1 Race, Military Spectacle and the West India Regiments

In 2018, the National Army Museum in London, with the assistance of the British Art Fund, acquired a remarkable painting (Figure 1.1). Dating from the early years of the nineteenth century, its creator unknown, it depicts a private of the 8th West India Regiment (8th WIR). The soldier was a member of the regiment's light company, as indicated by the green plume on his black stovepipe shako headgear. Supposedly consisting of the smallest and quickest men, they were often used to scout, skirmish and operate in looser formations.[1] The private stands to attention in the course of presenting arms, musket with bayonet attached, as though performing a manual drill under the inspection of an unseen superior – and by the viewer of the painting, who undertakes this role.[2] Tents and other uniformed figures can be seen to the soldier's rear, as well as a coastline with sailing vessels and, on the left-hand side, two palm trees that denote that the setting is the Caribbean. The depiction of British Army personnel from the period of French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815), including ordinary rank-and-file, was not uncommon. What is unusual is the ethnicity of the soldier. The West India Regiments were established by Britain in the Caribbean from the mid-1790s as part of the regular army – and uniformed as such. They were *not* colonial auxiliaries. Consolidating some existing units, including African-American men who had fought for the British in the American Revolutionary War (1775–83), their numbers were greatly augmented through the conscription of enslaved African men purchased by the British Army in the late 1790s and early 1800s.

Originally, the 8th WIR had been raised in 1795 when Britain was at war with Revolutionary France across the Caribbean. In April 1802,

[1] *A Private of the 8th West India Regiment*, 1803 (*c*), https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2018-07-13-1, last accessed 29 March 2022; Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *Wellington's Military Machine* (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1989), pp. 24, 40.

[2] *The New Manual and Platoon Exercises, as Practised by His Majesty's Army*, coloured engraving by and after Robert Dighton Snr. (London: Bowles and Carver, 2 January 1795).

Figure 1.1 *A Private of the 8th West India Regiment*, oil painting on canvas, artist unknown (c.1803). Image courtesy of the National Army Museum, London. Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund.

most of its soldiers based at Fort Shirley, located on a promontory in the north of the British colony of Dominica, rose up and killed some of their White officers. The 'mutiny', as the British termed it, was suppressed in a matter of days by a force of White soldiers, leaving around a hundred West India Regiment men dead. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the men of the 8th WIR had been embezzled of their pay and used by their commanding officer, Andrew James Cochrane-Johnstone (1767–1833), who was also the governor of the island, to work on the land he owned near the fort in preparation for the planting of sugarcane. Such treatment, combined with rumours that the regiment was to be disbanded during the period of peace associated with the Treaty of Amiens (1802) and the men re-enslaved, had caused the uprising.[3]

In the aftermath of these events, the 8th WIR was reduced: most of its remaining soldiers were reclassified as 'pioneers' and sent to perform hard labour for White regiments elsewhere in the region, while the rest, deemed not to have been involved, were transferred to other West India Regiments. Johnstone himself was recalled to Britain and would later face a court martial. Meanwhile, the renumbering of the remaining regiments saw the 11th WIR transformed into the new 8th WIR in late 1802. It is unclear whether the private depicted in the oil painting may have been based on a member of the 'old' or 'new' 8th WIR. Yet, although his identity is unknown, this is a naturalistic portrait of an individual man, likely based on the direct experience of a regimental officer. He is presented as a soldier, carrying his weapon and in a military setting. Moreover, representing one of the earliest known visual depictions of the West India Regiments, although one that does not appear to have been reproduced in printed form, the painting is emblematic of a discourse that emerged around the creation of these particular military units and the wider practice of arming men of African descent by the British.

More than a hundred years later, a very different image of a West India Regiment soldier was printed in *The Boy's Own Paper*. Originally appearing in 1879, this was one of the most popular and long-lasting illustrated publications aimed at juveniles.[4] By the early twentieth

[3] Roger Buckley, '"Black Man": The mutiny of the 8th (British) West India Regiment: A microcosm of war and slavery in the Caribbean', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 12 (1980), 52–76; Roger Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795–1815* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 77; Tim Lockley, *Military Medicine and the Making of Race: Life and Death in the West India Regiments, 1795–1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 101–10.

[4] See Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 34. See also Christopher B. Leach,

century, only one West India Regiment remained in existence. In striking contrast with the early nineteenth-century painting, the private is not portrayed wearing the uniform of Britain's Foot Regiments but a wholly different type based on that of France's Zouave soldiers (see Chapter 4). This martial style was applied to the West India Regiments in 1858 at a time when the Zouaves were highly regarded infantrymen, whose uniform signalled a new, looser form of warfare. By the time the print was published in the early twentieth century, however, the West India Regiment looked like an exotic leftover from a bygone military age.

Another difference between the images is that the West India Regiment soldier in Figure 1.2 does not stand alone but is accompanied by twenty-nine other military figures, eleven of them mounted. This body of men was drawn from across the British Empire, including the colonies of Australia and Canada, as well as representatives of the Indian Army. These types of collective martial images became common by the end of the nineteenth century and were emblematic of a mass militarised culture in Britain that was also evident in collectable cards, toy soldiers, jingoistic literature and public pageants. The West India Regiment had featured in the latter too, including at the Diamond Jubilee of 1897, which marked sixty years since Queen Victoria had been crowned (see Chapter 7). While the multiracial grouping of Figure 1.2 articulated imperial fraternity and a sense of unity-in-diversity – a positive spin on the hierarchies of empire – by including a representative of the West India Regiment among this group of 'our empire's defenders', the print was actually performing a sleight of hand. This is because they were part of the regular British Army and *not* colonial units like the Trinidad Light Infantry, represented in Figure 1.2 by the Black soldier and White officer wearing white pith helmets to the left, or the Victoria Ranger sitting with lower legs crossed. This is no minor quibble: in military terms, *the West India Regiment soldier does not belong in this company*. Yet, his presence here not only exemplifies the increasing marginalisation of the West India Regiments in British military-imperial culture from the second half of the nineteenth century especially but also points to an ambiguity about their martial and racial status that had been there from the very start.

