based publications like the *New York Observer* made comparisons between the Sepoy rebellion and domestic racialized subjects – such as Native American people – whom white Americans deemed threats to the national project.²⁵ The *New York Times* supported the British throughout the conflict, arguing consistently that the British were justified in using whatever force was necessary to end the rebellion. Their support for the British was based upon the notion that the rebellion in India was a similar situation to the maintenance of control over a racially subordinated group of people as seen in the South and that the potential for slave insurrection was not just

²¹ Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 2.

²² Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 170.

²³ W. Muir, *Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-West Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), Volume I, 375. Cited in Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 170.

²⁴ Ryan, “The Sepoy Rebellion and American Global Ambition,” 55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

a threat to the fortunes of the South, but also to the “union between North and South, as Northern pro-slavery Democrats are bound to support Southern slavery only insofar as they stand to profit from processing and shipping Southern cotton.”²⁶ In contrast, the *New York Daily Tribune*’s London correspondent, Karl Marx, argued that the rebellion in India should be understood as a national movement “against English supremacy.” In almost forty printed articles in the *Tribune*, Marx challenged the British narration of events in India, arguing that they were “not facts, but the mere inventions of English terror and hatred,” and highlighted his belief that the Sepoys’ actions were simply “the reflex, in concentrated form, of England’s own conduct in India.”²⁷

Much of the northern press printed the same sort of accounts from British newspapers as were seen printed in the southern press and supported the British via an understanding of racial solidarity with fellow white men. Yet these solidarities were entangled with other considerations; it was possible to racially align oneself with the British and still be critical of them. Some northern commentators were highly critical of the brutal violence used by the British to quell the rebellion and felt that Britain had lost moral credibility. Other northern newspapers were highly critical of the way in which the British East India Company had managed India.²⁸ When considering both the mainstream northern and southern presses and the many other groups outside the “mainstream,” it becomes apparent that, as Susan Ryan notes, “Americans’ disposition toward slavery informed their attitudes towards the rebellion in myriad ways.”²⁹ For example, Irish American newspapers initially took the same line as the Irish press in viewing the rebellion as an event in which colonized people were fighting back, but quite quickly changed to a position of supporting the British in order to “assimilate into the northern white political mainstream.”³⁰ Many abolitionist papers embraced support for the British as they wished to “maintain their vested interest in British moral authority” in relation to abolition and to champion British support of the abolitionist movement in the US.³¹

In many ways, though, the reaction to 1857 resonated most forcefully in the South because it was here that a direct parallel could be drawn between the fate of the white Europeans killed by the rebels in India and the southern slaveholders who lived in fear of the enslaved population fighting for their own freedom. Crucially, at the time news from India started appearing in the

²⁶ Bilwakesh, “Their Faces Were Like So Many of the Same Sort at Home,” 3–4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. ²⁸ Ryan, “The Sepoy Rebellion and American Global Ambition,” 58–59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54

³⁰ Bilwakesh, “Their Faces Were Like So Many of the Same Sort at Home,” 10–15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

American press, the southern states were still in the grip of a period of intense paranoia. From the autumn of 1856 through to early 1857, slave insurrection panics swept the South, as fear spread that slaves, inspired by the presidential election campaign of the Republican abolitionist candidate Frémont, would rebel.³² Douglas Egerton argues that “overheated Democratic rhetoric convinced defiant bondmen in parts of the South that 1856 was a moment of opportunity and that these pockets of rebelliousness in turn terrified whites into conjuring up imaginary conspiracies across the South.”³³ Blaming the unrest on both Republicans and abolitionists (as though they were one cohesive grouping) was politically advantageous for Democrats whose rhetoric in newspapers and fiery political speeches swayed many of those who might have voted for Frémont. However, it is also highly likely, as Egerton has shown, that this rhetoric also “helped spark several legitimate incidents of slave unrest” and, in turn, certainly incited white paranoia.³⁴ The news from India arrived in the South in the aftermath of this atmosphere of fear, anxiety and conspiratorial paranoia.

THE SOUTHERN PRESS, ANGLOPHOBIA AND PERCEIVED BRITISH HYPOCRISY

The southern press, and its associated racialized media discourse, were crucial to both creating and perpetuating slaveholders’ anxieties over the possibility of slave rebellion in the antebellum South.³⁵ The fear of the enslaved acting against white control played out in the media, enflaming public concern and encouraging the authorities to act in order to maintain the economic and cultural interests of the elite.³⁶ Analysing the content of newspapers is a worthwhile endeavour in order to gain a picture of the attitudes of those in the population who read this material. It is obvious that the southern press supported the interests of a propertied elite. The majority of the readership of the southern newspapers discussed here comprised wealthy white males, evidenced by the money needed to afford the yearly subscription rates of most

³² Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election.” See also Charles B. Dew, “Black Ironworkers and the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *Journal of Southern History*, 41, 3, (1975), 321–38.

³³ Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election,” 39. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57, 61.

³⁵ See, for example, Rosalyn Narayan, “‘Creating Insurrections in the Heart of Our Country’: Fear of the British West India Regiments in the Southern US Press, 1839–1860,” *Slavery & Abolition*, 39, 3, (2018), 497–517; and Narayan, “Humor, Minstrelsy, and the Representation of African Americans in Macon’s *Georgia Telegraph* and *Georgia Citizen*, 1855–1860,” *Civil War History*, 68, 2, (2022), 147–63.

³⁶ Brian Gabriel, *The Press and the Slavery in America, 1791–1859: The Melancholy Effect of Popular Excitement* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 103.

political newspapers.³⁷ Many of these men owned enslaved people in the South. It is important to note that many southern elite women were also interested in the contents of the newspapers: reading material themselves or listening when husbands and male relatives read pamphlets and newspapers aloud.³⁸

Southern editors often had no choice but to structure their content in the interests of the elite in order to maintain the financial stability of their papers. Indeed, as Carl Osthaus has argued, these editors “survived by joining, or at least integrating themselves with, the establishment.”³⁹ In this regard, the editors spoke for the slaveholders of the South; they were the “voice of the politically active and economically significant segment of the community,” and served as “weathercocks, indicating the prevailing views of the elite.”⁴⁰ Ratner and Teeter similarly point out that whilst historians of antebellum newspapers can certainly assume that newspapers influenced the opinions of their readers, there is not actually any clear way of measuring such influence. Rather, they argue, the value of antebellum newspapers to the historian is what they reveal about the “emotions and opinions” of their readers. As editors needed to stay in business, the way to keep their readers happy was to “remain attuned to words and ideas that would attract the readers they sought.” As such, newspapers reflected the opinions of their readers.⁴¹

In analysing the reporting of the Indian Uprising in the American Press more widely, Nikhil Bilwakesh makes the argument that Southerners, rather than empathizing with the British “dilemma of a coloured and rebellious populace rising against them,” instead condemned the British “for their hypocrisy in criticizing American slavery whilst practicing racial violence in India.”⁴² In contrast, this article argues that southern newspapers actually exhibited a much more nuanced approach to their coverage of the uprising. It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that the South had little sympathy for the British, given that the South’s fears of British involvement in southern affairs was a pressing matter for the southern elite. Scholarly attention has been paid to the southern response to Britain’s role in India, particularly in relation to the South’s increasing Anglophobia over the course of the antebellum

³⁷ Gerald J. Baldasty, “The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Modern American Journalism,” in John B. Hench, ed., *Three Hundred Years of the American Newspaper* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1991), 407–19, 409.

³⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 385.

³⁹ Carl R. Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 10. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁴¹ Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-Eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), ix–x.

⁴² Bilwakesh, “Their Faces Were Like So Many of the Same Sort at Home,” 1, 10.

period. In placing the antebellum American debate over slavery in an international context, specifically the context of the Indian world, Elizabeth Kelly Gray has shown how antebellum Americans closely followed news from India, seeing events as relevant to their own society.