Despite differences, there are also similarities between Figures 1.1 and 1.2. The former can be located within a long-standing, proto-ethnographic tradition of the representation of 'indigenous' and non-European peoples little changed since the Renaissance: the figure stands with body and weapons posed for display on a shallow foreground, while

'Scarlet and khaki, fire and steel: Representations of warfare in British mass culture, 1870–1914', PhD thesis, Simon Fraser (2009), p. 28.

Figure 1.2 Detail from *Types of Our Empire's Defenders*, *The Boy's Own Paper*, 26 October 1912. Image from author's own collection, courtesy of Don Cribbs.

other figures in the landscape echo the main subject and lend a sense of scale.[5] Likewise, the title of Figure 1.2 – *Types of Our Empire's Defenders* – evokes an anthropological perspective on exotic difference, and both privates stand in a formal pose as though ready for inspection, rather than action. In this book, it will be argued that the image of West India Regiment soldiers as passive figures, whose martial value had to be

[5] Sarah Thomas, *Witnessing Slavery: Art and Travel in the Age of Abolition* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2019), p. 117; Elmer Kolfin, 'Becoming human: The iconography of black slavery in French, British and Dutch book illustrations, c.1600–c.1800' in Elizabeth McGrath (eds.), *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem* (London: Nino Aragno Editore, 2012), pp. 253–96.

continually assessed, is a recurrent feature of their visual and textual representation – and something that had real consequences for how they were used militarily and viewed by the wider public over the nineteenth century.

Soldiers of Uncertain Rank is concerned with the changing image of soldiers of African descent who fought for Britain across its empire and specifically the West India Regiments that served in the Caribbean and West Africa. Prior to the formal abolition of the British trade in enslaved Africans in 1807, the bulk of recruits were enslaved African men and boys purchased from traders; subsequently, so-called Liberated Africans captured by the Royal Navy became a new source of soldiers. Owing to both their origins in slavery and a rank-and-file overwhelmingly composed of men of African descent, the history of the regiments is unique in the British Army. Commanded by White officers, they represented an idealised racial hierarchy and the Black soldiers were often spoken of in a highly paternalistic manner. Yet the West India Regiments' men enjoyed close equality with other soldiers in British regiments, as encapsulated by the original uniform itself (Figure 1.1). At the same time, they had complex relations with other people of African descent, be it enslaved people in the Caribbean until the 1830s and Black civilians thereafter or various African peoples after the units were posted to the continent from the 1820s. As such, the West India Regiments held an ambiguous place within British imperial and military discourses. By focusing on these soldiers of uncertain rank, this book thus examines a complex, underexplored and illuminating figure that sat at the intersection of nineteenth-century debates about slavery and freedom, racial difference, Britishness, savagery and civilisation, and military service and heroism.

'Troops of This Nature'

In April 1795, Britain's Secretary of War authorised the raising of 'two corps of mulattoes or Negroes' of one thousand rank-and-file each.[6] The request had come from Lieutenant-General Sir John Vaughan (1731–95), who had taken overall military command in the Caribbean in October 1794. He was convinced that Britain's military fortunes in the region could only be improved by tapping new sources of military personnel. Vaughan wrote that

> I have always thought that the climate of the West Indies; the mountainous country of which most of the islands are formed; and in particular the number

[6] Henry Dundas to John Vaughan, 17 April 1795, WO 1/83, TNA, ff. 297–309.

of Blacks which are to be kept in order; required the adoption of some plan, from which we could avail ourselves of the service of the Negroes – The example of the Seapoys (sic) in the East Indies, is a strong proof of what is capable of being effected by Troops of this Nature.[7]

He went on …

I am of the opinion that a corps of one thousand Men, composed of blacks and mulattoes, and commanded by British officers would render more essential service in the Country, than treble the number of Europeans who are unaccustomed to the Climate. And as the Enemy have adopted this measure to recruit their Armies, I think we should pursue a similar plan to meet them on equal terms.[8]

As Vaughan indicated, the impetus for the establishment of the West India Regiments arose not only from the hazard that the environment posed to the health of White troops – or, indeed, the successful precedent represented by the East India Company's use of sepoys.[9] It was also a response to the abolition of slavery in the French Caribbean possessions in February 1794, which left the British both as the prime defenders of colonial slavery in the region and increasingly on the military defensive. As such, the raising of the West India Regiments was a dramatic response to a realignment of the boundaries between slavery and freedom, and the military consequences of this in the Caribbean.

At the same time, the creation of the West India Regiments was also part of a longer history entwining military service and slavery.[10] In the Caribbean itself, Spain had used armed enslaved Africans in its earliest conquests, while England, France and other European powers employed them from the seventeenth century. There was great doubt about this practice among White colonists of the region, however: while experience showed they could be trustworthy and effective, this sat uneasily with hardening racial ideologies in the eighteenth century and the economic self-interest of the enslaving class. Such ambivalence was acute during the Seven Years War (1756–63), when British West Indian colonists were more concerned about enslaved rebellions than French attacks.[11]

[7] Vaughan to Dundas, 25 December 1794, WO 1/83, TNA, ff. 149–53. [8] Ibid.

[9] On the recruitment of sepoy troops, see Christina Welsch, *The Company's Sword: The East India Company and the Politics of Militarism, 1644–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 23–54.