Gray highlights how abolitionists bolstered their position by highlighting the British efforts to bring indigenous slavery to an end, whilst pro-slavery advocates focussed on what they believed to be British hypocrisy.⁴³ Indeed, as the slavery debate intensified to the “rancorous” level of the 1850s, defenders of southern slavery criticized a “British double standard,” arguing that slavery under British rule in India still existed “in fact if not in name.”⁴⁴ The polemic here was most likely aimed at Britain’s use of racial domination to justify extractive relationships with its colonial empire and subjects. By the time of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 – which abolished slavery in the British Empire and freed around 800,000 enslaved people – Britain had expanded the use of plantations across the empire (including tea and coffee plantations in India) and begun a substitution of the enslaved with a network of indentured labour from South Asia.⁴⁵ These new plantations across the empire “absorbed the structures of the old, including work discipline enforced by violence.”⁴⁶ The Indian Uprising certainly became a pivotal moment in which both pro-slavery and abolitionist newspaper editors could accuse one another of hypocrisy.⁴⁷

Southern politicians, in the later antebellum period in particular, manifested strong feelings of Anglophobia and were deeply paranoid about British abolitionist involvement in the Atlantic world and the possible repercussions for the southern system of slavery. Southern slaveholders believed that Britain’s abolition of slavery in 1833 was part of a grand conspiracy designed to weaken the South.⁴⁸ Such Anglophobia caused paranoia amongst southern politicians, many of whom came to believe in a British plot described by the Washington, DC *Madisonian* in 1842 as a plan for “the destruction of slave labor in America” in order for Britain to eradicate “the cotton culture to which this country is the successful rival of her East India possessions.”⁴⁹

⁴³ Gray, “Whisper to Him the Word ‘India’.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁴⁵ Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson, *Slavery, Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 187–94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 224. Berg and Hudson remark, “The slave-based plantation model, passed on from sugar and cotton to indentured and share-cropping labour systems, endorsed an already deeply embedded racial capitalism.”

⁴⁷ Bilwakesh, “Their Faces Were Like So Many of the Same Sort at Home,” 16.

⁴⁸ Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 180.

⁴⁹ *Madisonian* (Washington, DC), 1 April 1842, cited in Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 27.

As Matthew Karp has argued, despite the fact that Britain attempted to use India as an alternative cotton source after 1830, and despite the fact that the British government put obstacles in the path of Atlantic slaveholders after 1833, there is no evidence of a “nefarious conspiracy that linked the two policies.”⁵⁰ Fear that Britain had a plan up its sleeve to end southern slavery had become a source of great anxiety.⁵¹ After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, southern Anglophobia ramped up and white southerners were convinced that the English abolitionist threat to southern slavery was intensifying.

EMPIRE AND THE COLOUR LINE

Despite such a strong sense of southern Anglophobia, many white Southerners simultaneously looked towards Britain’s dealings in India with a sense of admiration, which serves as an insight into southern notions of whiteness. W. E. B. Du Bois, writing in the 1920s, first critically examined the notion of “whiteness.” He argued that the “discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is ... a nineteenth and twentieth century matter.”⁵² Du Bois also declared that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.”⁵³ The colour line was the way in which western empires had divided the world into blocs of dark and light “races” for the basis of imperial subjugation and capitalist exploitation. In considering the jostling between European powers that led to the First World War, Du Bois contended that the primary cause was the “jealous and avaricious struggle for the largest share in exploiting darker races.”⁵⁴ Discussing the notion of whiteness in the period after the American Civil War in European settler colonies, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds expanded upon Du Bois’s work by describing the “white man’s country” as “a paradoxical politics, at once transnational in its inspiration and identifications but nationalist in its methods and goals.” Such a form of politics created an “imagined community of white men” that “was transnational in its reach, but nationalist in its outcomes, bolstering regimes of border protections and national

⁵⁰ Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 28. For more on Anglophobia in the antebellum period see the chapter “From Anglophobia to New Anglophobia” in Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 107–23; see also the chapter “Confronting the Great Apostle of Emancipation” in Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*.

⁵¹ Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 28.

⁵² W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (London: Verso, 2016; first published 1920), 17–29, 17.

⁵³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; first published 1903), 3.

⁵⁴ Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” 27.

sovereignty.”⁵⁵ The same economy of whiteness and the same basis of “geopolitical alliances” and a “subjective sense of self” can be seen in the late antebellum South.⁵⁶

This article argues that this dualism can be seen in southern newspaper coverage of the Indian Uprising. Editors could simultaneously criticize the British, whilst also condemning the notion of a rebellious, nonwhite population rising against their white masters. This dualism was not always clearly expressed within editorials. Rather, the practice of reprinting from other papers meant that editors chose stories from various sources, so whilst editorials might, for example, criticize the British in some regards, other stories printed throughout the newspaper framed the British as the masters of a rebellious underclass, obviously drawing parallels with the situation in which southern slaveholders found themselves. In discussing the larger relationship between global imperialism and American slavery, Karp highlights the way in which many pro-slavery southerners saw the spread of European imperialism, the developing racial order of white men’s countries and the “vision of worldwide white supremacy, empire and commercial exploitation” as “an international vindication of their own slave system.”⁵⁷ Virginian planter Edmund Ruffin celebrated the spread of British imperial power in Asia, despite the fact that he was simultaneously highly critical of British abolitionism and what he deemed the cruelties of British imperialism (not to mention wary of British encroachment into the western hemisphere). On hearing the news of the Indian Uprising, Ruffin criticized what he deemed to be British abuses yet warned that a revolution by the native population would be a disaster for the “civilised world”; only with the dominance of the “European and superior race” and with the conquest of “mongrel and semi-barbarous communities” would humanity thrive.⁵⁸

Such an economy of whiteness, as exemplified in Ruffin’s sentiments, can be seen clearly in the southern press coverage of the Indian Uprising of 1857. Whilst nationalistic, and specifically southern, Anglophobic fears were rife, a notion of a transnational imagined community of white men can also be seen in the often supportive rhetoric of some southern editors and in the choice that editors made to reprint reports of the uprising from the British press. An

⁵⁵ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3–4. For a discussion of nationalism and whiteness during the belle époque see Musab Younis, “‘United by blood’: Race and Transnationalism during the Belle Époque,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 23, 3, (2017), 484–504, esp. 485–89.

⁵⁶ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 3–4.

⁵⁷ Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 159.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Karp cites *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. William K. Scarborough (Baton Rouge, 1972), 10 Aug. 1857, 20 April 1858, 26 April 1858, at 96–97, 179, 182 respectively.

article in the *Charleston Courier* referred to the belief that the “English would succeed in stopping” the uprising, “because we know the immense superiority of Europeans over Asiatics and the tenacity of the people of Great Britain.”⁵⁹ The *Richmond Whig* reprinted from the *London Times* an article entitled “Barbarism of the Hindoos,” which argued,

The Indian Mutiny is eminently a barbaric movement. It is such as what we call civilized States have always been liable to from the ruder nations whom they held in subjection ... the Asiatics were always especially barbaric ... The barbaric element is one of inevitable weakness and is the very reason of our dominion of the east ... it is the weak old Asiatic, the traitor and the slave, who has been playing against us.⁶⁰

To add to this dualism, even where the British were criticized, this article will show that this could also be read through a particular southern, slaveholding lens that focussed on what it meant to be a good master. Rebellion by a subordinate race could be understood when bad mastership was involved. By implication, this congratulated the enslavers of the South for their prime example of good care of slaves and eased their worries that those they enslaved might want to rebel.

In January 1858 an article entitled “Decay of the Asiatic Races” described explicitly the perceived differences between the white “European” and the “Asiatic races.” Printed in both the New Orleans *Daily True Delta* and the *Georgia Telegraph*, it introduced the words of the British *Friend of India* newspaper by highlighting how the Indian Uprising was an example of the differences described:

All history shows that indigenous Asiatic races require the directions of a dominant class. Industrious, hardy and with many of the qualities essential to the development of civilisation, they seem to lack social force ... They do not advance – and need the directing force of a progressive race.⁶¹

Yet, despite the comradeship expressed towards the British in racial terms – the global colour line – there still remained a clear animosity towards the British in terms of comparing the moral superiority of white men and white nations. In November 1858, the *Georgia Telegraph* reprinted the following article from the *Richmond Dispatch*, which again expressed a feeling of moral superiority in terms of the notion of good masters:

The Negroes of India. A special correspondent of the *London Times* in India gives some facts in regard to the treatment of the natives by their Masters, which deserves

⁵⁹ “Situation of the English in India,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 31 Aug. 1858.

⁶⁰ “Barbarism of the Hindoos,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 18 Sept. 1857.

⁶¹ “Decay of the Asiatic Races,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 9 Feb. 1858; “Decay of the Asiatic Races,” *Daily True Delta* (New Orleans, LA), 3 Jan. 1858.

the attention of those English Philanthropists who concern themselves greatly about the fancied miseries of the American slave. The writer thinks that the arrogant and repellent manner in which natives of rank in India are often treated, and the unnecessary harshness to inferiors had much effect in producing the sympathy which the mutineers and Rebels have received throughout the districts they have traversed.⁶²

The use of the word “master” clearly outlines the comparison between the treatment of the Indians by the British as described in the article and the “good masters” of the South. The article portrays the British as uncaring and violent towards “natives,” feeding into a picture of the British as unable to show a compassionate oversight of a racial underclass – something that southern slaveholders proudly believed they achieved very well.

A wider reading of southern newspapers for 1857 tells a nuanced story of how editors chose to report the events in India both with disgust for the rebels and as an opportunity to criticize the British. Indeed, the New Orleans *Times–Picayune* told its readers that “the present is not the fitting moment to review the policy that has ever been pursued by the British Government towards the population of its Indian possessions. There will come a time.” Instead, it suggests that the current “crisis of affairs” in India should enlist “the sympathies of all civilized nations.”⁶³ Criticism of the British did not necessarily imply support of the Sepoys’ cause. The *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* printed a report from the New Orleans *Bee*, noting that the “*Bee* has a thrilling article ... which fully embraces our views in relation to the Indian mutiny.” The report’s writer was very clear that, “In reviewing the atrocious features which characterize the rebellion in India, we have not scrupled to censure the British for the vindictive system of retaliation practised by them ... These summary and unnatural punishments are unworthy of a humane and enlightened nation.” Yet despite such criticism, the writer is also understanding of the British response, noting that “the course pursued by the British may find some palliation in the hideous torments deliberately inflicted by the rebels on every white-skinned individual who has fallen into their power, without discrimination of age or sex.”⁶⁴ Whilst the British are heavily criticized for the punishments meted out to rebels, there seems to be a clear understanding that the “horrors” committed against white-skinned people were so awful as to almost excuse the immediate reactions of the “exasperated” British troops.

Macon’s *Georgia Telegraph* displayed a fair amount of contempt for the British while simultaneously supporting the racial hierarchy between the British and the

⁶² “The Negroes of India,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 23 Nov. 1858.

⁶³ “British Policy in India,” *Times–Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 3 Oct. 1857.

⁶⁴ “Sympathy for the Sepoys,” *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* (Memphis, TN), 14 Oct. 1857.

Sepoy rebels, illuminating the dual concerns of the southern slaveholder: on one hand, nationalistically Anglophobic, whilst, on the other hand, in support of the maintenance of power by fellow white men over darker-skinned “races,” thereby bolstering confidence in their own system of oppression. In October 1857, the editor remarked that “no papers acknowledge more frankly than the English the gross mismanagement of the Indian empire by the East India Company, whilst, however, none, not even the Sepoys themselves, pretend it is an excuse for their mode of revenge.”⁶⁵ Here we see that it was perfectly possible to criticize the British role in India, yet still feel sympathy with the plight of the “European man, woman and child” during the rebellion.

CRITICISM OF THE BRITISH AS BAD MASTERS

In November 1857, three whole columns of the *Georgia Telegraph* were taken up by a reprint from the *Pastor's and People's Journal* discussing the death of American missionaries in India: “The revolt in India continues to be a topic of general discussion and absorbing interest in the Christian world. There is now but little remaining doubt that our missionary families of Futtegharh [*sic*] have all perished.”⁶⁶ The article referred to the killing of eight missionaries at the American Presbyterian mission station at Farrukhabad when the 10th Bengal Native Infantry had mutinied at Fatehgarh.⁶⁷ In this long article the author outlines what they believe to be the culpability of the British in India for the cause of the uprising and frames the British in India as the “masters” of Indians. Despite chattel slavery not existing in India, the British are represented as a self-serving people, exploiting their racial subordinates:

The wrongs of the African have been a ceaseless theme of philanthropists in Europe and America, but according to the showing of the English themselves, the African slave must now deliver up his mourning weeds to the down-trodden and outraged East Indian ... the refined cruelties of the mutineers have been learned from their English masters.⁶⁸

The article went on to describe in detail horrific torture carried out by the British and abuses against Indian women long before the mutiny. Throughout, there is a clear notion that the British have been bad masters for not fulfilling their role both to rule over their subordinates and to provide a level of “care” that their subordinates required from the superior race:

The British Standard, says: – “Let it never be forgotten that in the terrible events which have recently transpired in the East, the English have been the tutors, and

⁶⁵ “Nena Sahib,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 27 Oct. 1857.

⁶⁶ “India and Our Missionaries Again,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 17 Nov. 1857.

⁶⁷ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India*, 49.

⁶⁸ “India and Our Missionaries Again,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 17 Nov. 1857.

the Sepoys their pupils; they have only been exemplifying the lessons taught their fathers and themselves.”⁶⁹

The article quoted Judge Luard, a British judge who had lived in India and who had recently published a pamphlet outlining what he considered to be the causes of the uprising: “long-continued, corrupt, irresponsible, resistless tyranny,” with “diabolical cases of murder, judicial bribery and robbery, deliberately perpetrated and deliberately upheld.” Highlighting that the British East India Company had ruled India by way of corruption and violence towards Indians, Luard referred also to the long-term use of violence perpetrated against Indian women, criticizing the “deliberate brutality that native women have received at our hands, without ever once creating an emotion in the hearts of those whose duty it was to protect them on the spot.”⁷⁰ References to “duty” and “protection” would have struck a chord with white southern readers, as notions of care and love for subordinates were hugely important to the southern slaveholding elite. The paternalistic vision of the benevolent master played a vital role in the psyche of slaveholders, who could convince themselves of the care they were providing to the enslaved.⁷¹

Despite this criticism of British ability to behave as proper social and racial superiors, the belief in a global racial hierarchy, based upon whiteness and Christianity, remained intact. The article ends with the clear belief that the British must succeed in ending the rebellion, restore their power over Indians and behave as better “masters”:

India will know no repost or stable government for generations to come, unless the British ascendancy is restored; and once restored, after such a rebuke, it may be reasonably hoped that the government will be more worthy of a Christian nation.⁷²

In the same newspaper issue, two pages later, an article included the letter of “Rev Mr. Scudder of India” to the *Christian Intelligencer*, which celebrated the “remarkable instances of heroism” shown by British troops:

Let Americans never be ashamed that Englishmen are their forefathers. England is a noble country. Her sons are heroes and her daughters are heroines. This rebellion has brought deeds that deserve to be associated with those valorous actions, which we with throbbing pulses, read in history.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Excerpts are printed from Luard’s original pamphlet: Robert Davies Luard, *An Address to the Reconstructors of Our Indian Empire* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1857).

⁷¹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷² “India and Our Missionaries Again,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 17 Nov. 1857.

⁷³ “Remarkable Instances of Heroism,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 17 Nov. 1857.