[10] See Christopher L. Brown and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

[11] Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming slaves in the American Revolution' in Brown and Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves*, pp. 180–208; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, p. 1; Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

Nonetheless, there was a great deal of ad hoc arming of enslaved people throughout the eighteenth century, with the greater scale of the conflict seeing ever more use of enslaved (and free) soldiers of African descent in the Caribbean, as well as of other forms of non-European military labour across the globe.[12] This, in turn, set precedents for the British during the American Revolutionary War. Indeed, Philip Morgan and Andrew O'Shaughnessy note that the arming of enslaved men was not the 'radical departure' from the usual practice that is often claimed. Rather it was a 'dangerous expedient, but one resorted to frequently'.[13] For example, the Carolina Corps had been raised in South Carolina towards the end of the American Revolutionary War. Subsequently transferred to the Caribbean, its three hundred rank-and-file were stationed in Grenada in the early 1790s. These men, along with some units of enslaved 'rangers' that were raised in the Windward Islands during the French Revolutionary War, went on to form the cores of the newly established West India Regiments.[14]

Nonetheless, while the use of men of African descent in the Caribbean, free as well as enslaved, in military and pioneering roles was well established by the late eighteenth century, partly due to the expansion of slavery and the relative decline of European populations, these enrolments tended to be for fixed, limited periods. In contrast, the establishment of the West India Regiments as *permanent* units whose mainly Black soldiers – commanded by White officers – were armed, paid, rationed and uniformed (until 1858) along European lines, and that were a *regular part of the British Army* under the control of the War Office, was of huge significance. As such, it represented an 'unprecedented step' in the Caribbean that was bitterly opposed by colonists.[15]

Originally, the British military authorities had three routes in mind for raising soldiers for the regiments: purchases from 'patriotic' West Indian enslavers, volunteers from among the free population of African descent and, if necessary, buying African men directly from transatlantic traders. Yet, this policy could not be implemented: few free people of African

[12] Maria Alessandra Bollettino, '"Of equal or of more service": Black soldiers and the British Empire in the mid-eighteenth-century Caribbean', *Slavery & Abolition*, 38:3 (2017), 510–33. See also Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, pp. 23–54.

[13] Morgan and O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming slaves', pp. 181, 187.

[14] For a discussion, see Gary Sellick, 'Black skin, red coats: The Carolina Corps and Nationalism in the revolutionary British Caribbean', *Slavery & Abolition*, 39:2 (2018), 459–78; Lockley, *Military Medicine*, pp. 22–29; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, pp. 4–6; Martin R. Howard, *Death before Glory: The British Soldier in the West Indies in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2015), pp. 10–14.

[15] Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, pp. 4, 5. This was not the 'sepoy' model adopted by the East India Company. See Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, p. 51.

descent were willing to compromise their freedom by serving in the military and even fewer colonists were ready to sell the enslaved people that army was interested in – the strongest and most reliable – for the price offered. Moreover, the military received little help from the authorities in the various colonies, concerned as they were about the policy of arming of enslaved men. As a result, the only option was to buy enslaved people directly. Indeed, the British government became one of the largest individual buyers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, purchasing more than 13,000 enslaved Africans for the regiments between 1795 and 1808 – about 4 per cent of all enslaved people who arrived in the British Caribbean in this period – at a cost of almost a million pounds sterling.[16]

With renewed fighting in the Caribbean from 1803 and especially as Britain moved towards ending formal participation in the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans in 1807, the military authorities rushed to purchase more for the West India Regiments. Even after 1807, the British decided that the trade would continue to serve their military interests, this time in the form of recruiting from 'Liberated Africans' seized by the Royal Navy.[17] Between 1808 and 1815, approximately 2,500 men were enlisted from a variety of recruiting sources including from among Liberated Africans. There was a drop in demand following the end of war with France, before recruitment picked up again in the 1820s as Britain sought to garrison its West African possessions with African soldiers. This was in addition to efforts to recruit formerly enslaved people in the Caribbean itself. Overall, after slavery was formally ended in the British Empire in the 1830s, the regiments became more African-Caribbean in composition, although there were still enrolments in West Africa.[18]

During their existence of more than 130 years, West India Regiment soldiers served across the Caribbean, including in the continental enclaves of British Honduras (Belize) and British Guiana (Guyana), and also participated in the War of 1812. From the 1820s, they were deployed at Sierra Leone, the Gambia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Lagos

[16] Brian Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve: The Story of the West India Regiments of the British Army* (Antigua: Hansib, 1997), p. 22; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, pp. 55, 56; 'Slave voyages', www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates, last accessed 6 July 2021.

[17] Kyle Prochnow, '"Saving an extraordinary expense to the nation": African recruitment for the West India Regiments in the British Atlantic world', *Atlantic Studies*, 18:2 (2021), 149–71; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, pp. 60, 62.

[18] On efforts at recruitment in Sierra Leone, see Maeve Ryan, *Humanitarian Governance and the Origins of a British Antislavery World System* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022); Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

and elsewhere in West Africa. Numbering twelve at their peak, only a single regiment comprising two battalions remained after 1888.[19] This final regiment was disbanded in 1927. Throughout this history, the martial capabilities of the West India Regiments were often questioned. In the most extreme form in the early years, this was expressed in the intense opposition from White West Indians to their very existence, when armed men of African descent were seen as a danger to the colonies rather than as a military asset. Although such sentiment receded, even decades later there were many, including senior military figures, who expressed scepticism about the value of the regiments.

Despite their length of service, there is much misunderstanding about the West India Regiments, including among historians of the Caribbean. This is evident in repeated references to '*the* British West India regiment' – although there were multiple ones before 1888 – or 'the West Indian regiment', as well as in confusion with the British West Indies Regiment, which was made up of volunteers and established during the First World War.[20] Writing in the 1880s, Alfred B. Ellis, a senior West India Regiment officer and author of the first official history of these units, described their service during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in terms of 'unknown and forgotten skirmishes'.[21] He decried how little public understanding there was of the history and nature of regiments. Yet, as he acknowledged and will be argued here, the confusion around the West India Regiments was not just based on ignorance but was a manifestation of their marginalised status over the long term. Even some military historians usually so attentive to details are often mistaken when it comes to the regiments, while others present their history in ways that serve to sideline them. For example, in his account of the British Army uniforms of the late Napoleonic Wars, illustrated by Charles Hamilton Smith's contemporaneous *Costume of the Army of the British Empire* (see Chapter 3), the prolific military historian Philip J. Haythornthwaite rearranged the plates 'roughly in

[19] West India Regiment soldiers formed part of the garrison at Gibraltar in the late 1810s. See Lockley, *Military Medicine*, *in passim*. Moreover, a third battalion based in St Helena briefly existed from 1897 to 1902.