Therefore, in the same issue of the newspaper, readers of the *Georgia Telegraph* received two distinct messages. The first was that the British had been “bad masters” in India and therefore it was not surprising that their subordinates would rise against them. Such bad government of India was enough to “bring a blush to the face of every one in whose veins flows English blood.” Yet, on the other hand, because of the valiant actions of British troops in suppressing the uprising, they were also told to “never be ashamed that Englishmen are their forefathers.”⁷⁴ The British were deemed not to have behaved as well as they should have done as white men, yet, when the power associated with this whiteness was threatened, their actions as white men compared with the actions of their racial subordinates was deemed heroic.

RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY

The hardening of racial prejudice over the course of the nineteenth century in both colonial India and the United States developed alongside a widely held conviction, promoted by contemporary theorists, that the “darker races” of the world (a categorization that included both African Americans and Indians) were inferior to white-skinned peoples. For southern Americans, the importance of a “distinctly ‘Anglo-Saxon’ whiteness” grew, particularly as a backlash against the spread of abolitionist rhetoric.⁷⁵ Crucially, the development of regimes of racial hierarchy and the ways in which white people set themselves as the “ruling race” in British India and the United States, and in the South in particular, were strikingly similar.⁷⁶

As Peter Putnis has pointed out, British press accounts of the Indian Uprising reveal an intensification of racial discourses, which “emphasised notions of ‘native savagery’ and legitimised the British Army’s brutal retaliation in the name of vengeance.”⁷⁷ Within southern press coverage of the news from India, many descriptors are used which would have drawn the reader’s attention to the supposed similarities of the “darker races” in direct opposition to those of “European” ancestry. Wilmington’s (North Carolina) *Daily Journal* spoke of the “black faces” of the “native portion” of spectators at the public killing of a Sepoy rebel at Peshawar.⁷⁸ The same paper reprinted from the *Baltimore Sun* the following account by a British

⁷⁴ “India and Our Missionaries Again,” *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 17 Nov. 1857.

⁷⁵ Nico Slate, *Coloured Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 8–9. See also Rosemarie Zagarri, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn’ for the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31, 1 (2011), 1–37, 32–33, 36.

⁷⁶ Zagarri, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn,’” 36.

⁷⁷ Putnis, “The International Press and the Indian Uprising,” 1.

⁷⁸ “Blowing from Guns at Peshawar,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 5 Dec. 1857.

“civil officer of the government” who described how he and others had fought against the rebels:

One trip I enjoyed amazingly: we got on board a steamer with a gun ... when we went ashore and peppered away with our guns; my old double barrel that I brought out with me, bringing down niggers, so thirsty for vengeance was I.⁷⁹

The *Charleston Courier* included an extract of a letter written by the wife of a British officer reprinted from the *Inverness Courier*, in which she describes Indians as “niggers.”⁸⁰ Nico Slate has shown how the “transnational prominence of this word epitomized the conflation of dark-skinned people,” especially in India where the British, “inspired by white Americans, increasingly denigrated Indians” as such.⁸¹

Within the same piece in the *Daily Journal*, a letter from another British soldier described his escape from Delhi. He explains how he was “shot at by a black” as he tried to leave his house. In his attempt to disguise himself in order to escape, the soldier explains that he “discoloured” his face and put on the clothes of one of the “dead blacks.” He remarks that he was able to speak the language of the “blacks” and could therefore “pass for a black.” His description of his pretending to be an Indian has a rather animalistic tone, as he describes how he “began halooing and hooting and running.”⁸² Slate argues that notions of blackness linked Indians and African Americans, while disparaging both as “filthy, evil or primitive.”⁸³ Importantly, much of what the southern newspapers printed was reprinted from the British press, which was often, in turn, material reprinted from English-language Indian newspapers. Peter Putnis shows how important these accounts were in shaping the dominant understanding of the events in India around the world: “The force of these initial accounts was such that a racialised narrative of native atrocity overwhelmed any other possible interpretive framework.”⁸⁴

Furthermore, Slate explains how “scientific theories of racial hierarchy bound together the trajectories of white supremacy in both colonial India and the US, linking Indians and African Americans within the ‘darker races.’”⁸⁵ Such scientific hierarchies legitimated a racial order based upon

⁷⁹ “The Revolt in India,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 11 Sept. 1857. The same story was printed in the *Charleston Courier*: “British Atrocities in India,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 16 Sept. 1857.

⁸⁰ “The Rebellion in India,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 16 Sept. 1857.

⁸¹ Slate, *Coloured Cosmopolitanism*, 9; see also Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, 111.

⁸² “The Revolt in India,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 11 Sept. 1857.

⁸³ Slate, *Coloured Cosmopolitanism*, 9.

⁸⁴ Putnis, “The International Press and the Indian Uprising,” 15.

⁸⁵ Slate, *Coloured Cosmopolitanism*, 10.

what were considered inherent differences in physical characteristics.⁸⁶ The *Richmond Whig* alluded to these scientific theories when it printed a letter which described the “Hindoo population” as men who were

square shouldered, flat and thin chested, hollow-thighed, big-kneed, large-footed, lank heeled ... Some wear a turban of the same material; some their natural coarse black hair ... Some are blacker than the darkest Ethop, others are colored like the tawny moor ... There is one who has ... a stupid and ugly look in his dull dark eyes ... The women though more decently clad, seems to be more wild and savage than the men.⁸⁷

In the same paper, on a different page, is an article which describes how “there is all the difference in the world between the white man and the negro. God, the Creator, made them different ... The woolly head, the black skin, the thick lips, flat nose, the muzzle-mouth.” The similarity in the way these physical attributes are described negatively is not a coincidence, particularly because the article concerning the difference between “Whites and Blacks” goes on to explain how the “white man, on the other hand, created in the image of God, is gifted with endowments intellectual and physical, which aid and adorn each other.”⁸⁸ As these two examples show, across this issue of the *Richmond Whig*, the inferiority of the “darker races” is identified in opposition to the superiority of whiteness.

REPORTS OF VIOLENCE

It is possible to identify visions of slave rebellion in the South through much of what was printed in the southern press about the Indian Uprising. The “mutiny” can be seen as a powerful signifier of the potential for black resistance. The events in India signified both the strengths and the possibly fragility of international white supremacy, but also the power of white supremacy in the South and the paranoia on which it rested. Newspaper reports offered a direct reflection of possible slave rebellion at home and how it would be dealt with. It also offered the vision of the indiscriminate killing of whites, the violation of women and children and the rise to power of slave rebel leaders. Ultimately, the Indian Uprising, as represented in the southern newspapers, confirmed to the southern elite that despite any Anglophobic sentiments, slave and subject peoples of the “darker races” should be kept under the control of white men.

Southern slaveholders understood that slave rebellion, and its immediate consequences, would likely include the violent deaths of themselves and

⁸⁶ Zagarri, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn,’” 36.

⁸⁷ “Interesting Letters from India,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 11 May 1858.

⁸⁸ “The Great Question for the South,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 11 May 1858.

their families. If emancipation occurred, the breakdown of the racial order would follow. They dreaded race war and the immense disorder and ruin it would bring to their current economic and social standing.⁸⁹ Much of the news from India described scenes akin to a general uprising that may have drawn parallels with the feared prospect of slave rebellion in the minds of white southern readers. News included descriptions of how the populations of Bengal had begun to “rise and were killing the English; and that the revolution was becoming more general.”⁹⁰ Descriptions of “the massacre at Delhi” explained how “the whole city was up in arms, every European residence was searched, the troopers declaring that they did not want the property, but life,” and crucially the uprising had spread more widely as “people of the city and bazaar appear to have been very active and to have aided the mutineers in their bloody work.”⁹¹ The use of terms such as the “armed rabble” who joined the Sepoys and the description of how local people had “committed atrocities far greater than those of the Sepoys” may have brought to mind the spreading of a slave revolt beyond its initial organisers.⁹²

Historian Winthrop D. Jordan described the fear felt by southern slaveholding whites of a future “appalling world turned upside down, a crazy nonsense world of black over white.”⁹³ News from India described how European “ladies remained eight and ten days in the jungle, trusting to the natives for protection.”⁹⁴ The *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* also carried similar news, reprinted from the *London Daily Times*, which claimed that “some of the ladies escaped nearly naked, lived in the jungle for days with their infant children, starving and rarely able to get a handful of rice to satisfy the cravings of hunger.”⁹⁵ That white women had to escape and hide in the jungle was entirely at odds with the slaveholders’ notion of white power over enslaved peoples. In the southern states, it was fugitive slaves, Maroons, who hid and

⁸⁹ Peter J. Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 22–23. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 111.

⁹⁰ “Four Days Later from Europe,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 14 Oct. 1857.

⁹¹ “The Massacre at Delhi,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 7 August 1857.

⁹² First quote can be found in “India News,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 31 May 1858; and “Late Foreign News” *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), 29 May 1858. Second quote: “The Mutiny in the Indian Army,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 20 July 1857.

⁹³ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 111, 114.

⁹⁴ “The Massacre at Delhi,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 7 Aug. 1857, 8 Aug. 1857.

⁹⁵ “Arrival of Indian Fugitives at Southampton,” *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* (Memphis, TN), 18 Oct. 1857.

lived in the swamps.⁹⁶ To add to this picture of power structures overturned, several papers carried the description of “wives and children of the officers and soldiers” who were “taken into Cawnpore and sold by public auction and were treated with the highest indignity.”⁹⁷ The *Richmond Whig* reprinted a story from the London *Times* that claimed that rebel leader Nena Sahib had sold white women “openly in the bazaars to his soldiers.”⁹⁸ Slaveholders were accustomed to public auctions in which the bodies of enslaved African Americans were traded.

Southern slaveholders were acutely aware of the history of slave rebellion in the South.⁹⁹ Nat Turner’s rebellion of 1831 had sent shockwaves throughout the South and, despite having occurred three decades earlier, it still loomed large in slaveholders’ minds. In Southampton, Virginia, Turner had gathered the support of seventy enslaved people and killed somewhere between fifty-five and sixty-five white people, including women and children. The rebellion caused immense fear throughout the South, with neighbouring states experiencing widespread rumours and panic.¹⁰⁰ In the subsequent 1831 publication of the “Confessions of Nat Turner,” Thomas Gray, a lawyer who met Turner and noted down his apparent confession, provided an introduction:

a gloomy fanatic was revolving in the recesses of his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind, schemes of indiscriminate massacre to the whites. Schemes too fearfully executed as far as his fiendish band proceeded in their desolating march. No cry for mercy penetrated their filthy bosoms. No acts of remembered kindness made the least impression upon these remorseless murderers. Men, women and children, from hoary age to helpless infancy were involved in the same cruel fate. Never did a band of savages do their work of death more unsparingly.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Timothy J. Lockley, *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

⁹⁷ Taken from accounts printed in the following pieces: “Aspect of Affairs in India,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 11 Sept. 1857; “News from Europe,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 17 Sept. 1857; “News from Europe,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 18 Sept. 1857.

⁹⁸ “Barbarism of the Hindoos,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 18 Sept. 1857.

⁹⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 155.

¹⁰⁰ There is an extensive literature on Nat Turner’s Rebellion. See, for example, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); David F. Allmendinger, *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion* (New York: Dover Publications, 2006; first published 1966).

¹⁰¹ Thomas R. Gray, “The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA,” in Aptheker, *Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion*, 127–51, 130.

Similarities can be seen in the way that southern press content discussed the Indian Uprising. Southern editors reprinted stories from the British press, most of which focussed on the brutality of the rebels. Many reports lay great emphasis on the rebels' indiscriminate killing of Europeans "without regard to age or sex."¹⁰² The New Orleans *Daily True Delta* related that during the siege of Delhi, "the Sepoys took all the wounded Europeans they could catch and burnt them alive!"¹⁰³ The *Richmond Whig* described how

children have been compelled to eat the quivering flesh of their murdered parents, after which they were literally torn asunder by the laughing fiends who surrounded them. Men in many instances have been mutilated, and, before absolutely killed, have had to gaze upon the last dishonour of their wives and daughters previous to being put to death.¹⁰⁴

The editor of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* exclaimed that

not a mail crosses the Atlantic that does not bring us the most appalling details of the barbarities inflicted upon English men, women and children by the Sepoy insurgents. The atrocities and enormities committed by the mutineers surpass all that have ever before been related as the suggestions of savage fury and evince a ghastly refinement in cruelty and barbarity that the human imagination has never before dreamed of.¹⁰⁵

The *Charleston Mercury* reprinted a piece from the London *Times* which referred to the "tiger-like ferocity of the Indian" and the "indiscriminate massacre of the Europeans ... carried out in a manner the most remorseless."¹⁰⁶ The *Charleston Courier* printed news that "about six hundred Englishmen, women and children have been put to death ... in the most terrible way. The females were violated, tortured, ripped open; the children were butchered or thrown into the fire, and the men cut to pieces."¹⁰⁷ Such shocking and vivid images of violence against fellow white people must have come as a shock to southern readers.¹⁰⁸

There are numerous examples of the reprinting of articles that focussed particularly on the violence committed against vulnerable women and children. As Alison Blunt has highlighted, British newspaper accounts of the uprising

¹⁰² See, for example, "Telegraphic News," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 11 July 1857; "Later from Europe," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 8 July 1857. Similar comments can be found in many articles, for example: "No Tenderness Was Shown to Sex, No Reverence to Age," in "The Anti-English Mutiny in India," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 15 July 1857.

¹⁰³ "The War in India," *Daily True Delta* (New Orleans, LA), 3 Jan. 1858.

¹⁰⁴ "The Recapture of Cawnpore," *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 6 Oct. 1857.

¹⁰⁵ "British Policy in India," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 3 Oct. 1857.

¹⁰⁶ "The Anti-English Mutiny in India," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 15 July 1857.

¹⁰⁷ "From Europe," *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 16 Sept. 1857.

¹⁰⁸ "The War in India," *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 6 Oct. 1857.

focussed on the fate of white women. The severity of the events “came to be embodied” by the defilement of the bodies and homes of British women.¹⁰⁹ The *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer* printed a letter from a clergyman in Bangalore who described how the rebels had taken

[f]orty-eight females, most of them girls of from ten to fourteen, many delicately nurtured ladies – violated them, and kept them for the base purpose of the heads of the insurrection for a whole week. At the end of that time they made them strip themselves, and gave them up to the lowest of the people, to abuse in broad daylight in the streets of Delhi. They then commenced the work of torturing them to death, cutting off their breasts, fingers and noses and leaving them to die.¹¹⁰

Striking similarities exist between this letter from India and the letter from Columbus (Colorado County, Texas) reprinted from the *Galveston News* by the *New York Herald*, which described the “Contemplated Servile Rising in Texas” in September 1856. According to this letter, slaves had “a well organized and systematized plan for the murder of our entire white population, with the exception of the young ladies, who were to be taken captives and made the wives of the diabolical murderers of their parents and friends.”¹¹¹ Reports of the events in India came only months after anxieties had abounded that white southern women were under threat from the enslaved black population. Slaveholders must have noticed perceived racial parallels between their own situation and that of the British in India. Newspaper coverage of major southern slave rebellions and conspiracies included the recurring theme of a discourse of racial panic, which often focussed concern over the possibility of sexual violence against white women.¹¹² As Douglas Egerton remarks about the 1856 panics, “as was typical with other North American slave scares, white men found it easier to believe that potential rebels desired white women than admit that blacks hoped to gain freedom and political equality.”¹¹³

The focus on the atrocities against women in particular would have touched a raw nerve amongst the southern slaveholding readers who feared the prospect of violence against their own women and children. For southern readers, honour was an important guiding principle in life, and the fear of what slave rebellion might mean for white females may have been contemplated

¹⁰⁹ Alison Blunt, “Embodying War: British Women and Domestic Defilement in the Indian ‘Mutiny,’ 1857–8,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26, 3 (2000), 403–28, 403.