[20] For a discussion of the BWIR, see Barry Renfrew, *Britain's Black Regiments: Fighting for Empire and Equality* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2020); Glenford D. Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2002); Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of a National Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Christopher Reid, 'Islands at war: The British West Indian experience of the First World War, 1914–1927', PhD thesis, Memorial University (2021).

[21] Alfred B. Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1885), p. 164.

order of regimental seniority' and relegated the West India Regiments to the section on 'Foreign Regiments', even though he admitted they were not 'foreign *per se*'.[22] As with Figure 1.2, the West India Regiment was put in the wrong (military) place. If they were not 'foreign *per se*', why do this? As *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank* will show, such ambiguity, marginalisation and symbolic redeployment on the basis of non-military criteria recur in the history of the West India Regiments.

Military Spectacle and Martial Hybridity

This book is concerned with the changing visual and textual image of the West India Regiments, particularly their ordinary soldiers who were overwhelmingly of African descent, as well as the circulation of representations of them across the British Empire, the efforts made to manage this image and its consequences for how they were used militarily. As such, it is not a general history of the regiments but rather is situated at the confluence of cultural, imperial and military history. As already noted, the existing historiography of the West India Regiments was inaugurated by 'insider' accounts written by commanding officers in the late nineteenth century that sought to defend and augment their reputation, a trend that extends to the more recent 'recuperative' histories. Such work has primarily been concerned with demonstrating the value and importance of the regiments, and especially their Black personnel, in the face of prejudice, ignorance and racism, and largely focuses on military, social and political matters.[23] More recently, Tim Lockley has taken the historiography in a new direction by examining the medicalised ideas about race that circulated around the regiments.[24] *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank* is also concerned with ideas of race associated with the West India Regiments, though as embodied in their changing image within wider British military-imperial culture. In this way, it is the first cultural history of the regiments.

[22] See Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *Wellington's Army: Uniforms of the British Soldier, 1812–1815* (Barnsley: Greenhill, 2002), pp. 11, 22.

[23] Ellis, *The History*; James Caulfeild, *One Hundred Years' History of the 2nd Batt. West India Regiment* (London: Forster Groom & Co., 1899); Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*; Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve*; Renfrew, *Britain's Black Regiments*.

[24] Lockley, *Military Medicine*. See also Michael Joseph, 'Military officers, tropical medicine, and racial thought in the formation of the West India Regiments, 1793–1802', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 72:2 (2017), 142–65; Rana A. Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780–1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

Cultural approaches to British military and imperial history are not new.[25] The days when the fields of 'new imperial' and military history remained distant are past, with the themes of identity, difference and representation, as well as the connection between military actions and popular perceptions, all receiving increasing attention.[26] Such work has often attended to the image of soldiers, and while military uniforms and other visual elements such as flags and medals have been among the more traditional concerns of military historians, they have also gained increased attention from historians of dress and fashion.[27] A useful concept when considering such themes is Scott Myerly's notion of 'military spectacle'.[28] Myerly uses this to refer to the distinctive clothing, equipment, badges, colours (military flags and standards), as well as the music, ceremonies and rituals, forms of address and bodily deportment, associated with the military. These elements were experienced by soldiers every day and Myerly argues that the manipulation of military

[25] Such approaches have been particularly productive in the fields of naval and maritime history. See, for example, Karen Downing, Johnathan Thayer and Joanne Begiato (eds.), *Negotiating Masculinities and Modernity in the Maritime World, 1815–1940: A Sailor's Progress?* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) – though the focus is more on the interplay of gender, class and nation, rather than race.

[26] See, for example, Welsch, *The Company's Sword*; Michael Brown, Anna Maria Barry and Joanne Begiato (eds.), *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele and Jane Rendall (eds.), *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775–1830* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Joseph Clarke and John Horne (eds.), *Militarized Cultural Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2018); Thomas S. Alber, *Hinterland Warriors and Military Dress: European Empires and Exotic Uniforms* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Heather Streets-Salter, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 5–6. For a wider discussion, see Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, 'Introduction' in Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack (eds.), *Britain's Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715–1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 1–16. The global wars of the twentieth century have been the main focus of such work. See, for example, Anna Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Santanu Das, Anna Maguire and Daniel Steinbach (eds.), *Colonial Encounters in a Time of Global Conflict, 1914–1918* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[27] John Mollo, *Military Fashion: Comparative History of the Uniforms of the Great Armies from the 17th Century to the First World War* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972); Haythornthwaite, *Wellington's Army*. See also the 'Men-at-Arms' series published by Osprey. For an example of recent research that uses uniforms as a way of exploring military identities, see Holly Winter, 'Militaristic masculinity and material culture in the armies in India, 1840–1900', PhD thesis, University of Warwick (2022).

[28] Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Myerly's ideas have been underutilised by later scholars. For an exception, see Catriona Kennedy, 'John Bull into battle: Military masculinity and the British Army officer during the Napoleonic Wars' in Hagemann et al. (eds.), *Gender, War and Politics*, pp. 127–46.

spectacle and its 'symbolic associations' was a crucial element of managing army discipline and morale, as well as facilitating recruitment through the appeal to a 'sense of male prowess, patriotism, and idealism'. Military spectacle, particularly the uniform, served to mark the soldier off from the wider population. It was brought to public attention through reviews and pageants, as well as being represented in a range of visual forms (such as Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In this way, military spectacle exerted a 'strong psychological and emotional influence' on the soldiers themselves and also shaped how they were viewed by others.[29] As such, Myerly's notion speaks to wider themes of visual culture, practice, embodiment and experience in a military context.