¹¹⁰ “The Atrocities at Delhi,” *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer* (Memphis, TN), 20 Sept. 1857.

¹¹¹ “The Contemplated Servile Rising in Texas,” *New York Herald*, 22 Sept. 1856, also cited in Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election,” 40.

¹¹² Gabriel, *The Press and the Slavery in America*, 106. See also Joshua D. Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 106. ¹¹³ Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election,” 40.

when reading the stories of atrocities in India.¹¹⁴ This was especially true as the British press often referred to the violence against women in terms of notions of female honour. For example, the *Charleston Courier* reprinted a piece which referred to the “valuable lives and the honor of English women.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, the *Charleston Mercury* contained news of British troops discovering the “naked, mutilated, and dishonoured remains almost still warm, of about two hundred women and infants.”¹¹⁶ Both the *Charleston Mercury* and Milledgeville’s *Federal Union* printed an account of the atrocities in Meerut:

The frantic rebels now turned upon the English residents of the station, with the ferocity of tigers ... the wives and children of the English residents were flying in terror before the blood-thirsty Sepoys ... The defenceless women and innocent children were not only butchered, in attempting to escape from the burning dwellings, but their bodies were horribly mutilated and cut in pieces on the highway, by these Hindoo savages ... All the savage atrocities at Meerut were repeated, with tenfold madness, on the Christian women and children in Delhi.¹¹⁷

The *Times-Picayune* printed telegraphic news about the events at Cawnpore, in which “the women were stripped naked, beheaded and thrown into a well and their children hurled down alive upon their mangled bodies.”¹¹⁸ To this account, the *Charleston Mercury* and *Richmond Whig* added further lurid description of the “soul-harrowing spectacle,” also describing how European children were “hurled down alive upon their butchered mothers, whose blood reeked on their mangled bodies.”¹¹⁹

Wilmington’s (North Carolina) *Daily Journal* also printed an account of the capture of 126 British women and children near Cawnpore, referring to how a rebel took “an infant of a month old ... from its mother’s breast, pretended to fondle and then cut it to pieces.” Southern slaveholders may have remembered the moment in Turner’s “confession” when, describing the murder of his master’s family, Turner mentioned how “there was a little

¹¹⁴ On southern honour in general see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹¹⁵ “Cawnpore and Lucknow,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 17 Nov. 1857. For more on concern for elite white women see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*, 138–39. For more on southern white fear of Black men as a sexual threat to white women see Ronald Takaki, “The Black Child-Savage in Antebellum America,” in G. B. Nash and R. Weiss, eds., *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 27–44, 41.

¹¹⁶ “Correspondence of the NY Commercial Advertiser,” *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 6 Oct. 1857.

¹¹⁷ “The Revolt in India,” *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 18 July 1857; “The Revolt in India,” *Federal Union* (Milledgeville, GA), 28 July 1857.

¹¹⁸ “By Steamship Arabia,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 9 Oct. 1857.

¹¹⁹ “Further by the Jura,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 2 Oct. 1857; “Additional by the Jura,” *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 2 Oct. 1857.

infant sleeping in a cradle, that was forgotten, until we had left the house and gone some distance, when Henry and Will returned and killed it.”¹²⁰ Thomas Gray also noted that Turner had described the details of his killing spree, revealing how he “sometimes got in sight in time to see the work of death completed, viewed the mangled bodies as they lay, in silent satisfaction, and immediately started in quest of other victims.”¹²¹

Southern slaveholders were accustomed to writing their own journals and so reprints of journal accounts in the press may have given readers an emotional connection with the writer. The *Richmond Whig* reprinted an article from the *London Times* referring to a journal extract found in the “barrack where the European inhabitants took refuge and were besieged.” “It is scarcely to be read without tears, as in simple language it notes day after day the death of this or that member of the family of the writer – ‘Annie died, Mamma died’ and then abruptly ceases.”¹²² Another journal was referenced in Milledgeville’s *Southern Recorder*, which reprinted from the *London Chronicle* a long extract from the writings of Mrs. Murray, the wife of Sergeant Major Murray, who had witnessed the Cawnpore massacre. The account is yet another example of the narration of explicit and violent scenes, in which white women and children were brutally murdered and tortured. Describing how young European children were shot by the rebels, followed by all the males in the garrison, including her husband and brother, Mrs. Murray went on to describe how

[t]he women all, high and low, were stripped in open air, a piece of blue cloth of hardly three cubits and less than a cubit in breadth was given to each woman just to cover herself. Then followed the massacre of the children, and I can, without any exaggeration confidently declare that no less than 300 of the innocent angels were destroyed ...

Such explicit detail of the murder of children must have been shocking to southern slaveholding readers, who read Mrs. Murray’s account of how white children were “bayoneted, shot, dashed on the ground and trampled under foot.” Mrs. Murray went further in her descriptions of violence, describing how her grandsons were both killed, and how her two daughters-in-law, Lewsa and Santa, who were both pregnant, were also killed. Santa, she explains, “being very far advanced” in her pregnancy, “was ripped open and the child came out of her womb, which was cut on the spot.”¹²³ Such scenes of white motherhood under attack by those of a subordinate race must have hit at the heart of any white-supremacist society.

¹²⁰ “The Revolt in India,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 11 Sept. 1857; Gray, “The Confessions of Nat Turner,” 139–40.

¹²¹ Gray, “The Confessions of Nat Turner,” 142.

¹²² “General Havelock’s Operations,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 20 Oct. 1857.

¹²³ “Another Horrible Story,” *Southern Recorder* (Milledgeville, GA), 5 Oct. 1858.

SUPPORT FOR THE RESUMPTION OF WHITE CONTROL

The idea of the global colour line can be read into news reports and editorials, as can the notion of white power maintaining its control over the “darker races.” Elizabeth Kelly Gray has argued that supporters of southern slavery used the uprising in India as an example of why firm control needed to be maintained over southern slaves.¹²⁴ Many slaveholders believed that the “purity of whites” would be threatened by the demise of slavery and a violent race war would spread across the South.¹²⁵ This was especially frightening to slaveholders as pro-slavery ideology encouraged the idea that as a result of emancipation, slaves, who were contented and “civilised” under the progressive guidance and firm hand of their masters, would regress to the “natural” state of barbarism and savagery they had apparently experienced in Africa.¹²⁶ Bender has shown how, throughout the British Empire, narratives of the perceived “mutiny” represented the colonized as innately barbaric, as demonstrated in the violence committed against the British, whereas British violence was explained as the only sensible option for regaining control.¹²⁷ In the southern press’s reporting of how the Indian Uprising was contained and defeated, slaveholders would have recognized the need to maintain the power of the southern slaveholding system in order to avoid similar scenes occurring in the South. Indeed, newspaper coverage of slave rebellions or threats of black resistance in the South included accounts of similarly violent responses from white authorities.¹²⁸

White southern slaveholders might have been encouraged in their belief that they must maintain their own power at a time when anxieties abounded from the perceived threat of northern abolitionists. This encouragement was based upon a global white-supremacist underpinning in much of what was written in both the British and southern presses. Other papers allude to the same thing. The *Alexandria Gazette*, reporting on the defeat of the rebels in Delhi, remarked, “The great feature of the late foreign news is the fall of Delhi, of which the British are again masters.”¹²⁹ The *Charleston Mercury*, reprinting from the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, referred to the way in which the Sepoy rebels and Nena Sahib “hastily fled back through Cawnpore, the scene of their late atrocities,” leaving the British general Havelock “to reoccupy it as its undisputed master.”¹³⁰ The *Daily Journal*, reprinting from the *London Times*, pressed the notion of maintaining control

¹²⁴ Gray, “Whisper to Him the Word ‘India,’” 381.

¹²⁵ Oakes, *The Ruling Race*, 233.

¹²⁶ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*, 109.

¹²⁷ Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, 4.

¹²⁸ Gabriel, *The Press and Slavery in America*, 110.

¹²⁹ “The Fall of Delhi,” *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), 16 Nov. 1857.

¹³⁰ “Correspondence of NY Commercial Advertiser,” *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), 6 Oct. 1857.

over a subordinate group when it exclaimed that “the moment has arrived for action – sharp, stern and decisive ... in the first place the mutiny must be suppressed and in such a manner as shall impress the minds of the natives with the nature of the power they have defied.”¹³¹

Wilmington’s (North Carolina) *Daily Journal* reprinted an article from the *Richmond South*, which seems to declare an understanding of Britain’s violent retribution based upon what had been inflicted by the rebel Sepoys upon “the dominant race.” The writer declares that the English soldier “is suppressing a mutiny; he is contending with rebels and with rebels who have aggravated the guilt of treason by incredible outrages upon the dominant race.” The writer remains confident that “England’s ascendancy will be re-established in India without difficulty and on a more solid basis than ever.”¹³² The *Times–Picayune*, reporting on events in India in September 1857, described the “increasing confidence of the successful rebels themselves and the influence of their example and counsel upon a bigoted and priest ridden race.” The notion of a rightfully insubordinate race of people can be seen here, and once again, the idea of the British as the “natural” benevolent masters of Indians can be seen as the article progresses:

The general feeling of personal insecurity in a state of things so uncertain and among so fanatical and barbarous a people; just and reasonable fear and alarm for the personal safety of family and friends at a distance, or it may be, which is far worse, at home, their brutal insult beneath the very eye of their natural protector.¹³³

Whilst many newspapers alluded to the need for the British to maintain power over a subordinate race of people, one paper, the *Richmond Whig*, was explicit in its support of the British. An editorial in September 1857 argued strongly that the British would be able to crush the rebellion: “The question has been asked, will England be able to put down this insurrection? We ask in turn, why not? ... Her sons are descended of a race the most persevering, the most indomitable.” In referring to the uprising as an “insurrection,” and in the editor’s belief in the racial superiority of the British compared with the Sepoy rebels, the South’s own awareness of the threat of slave revolt is expressed. The editor goes on to say that “England will take severe vengeance for the atrocious cruelties to which her children have been subject in India, and she will lay the foundation of her power too deep to be shaken again.”¹³⁴ The following month, the paper noted that “the authority of Great Britain over her Indian possessions arises from no compact with the governed. It was obtained by the sword,

¹³¹ “From the London Times,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 13 July 1857.

¹³² “The Fall of Delhi – Aspects of Affairs in India,” *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 18 Nov. 1857.

¹³³ “Affairs in India,” *Times–Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), 6 Sept. 1857.

¹³⁴ “The Troubles in India,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 11 Sept. 1857.

and by the sword it has been and must be maintained.”¹³⁵ A belief in the necessity of a superior race to forcefully rule over those deemed racially inferior to them, for the supposed benefit of those below the colour line, would have met with understanding from southern slaveholders.

By October 1857, the *Richmond Whig* was exclaiming that England would have no problem dealing with the Sepoy rebels as “Old England’s day is not come yet.” The editor is highly critical of the rebels, declaring,

When she [England] sinks, it will not be under the blows of these pure patriots, who inaugurate the new millennium by murdering unarmed men, violating women and then cutting their throats, cutting to pieces mothers, and forcing their children to eat their flesh, dashing infants against the wall, to prove how worthy they are of the sacred boon of political freedom?

A clear solidarity with England is expressed by the editor, who remarks that “he must have a very contracted notion of England’s power, who believes her incapable of overthrowing 250,000 Sepoys!”¹³⁶ Emotive language and the vivid description of scenes of violence are used by the editor to make his point more powerful. Portraying events of this kind must have raised the prospect of similar violence in the South in the minds of many slaveholding readers.

COMPARING INDIA AND THE SOUTH: “THE CLASS TO WHICH THE SLAVEHOLDER BELONGS ... IS THE CLASS TO WHICH THE ENGLISHMAN BELONGS”

Adding to a growing sense of racial solidarity with the British, an editorial in the *Richmond Whig* in October 1857 entitled “Sepoy Sympathy” is explicit in its comparison between the events in India and Virginia’s own history of slave rebellion:

We believe the British prints, both in England and in India, are perfectly correct in the declarations which they are continually making, that the world has never witnessed such atrocities as those which have been perpetrated in India, since the beginning of the present revolt ... Even the insurrection of the slave population in San Domingo was a mild and merciful movement in comparison ... The British in India, are placed in almost the identical position, morally, that we are placed in here in Virginia. Physically, the difference is that we are the more numerous class as compared with the inferior race which we govern, while the English in Hindostan are but as one to several thousand of the Hindoos. But in both cases, a great, powerful, intellectual race holds in subjection one which is inferior to it in all mental and moral attributes. The class to which the slaveholder belongs in Virginia, is the class to which the Englishman belongs in India.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ “Proselyting in India,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 2 Oct. 1857.

¹³⁶ “England to Be Used Up,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 13 Oct. 1857.

¹³⁷ “Sepoy Sympathy,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 16 Oct. 1857.

The global colour line is expressed explicitly here, with the southern slaveholder and white “Englishman” at the top of a racial hierarchy. The editorial ends with a forceful demand that the issue of whether one empathizes with the British or not was

well worthy of every southern man’s consideration. He may hate Great Britain as much as he may think proper. He may take sides with Russia against her, because the Russians though somewhat barbarous, and living under a despotism, are white men. But we suggest that when he sympathizes with the Sepoys, he takes sides against his own cause.¹³⁸

This “cause,” of course, was that of the maintenance of the institution of slavery. It is quite clear from what the editor says in regard to Russians being “white men” that a very clear notion of the global colour line is being expressed, in which southern slaveholders should be in unity with other white men across the world, in pursuit of their racially superior destiny.

The *Richmond Whig*, in particular, expressed its sympathy for the British in its editorials and made direct comparisons between the slaveholding South and the British in India. While its editor was explicit in this regard, the readership of other southern newspapers received similar underlying messages, which fed into deep-seated fears of slave rebelliousness and highlighted the possible fragility of the slaveholding system. Many descriptions in the British press would have struck a chord with southern slaveholders, particularly the way in which the global colour line could be read into much of what was printed and reprinted in the southern press.

We can gain an indication of the comparison that slaveholders may have drawn between the events in India and the possibility of slave rebellion at home, given what we know of Mary Chesnut, the southern diarist. After watching an 1862 performance of Dion Boucicault’s play *Jessie Brown: or, the Relief of Lucknow* in Washington, DC, Chesnut exclaimed in her diary in early July 1862,

I read a book called “Wife and Ward” the scene laid at the siege of Cawnpore. Who knows what similar horrors may lie in wait for us? When I saw the siege of Lucknow in that little theatre at Washington, what a thrill of terror ran through me as those yellow and black brutes came jumping over the parapets! These faces were like so many of the same sort at home. To be sure, John Brown had failed to fire their hearts, and they saw no cause to rise and burn and murder us all – like the women and children were treated in the Indian Mutiny. But how long would they resist the seductive and irresistible call “only rise, kill, and be free?”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 5 July 1862 entry, at 409.

In another diary entry soon after, making reference to reading the account of an English journalist in India during the conflict, Chesnut remarks, “Saintly folks, those English, when their blood is up. Sepoys and blacks we do not expect anything better from.”¹⁴⁰ Chesnut outlines what she considers to be a clear racial divide between white people on the one hand and Sepoys and African Americans on the other. When southern slaveholders read the news from India, the powerful narrative of a global colour line might very well have made them think, as Mary Chesnut did a few years later, “These faces were like so many of the same sort at home.” It would have been difficult for southern slaveholding newspaper readers *not* to have had their heads filled with imagery with which to draw such parallels. Indeed, as elite white southerners tried to soothe their fears of slave rebellion and boost their faith in the trustworthiness of their slaves, seeing parallels in the “faces” not only highlighted a rebellious racial underclass in slaves and Sepoys but, by implication, drew attention to the white faces of those butchered and violated.