Myerly's substantive focus is on the British Army in the first half of the nineteenth century, up to and including the Crimean War (1853–56). He argues that in this period, British public attitudes to soldiers were somewhat contradictory, encompassing both pride in national military honour and glory but also fear and resentment because of the role that soldiers played in suppressing domestic dissent. Although Myerly does refer in passing to soldiers who were not White and British, the place of military spectacle in the British Empire is beyond his scope, something that reflects a broader tendency in cultural histories of the British Army to view it as essentially White.[30] Nonetheless, Myerly's ideas are of great value when it comes to examining the image of the regiments because the concept of military spectacle is located at the interface of this book's key concerns: how the soldiers were viewed, how this image was informed by and impacted on their military actions and use, and how they viewed themselves.[31]

The military spectacle of the West India Regiments was a locus for a range of projects and discourses directed towards the soldiers themselves and, as such, was a key part of their fashioning into martial subjects. The decision to adorn the men in what was essentially the military spectacle of the Foot Regiments that made up the bulk of the British Army will be discussed in Chapter 3. However, it is important to understand this as part of a calculation by the British military authorities by which they sought to manage and secure the loyalty, or at least the compliance, of Black soldiers to their cause in the face of a wider range of freedoms that had been offered to and seized by people of African descent elsewhere in

[29] Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, pp. 8, 10, 53. See also Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, 'Defining soldiers: Britain's military, c.1740–1815', *War in History*, 20:2 (2013), 144–59, pp. 156–57.

[30] Downing et al., *Negotiating Masculinities*; Brown et al., *Martial Masculinities*.

[31] He also makes some passing references to the West India Regiments. See Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, pp. 37, 215 (note 46).

the late eighteenth-century Caribbean. The creation of the West India Regiments was an act of desperation as Britain saw its armed forces beaten back across the region by the multiethnic revolutionary alliances associated with the Haitian and French Revolutions, and crippled by sickness. In this context, Figure 1.1 was as radical an image as a pro-slavery, counter-revolutionary power could possibly create – a spectacular and symbolic 'gift' in lieu of more substantive freedoms.[32] The military spectacle depicted here was also intended to distance and differentiate the soldiers of the regiments from the wider population of people of African descent. Indeed, when the West India Regiments were first established, contemporary observers were certain that military service would change how the men thought of themselves. As George Pinckard, a regimental surgeon then in Barbados, put it,

> may it not instruct them that they are men; and that a single step might ensure to them the rights of their common nature? Compared to slavery the restrictions of military discipline are as exquisite freedom; and the negro who has once tasted it cannot be expected to return quietly to the yoke, and again expose his back to the whip.[33]

The question of whether the men *internalised* British military discipline is an important one, even though the perspective of the soldiers themselves is very difficult to access. Too often we have opinions allotted to them, as with Pinckard, especially by their officers. As such, while military subalterns – or at least commanding officers – speak freely, the ordinary soldiers' views remain private.[34] Archival silence does not mean passivity, however. Writing more widely of military service, Erik-Jan Zürcher insists that soldiers had agency, with life in the army offering

[32] On the idea of freedom from slavery as a gift, see Marcus Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

[33] George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies: Written during the Expedition under the Command of the Late General Sir R. Abercrombie…* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1806), vol. 2, p. 130. Writing of the conscription of enslaved people more broadly, Peter Voelz asks '[h]ow did it change the black recruit's view of himself, and was there a change in the views of whites toward him, and of slaves, on seeing the black soldiers towards themselves?' See Peter Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 8.

[34] Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, pp. 15–19. The question of why soldiers from the colonies would fight for the imperial power has received increasing attention, particularly in relation to the global wars of the twentieth century. See, for example, Tarak Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Anthony King, 'Why did they fight? Towards a sociology of subaltern soldiers', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33: 1 (2020), 39–44. See also Vron Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

opportunities for social advancement or material betterment, escape from 'issues at home' or the chance to travel beyond one's immediate locale.[35] While such forms of agency may not have been available to West India Regiment soldiers, not least because of how most of the earliest rank-and-file were bought to serve in the British Army, they were certainly not passive. Indeed, apposite to Pinckard's observation, it is significant that the first mutiny among troops from the West India Regiments, as discussed earlier, occurred amid rumours that the soldiers were to be disarmed and then sold into slavery. That many of the men of the 8th WIR had already been deployed with hoes and used to clear the land near their base, and that the additional pay that should have arisen from such work was irregular, only lent credence to such fears. In the context of an apparent threat to their military status, the men took action. Such mutinies were the exception, however, and the broader success of army discipline and the power exerted by military spectacle was evident in the fact that the men of the West India Regiments largely 'did their duty' in soldiering, killing and dying for Britain across its empire.[36]

The military spectacle of the West India Regiments was also intended to send a message about how they should be viewed by others and thus took on considerable significance in those societies where they served. Military uniform and other martial symbols differentiated soldiers from the civilian population and expressed identity with their comrades.[37] When the soldiers in question were of African descent in colonies characterised by a stark racial hierarchy and where the large majority of people of African descent were enslaved, their military spectacle was a significant, anomalous and hitherto underappreciated element in these societies and their visual culture. In these circumstances, the West India Regiment soldier could be a deeply threatening figure for White colonists. In the early years of the regiments in particular, White West Indians expressed concerns not only about their existence but also about their *appearance*, fearing that even the sight of men of African descent adorned as British soldiers and acting with authority could serve to undermine

[35] Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'Introduction: Understanding changes in military recruitment and employment worldwide' in Erik-Jan Zürcher (ed.), *Fighting for a Living: Comparative History of Military Labour 1500–2000* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 39.