The belief in the trustworthiness of slaves was of vital importance to the maintenance of the system of slavery. Slaveholders wished to present slavery as a benevolent institution in which paternalism ruled. The slaveholder took care of the whole family, white and black, and slaves were happy. In reality, this romanticized picture only existed in the minds of slaveholders, who perpetuated the myth because they needed to justify an exploitative system.¹⁴¹ The fear and anxiety that their otherwise loyal slaves might rebel may have been intensified by the “warning signs” indicated in the news from India in which accounts of the events were framed in paternalistic terms familiar to southern slaveholders. Indeed, a main narrative arc running through many British newspaper accounts displayed “scenes of domestic horror” and the “sanctity of domesticity disregarded.” This was linked to a theme of betrayal that runs throughout many of the accounts that situates the Indian rebels as ungrateful to the British who had cared for them.¹⁴²

News accounts described the plotting of those deemed to be loyal to the British. The *Charleston Courier* reported that “only the day before their outbreak the Sepoys appealed to their officers to recall their wives and families from the hills, where they had been sent for safety and even to the last moment these miscreants swore to protect their officers to the death.”¹⁴³ The *Richmond Whig* reprinted from the London *Times* a report on the statement by Dr. Hay, an American missionary in India, who claimed that “it was

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁴¹ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*.

¹⁴² Andrea Kaston Tange, “Maternity Betrayed: Circulating Images of English Motherhood in India, 1857–1858,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 35, 2 (2013), 187–215, 190.

¹⁴³ “From Europe,” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), 1 Sept. 1857.

at one time fully expected that the native Mohammedan servants would rebel in Calcutta. Numbers had been saying to the European children of whom they had charge that all the houses in Calcutta would soon belong to the natives.”¹⁴⁴ Such news reports should be considered in light of the mind-set in which southerners would have read them. Egerton has shown that during the slave panics just months before news arrived from India, the intense feelings of anxiety and paranoia amongst slaveholders meant that suspicion was cast upon the activities of slaves by nervous masters and mistresses who “suddenly regarded trusted domestics as potential assassins.”¹⁴⁵

Alongside the paranoia over the trustworthiness of slaves stood the trope of the powerful black leader of slave rebellion. The memory of Nat Turner lived long in the minds of southern slaveholders. Making the link between Turner and Sahib was an important step in making the metaphorical argument that the uprising represented the dangers posed to slaveholders in the South. In most reports, Nena Sahib was described as a monster. The *Alexandria Gazette*, the *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* and the *Federal Union* all printed an article from the London *Spectator* which described how Nena Sahib should be treated by the British when he was caught. Describing him as a “wild beast,” the author argues he should “live out the term of his natural or unnatural life like a monster without sympathy ... reduced to the condition of a captured beast of prey.”¹⁴⁶ It was not uncommon for reports to refer to him as a “monster” or, as the *Augusta Chronicle* described him, an “inhuman monster.”¹⁴⁷ This was similar to press coverage of slave rebellion in the South in which slave rebels and any white coconspirators were cast as “dire threats to the southern racial order.” Black rebels thus became “objectified and dehumanized” in the press, in such a way that thoroughly justified the killing of rebels.¹⁴⁸ The *Richmond Whig* exclaimed,

It is strange to us ... how any Virginian can sympathize with the atrocities of Delhi, unless he is prepared to sympathize with the massacre of Southampton, or if he thinks Nat Turner was justly hung, does not think that Nena Sahib deserves to be quartered alive ...¹⁴⁹

Here Nena Sahib became a metaphorical black slave rebel in the minds of *Whig* readers, adding to white slaveholders’ fears of the stereotyped armed

¹⁴⁴ “Interesting Statement of Dr. Hay, an American Missionary,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 9 Oct. 1857.

¹⁴⁵ Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election,” 56.

¹⁴⁶ “A Terrible Punishment,” *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), 8 Oct. 1857; “A Terrible Punishment,” *Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer* (Memphis, TN), 14 Oct. 1857; “A Terrible Punishment,” *Federal Union* (Milledgeville, GA), 20 Oct. 1857.

¹⁴⁷ “Nena Sahib,” *Daily Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), 4 Nov. 1857; “Nena Sahib,” *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA), 23 Feb. 1859.

¹⁴⁸ Gabriel, *The Press and the Slavery in America*, 110.

¹⁴⁹ “Sepoy Sympathy,” *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), 16 Oct. 1857.

black male and cementing the metaphorical narrative of the Sepoy uprising as a foil for the prospect of southern slave rebellion. In the explicit comparison between slaves and Sepoy rebels, and between Nat Turner and Nena Sahib, the *Whig* editor makes clear the distinct fears of the white slaveholding elite – that in the current southern system, the slaveholder was equivalent to the British in India.

CONCLUSION: A GLOBAL HIERARCHY OF WHITENESS

The focus upon reports of dreadful atrocities committed against white Europeans in India provided the southern elite readership with images of the spectre of slave uprisings at home. An analysis of southern newspapers shows how the reporting of events in India betrayed a deep-seated fear of slave rebellion within the South. It also serves as an example of the power of the press in amplifying the fears and anxieties of the white slaveholding elite on the eve of secession. This article has drawn attention to the importance of challenging traditional views of American, and specifically southern, exceptionalism. Calling for a greater use of a comparative global approach to the study of the early United States, Rosemarie Zagarri argues that the “global turn will help us to rewrite the history of the early American republic not only as the story of a nation among nations but as of an empire among empires.” Using this approach to look at the Indian Uprising in the southern context allows us to see how “a discourse of white racial superiority extended across the globe,” with similar racial practices emerging in India and the US concurrently.¹⁵⁰ Crucially, as Mediratta has argued, “the Sepoy revolt and its metaphorical travels to the US provide us an interesting lens with which to further complicate the tangled web of nineteenth-century imperialism and help showcase the ways these narratives contributed to consolidating an international imperialist vocabulary around race and insurrection.”¹⁵¹

The southern form of white supremacy was an unstable formation linked inherently to international events beyond the South. This article has stressed how global matters of whiteness ultimately came to structure how the South perceived itself in the lead-up to secession. Despite Anglophobia and fear of abolitionists, southern slaveholders could also find it within themselves to support the British when it came to the maintenance of a global hierarchy of whiteness. This is clearly the case with the sympathy shown towards the British in the case of the Indian Uprising of 1857. News of the uprising was reported and read across a global colour line, which posited the superiority

¹⁵⁰ Zagarri, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn,’” 36.

¹⁵¹ Mediratta, “The Affair of the Greased Cartridge,” 16.

of the white or “European” against the “darker races.” Despite many negative attitudes towards the British, the way in which the southern press largely reported the Indian Uprising by way of drawing parallels with their own situation and reprinting British sensationalist accounts provides us with an example of how competing elite white men, on a global scale, in specific moments, laid their enmity to rest in the face of a potential challenge from those below the colour line. The whiteness of white men mattered, on a global scale, as did the “darkness” of people of colour.

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Rosalyn Narayan is an independent scholar whose research explores the antebellum newspaper press of the American South. Her previous work has appeared in *Slavery & Abolition* and *Civil War History*. Her sincere thanks go to the anonymous *Journal of American Studies* reviewers, who engaged with this work so positively and who clearly spent much time providing incredibly helpful advice and suggestions for strengthening the article. Her thanks also go to the *Journal of American Studies* editorial team, who were patient and understanding in relation to pregnancy sickness and maternity leave. This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, grant number AH/L013452/1.