[36] Similarly, writing of such 'martial race' soldiers such as Scottish Highlanders, Sikhs and Gurkhas, Heather Streets-Salter discusses the 'dissonances and harmonies' between image and experience, arguing that the fragmentary evidence available suggests that many accepted or even 'relished' this military identity. See Streets-Salter, *Martial Races*, pp. 190, 191, and pp. 190–224 more generally.

[37] Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*; David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 93.

racial slavery (see Chapter 2).[38] Along with raising doubts about the extent to which the soldiers had truly internalised their martial role, there were frequent calls for Black soldiers to be confined to remote military sites to lessen the threat they might pose to the (visual) regime of slavery. As such, the original figure of the West India Regiment soldier could be seen to embody a kind of 'martial hybridity' – 'slaves in red coats' as Roger Buckley termed them – and represent a destabilising presence in the racialised colonial order. They were figures of 'mimicry' – almost the same as other British regulars but not quite – and 'menace' – almost different from other people of African descent but not quite.[39] By examining this image and the men who embodied it, *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank* provides new insights into the (visual) culture of race, colonial slavery and its legacies. As to what other people of African descent – whether enslaved or free, African or African-Caribbean – thought about the West India Regiments, it is much harder to say because, as with the soldiers themselves, they are often rendered silent by the archive.

Black Soldiers and the War of Representation

The military spectacle of the West India Regiments circulated more broadly within wider discourses of empire when their image was represented visually in newspapers, compendia of military uniforms and the occasional work of art. It was also expressed in print by officers and special correspondents, and viewed by members of the public when the men were on parade and appeared in pageants. *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank* analyses the image of the regiments in relation to wider political, cultural and visual contexts across the nineteenth century, which included the changing conventions of military art and style.[40] The military spectacle of the West India Regiments also needs to be understood in comparison with an array of images of military and non-military figures, including enslaved people of African descent, Maroons, Haitian soldiers and

[38] Later on, the regiments' military chroniclers decried the fact that they were rarely seen in the imperial metropole. Being out of sight, they were also out of mind of the British public who, in consequence, failed to appreciate their efforts or value. See Ellis, *The History*, p. 25.

[39] Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2012, 2nd ed.).

[40] For similar recent work focusing on the French Empire, see Rebecca Peabody, Steven Nelson and Dominic Thomas (eds.), *Visualizing Empire: Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2021). On the representation of Black soldiers in the US context, see Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Smithsonian, 1990), pp. 114–16.

emancipated West Indians, as well as Britain's African antagonists, such as the Asante, other British soldiers and Indian sepoys.[41] By situating the image of the West India Regiments in relation to these other military and non-military figures, this book demonstrates that military spectacle could be an important site for the production, circulation, reception and contestation of racialised discourses. Nor did this image remain unchanged: as Figure 1.2 indicates, the most significant alteration came with a switch to a style of uniform based on France's Zouave soldiers in the late 1850s.[42]

This book is particularly concerned with the place of the contested image of West India Regiment personnel within wider debates about the nature of people of African descent during the 'long' nineteenth century. This was evident in the early decades of their existence – the focus of Chapters 2 and 3 – when representations and counter-representations, particularly by the regiments' commanding officers and West Indian colonists, circulated amid what Catherine Hall has termed the 'war of representation' during the contemporaneous slavery controversy.[43] Those involved in or who benefited from the enslavement of men, women and children of African descent, as well as their defenders, sought to portray them as savage or childlike, requiring enslavement to make them work and keep White people safe. In this way, they claimed that slavery was necessary and even civilising. Their opponents sought to contest this pro-slavery discourse through the mobilisation of sentiment, appeals to shared humanity, and accounts of suffering and cruelty. Articulated through poems, biographical narratives, reports by abolitionist organisations and so on, the Black figure at the heart of anti-slavery discourse was illustrated by the kneeling figure that accompanied the plea, 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' Yet, this was a passive victim, appealing to a presumed White saviour and supposedly ready to be grateful when the gift of freedom was bestowed upon them. As such,

[41] See, for example, Channa Wickremesekera, *'Best black troops in the world': British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1746–1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002); Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, p. 31.

[42] The visual representation of the *Tirailleur Sénégalais*, which David Murphy describes as 'arguably the most iconic figure of French colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa', has also been the subject of analysis. See David Murphy, 'Representations of the *Tirailleur Sénégalais* and World War I' in Peabody et al. (eds.), *Visualizing Empire*, pp. 118–35. How the *Tirailleur Sénégalais* and the ordinary soldiers West India Regiments would come to share a common military spectacle from the late 1850s is discussed in Chapter 4.

[43] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 9, 106. See also David Lambert, 'Sierra Leone and other sites in the war of representation over slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 64:1 (2007), 103–32.

both the pro- and anti-slavery sides participated in a war of representation that involved producing competing images of the Black subject that were distinct from the realities of how people of African descent were subjected to slavery and sought their own liberty – although this culture war could still have profound consequences for their lives.[44]

Of course, the notion of a *war* of representation carries additional charge when the place of Black soldiers is considered. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, a significant feature of pro-slavery discourse was the rebellious Black man, often termed the 'brigand' by the British, who threatened the socio-economic order and racial hierarchies that had been established in the Caribbean. The insurrection in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti), against which Britain unsuccessfully intervened from 1793 to 1798, loomed large here, but so too did other acts of resistance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If the Black brigand was the stuff of White, pro-slavery nightmares – the dangerous armed Black man – what of the West India Regiment soldiers being recruited at the same time? An important argument in *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank* is that just when pro- and anti-slavery representations were circulating, so too were images of Black martial figures and that these were also part of the war of representation. Figure 1.1 is exemplary here: it was very different from how the Black brigand was depicted (see Figure 2.2, for example) and, like anti-slavery imagery, served to articulate a more 'civilised' image of the regiments and one that sought to constrain their disruptive martial hybridity. Such images were not associated with anti-slavery campaigners, but rather with military and colonial governmental staff for whom the West India Regiments represented a solution to Britain's military crisis in the Caribbean and for whom such soldiering could serve as a model for freedom-as-service. Indeed, the creation of the West India Regiments was not only a military undertaking but one that involved the articulation of a pro-regiment discourse. To put it another way, *the establishment of the West India Regiments within the British Army was a cultural act*. A war of representation was fought over them by supporters and opponents, making their military spectacle a 'site in which imperial identities and exclusions were framed'.[45] Yet, while the supporters of the regiments sought to challenge negative representations of men of African descent,

[44] Thomas, *Witnessing Slavery*, pp. 41–49. See also Radiclani Clytus, 'Keep it before the people: The pictorialisation of American abolitionism' in Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (eds.), *Early African American Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 291–317; Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester: Routledge, 2000).

[45] Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, p. 26.

in so doing they produced new stereotypes – just as the anti-slavery movement did. As will be established in Chapter 3 and expanded thereafter, Figure 1.1 was the martial equivalent of the kneeling, anti-slavery icon: both were trapped in passivity, making an appeal to the viewer, rather than a confident assertion of their equality and value.

After the formal ending of slavery, the question about the nature of Blackness remained a crucial one. The refusal of formerly enslaved people to conform to anti-slavery expectations in the nominally free societies of the Caribbean led some to view emancipation as a 'failure', contributing to the hardening of British attitudes towards people of African descent from the 1840s.[46] The war of representation thus extended beyond the immediate issue of British involvement in Atlantic slavery to include the ways in which emancipation was judged, while also blending into wider debates around racial difference associated with the rise of scientific racism in the second half of the nineteenth century. The West India Regiment soldier continued to feature in this wider field, not only against the backdrop provided by Britain's 'civilising mission' but also as its personnel actively participated in the expanding imperial presence in Africa. Questions about race and military capability coalesced during the 'small wars' that Britain fought in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as with the solidification of the discourse about 'martial races'. The men of the West India Regiments never achieved the latter status, and as the Caribbean declined in importance within the British Empire, the units themselves became an increasingly marginalised element of the British Army. As such, while the original establishment of the West India Regiments had been a desperate military innovation during the Age of Revolution – witness Figure 1.1 – the consequences of this act would be gradually diminished and dismantled over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century.

Discussing the empire-wide efforts that the British made to arm their colonial subjects, Christina Welsch argues that it is wrong to focus solely on how this was a paradoxical practice that '*inadvertently* blurred the lines of difference being drawn across the empire'. Instead, it should be recognised that it served as a locus for active race-making.[47] As she puts

[46] Elizabeth McGrath (eds.), *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem* (London: Nino Aragno Editore, 2012); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Douglas Lorimer, *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 109–38.

[47] Welsch, *The Company's Sword*, p. 25. Emphasis added.

it, 'British efforts to mobilize military labor were directly involved with how issues of identity and otherness were defined, and its military institutions were spaces in which difference was created'.[48] Likewise, the image of the West India Regiments was a significant site for the production and contestation of race and racial difference, with the struggle over their martially hybrid figures an important front in a wider war of representation that scholars have not so far considered. Placing the West India Regiments in this context expands understanding of the cultural and political struggles that occurred around different visions of racial difference in the British Empire. The West India Regiments can thus be seen not only as a component of the system that defended slavery and expanded empire, or an often-overlooked part of Britain's imperial military forces, but also as a unique and revealing thread within the entangled histories of race, empire and warfare in the 'long' nineteenth century.

Structure of the Book

The six substantive chapters that comprise the core of the book form three rough pairs, each of which addresses a different historical period during the 'long' nineteenth century. The first two focus on the early decades of the West India Regiments' existence, from their establishment in 1795 to the aftermath of the 'mutiny' of the 1st WIR in Trinidad in 1837. This period saw the regiments involved in military action during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in the Caribbean. Although there were compelling reasons to employ Black soldiers against Britain's enemies in the region, the plan faced intense opposition from White West Indians. Chapter 2 examines the effort against the establishment of the regiments in the 1790s. The spectre of insurrection in Saint-Domingue was a constant presence, and critics of the regiments frequently likened them to Haitian soldiers, formerly enslaved insurgents, Maroons and other 'brigands' that opposed the British across the Caribbean. Yet, White West Indians were not opposed to the arming of African men *per se* but favoured the use of irregular 'black shot', a form of military service that remained constrained by the bonds of slavery. In this way, the chapter not only explores the deeply held prejudices and phobias that made West India Regiments so feared but also the contradictions in White West Indian and broader pro-slavery thought revealed by attitudes to military service.

[48] Ibid., p. 26.

Even after the regiments' soldiers helped to suppress enslaved uprisings in Barbados (1816) and Demerara (1823), they continued to be objects of suspicion. Chapter 3 examines the efforts that commanding officers and supporters of the regiments made to challenge such opposition by seeking to manage the image of their Black soldiers and portray them in a favourable light. What emerged is the 'steady Black soldier', an ambiguous racial-martial figure that was simultaneously soldierly yet passive. This theme is explored through both the predominant representation of West India Regiment soldiers as standing 'ready for inspection' and the elision of any active military role (as exemplified by Figure 1.1). This image is placed in the context of wider debates about the figure of the Black subject that characterised the contemporaneous controversy over slavery, and it will be argued that the steady Black soldier represents the military equivalent to the kneeling enslaved figure promulgated by anti-slavery advocates.

Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the mid-Victorian period and, reflecting Britain's 'swing to the East' and the deployment patterns of the West India Regiments, the focus begins to shift towards Africa. The former considers a key change in the military spectacle of the West India Regiments in the mid-to-late 1850s, when the uniform for all ranks below commissioned officer – that is, for the overwhelmingly Black rank-and-file – was altered to one inspired by France's Zouave forces. The chapter examines the reasons for and significance of the adoption of this new uniform. Representing a form of martial rebranding, this was a dramatic shift that ended the policy of using the same basic uniforms as other British Foot Regiments, a practice that had reflected the (qualified) equality of Black and White troops. Two interpretive frames for this 'Zouavisation' of the West India Regiments are offered. First, there was a desire to emulate and replicate the picturesque valour that the French Zouaves had displayed in the Crimean War, a sentiment strongly expressed by Queen Victoria herself. Figuratively, the Zouave was a half-civilised, half-savage soldier – originally raised in north Africa – and the wish to rebrand the West India Regiments as analogues of the French troops was part of a longer history of incorporating those from the imperial 'margins' into metropolitan militaries. Second, there was an effort to assign uniforms that were more sensitive to the local conditions in which British military units operated. In the case of the West India Regiments, this policy served to inscribe racial differences between troops, as demonstrated by the fact that the officers of the regiments were not required to wear Zouave-style uniforms. This change reflected shifting ideas about people of African descent, as well as about tropicality, in this period. These twin interpretive frames are examined in

relation to other developments around the mid-century, including the emergence of warfare as a spectacular and highly mediated realm, the discursive Orientalisation of the British Caribbean and the crises represented by the Crimean War and the 1857–58 Indian Uprising.

Chapter 5 focuses on the depiction of the first African-Caribbean man to receive the Victoria Cross, Samuel Hodge (c.1840–68) of the 4th WIR. In 1866, Hodge was serving in West Africa when his unit was involved in an assault against a stockaded village close to the River Gambia. For his bravery in breaching the defences, he was awarded Britain's highest military honour, though he died of his wounds in early 1868. Hodge appeared in *The Capture of Tubabecelong, Gambia, 1866*, by the English artist, Louis William Desanges (1822–87). Desanges was best known for his paintings of Victoria Cross winners, which were among the most familiar depictions of contemporary warfare, on display at the Crystal Palace in the 1860s and 1870s, as well as circulating more widely as photographs and book illustrations. As such, Desanges did much to express visually the growing middle-class militarism and patriotism that characterised mid-century Britain. The chapter analyses the depiction of Hodge by Desanges, comparing it with the imagery of other Victoria Cross heroes, as well as written accounts. It shows that with the steady Black soldier dominating the image of the West India Regiments, Hodge's valour could only be represented in highly circumscribed ways.

The last pair of chapters address the period associated with 'high' imperialism. Chapter 6 is concerned with the role of the West India Regiments in maintaining and expanding Britain's African empire in the final decades of the nineteenth century, which encompassed the European partition of Africa. The particular focus is the 1873–74 Anglo-Asante War, the first colonial campaign to capture the British public's imagination and one which made a household name of the commanding officer, Garnet Joseph Wolseley (1833–1913). The Asante were among Britain's most consistent antagonists in the imperial theatre and also held a long-standing place within European discourses of African 'savagery'. Warfare against them was cast as an interracial struggle. However, the involvement of the West India Regiments complicates this picture, and the chapter compares the depiction of the regiments' soldiers with that of Britain's Asante enemies and local Fante allies as promulgated by newspaper correspondents accompanying the expedition and military officers. The chapter also considers the military role allotted to the West India Regiments soldiers as the campaign developed, including the fact that they were used as baggage-handlers for the White regiments during the final march on Kumasi and were not permitted to enter the Asante capital. This shows the way in which their

constrained martial image, such that they were neither White 'soldiers' nor African 'warriors', had consequences in the military field.

Chapter 7 looks at the place of the final remaining West India Regiment within the mass militarised culture of late nineteenth-century Britain. The first book-length regimental histories date from this period. Written by men who had served in the 1873–74 Anglo-Asante War as junior officers, these histories offered more celebratory accounts of the West India Regiments and represented an effort to secure the status and historical legacy of the units. A particular focus of the chapter is the Diamond Jubilee of 1897, when representatives of the regiment were present in London. The coverage they received, as well as their depiction in popular cultural forms similar to Figure 1.2, serves to reveal their exclusion from a British Army that was rendered White and metropolitan at this apogee of a racially inflected imperial culture. As such, the partial equality that had been granted to their Black soldiers when they were created a century earlier was symbolically undone. Chapter 8 examines the commemorative afterlives of the West India Regiments in Britain and the Caribbean. Placing this within the wider context of the centenary of the First World War and the 'culture wars' that have occurred around how the British Empire is remembered, the chapter considers the acquisition, creation and display of the regiments' material culture such as Figure 1.1.

Soldiers of Uncertain Rank is centred on the interpretation of textual and visual depictions of West India Regiment personnel, especially the rank-and-file and Non-Commissioned Officers that were overwhelmingly of African descent. These men were objects of scrutiny, not only by their commanding officers but also by the enslaving colonists of the British West Indies where they were first raised and served, government officials, colonial bureaucrats, travellers, newspaper correspondents and others. They were depicted in complex, often contradictory, ways that impacted on their deployment in the field and influenced public understanding. As such, this book shows that the military history of empire – of colonial warfare and counter-insurgency, as well as the recruitment and deployment of colonial subjects – is also a cultural history that involved the articulation and contestation of racialised identities, representations and discourses. The theme of violence in the imperial sphere is one that has gained increasing attention.[49] Addressing this fully requires attending to imperial military institutions, personnel, practices, experiences and ideas,

[49] Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London: Verso, 2011); Kim Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

thus incorporating soldiers, martial identities and military spectacle into our understanding of British imperial culture. This not only means examining imperial violence against racialised 'others', or even how Britain armed and deployed racialised 'others' against one another, but recognising how the subjects, institutions, practices and spaces – both real and imagined – associated with this violence were also implicated in the un/making of British imperial identities.