
Defoe and the Black Legend: The Spanish Stereotype in *A New Voyage Round the World*

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On 23 July 1711, Daniel Defoe wrote a letter to his employer/savior Robert Harley in which he outlined a “Proposall for Seizing, Possessing, and forming an English Collony on The kingdome of Chili in the South Part of America” (Healey 346). In this letter, Defoe asserts that Chile is particularly suited for an English colony because it is well-adapted for “Commerce, Planting, and Inhabiting” (Healey 346). Defoe’s missive systematically sets forth the benefits of such a proposal, such as the establishment of an excellent market for English wool, while simultaneously refuting possible objections to the plan, such as the resistance of the Spaniards. He maintains that the native Chileans would cooperate with the English if it secured their deliverance from the “Cruell and Tyrannic Temper of the Said spaniards” (Healey 347). Defoe’s scheme is remarkably thorough, even if it failed to win Harley’s approval. Seemingly undaunted by lack of governmental support, Defoe tenaciously held fast to his idea, and we meet it again thirteen years later in his 1724 travel fiction, *A New Voyage Round the World*. In this text, Defoe enlarges upon his scheme in an effort to convince his English readership that South America is ideal for an English colony.¹

The few critics who have written on *A New Voyage* agree that Defoe fully intended for this project to come to fruition. Jane Jack, for example, labels *A New Voyage* Defoe’s *roman à thèse* “designed to enlist the sympathy of its readers for a serious scheme of colonization and commerce” (75). Much more recently, Robert Markley ascribed the novel’s purpose to “firing the imagination of his English readers to explore and exploit the lands that the novel describes” (159). This travel fiction, then, moves beyond the mere entertainment or educational purpose its contemporaries boasted (Richetti 60-61), and positions itself as thinly-disguised colonial propaganda.

In order for this propaganda to succeed, however, Defoe must illustrate to his English readers that the *Coasta Deserta* region, extending from Buenos Aires to

the Straits of Magellan, is ripe for English colonization. One major obstacle blocks his way: the region has already been claimed by the King of Spain. From Columbus on, Spain enjoyed a virtual stranglehold on both discovery and trade in the Americas. The Bulls of Donation of 1493 granted Spain sovereignty over any lands in the Atlantic previously undiscovered by Christians, thus investing the Spanish empire with unprecedented power and scope (Pagden 14). In order to legitimate his claim, then, Defoe's narrator must convince his English readers that their perception of Spain's omnipresence and great strength in the Coasta Deserta region rings false. In reality, Defoe's narrator argues, Spain's presence here is weak, and by manipulating Spain's pre-existing reputation as an excessively cruel and proud colonial power, Defoe is able to promote his own colonialist scheme for present-day Argentina.

European, and especially English, negative attitudes toward Spain were already firmly entrenched by Defoe's day. Spain was suffering from what historians call the "Black Legend," the idea that Spaniards are somehow inferior to other Europeans (Maltby 3). The prevailing stereotype of the Spaniard portrayed him as licentious, Machiavellian, greedy, and bloodthirsty, while claiming that "Spaniard" and "barbarian" were synonyms (Maltby 3, 4). This legend stemmed from a variety of sources, and by the early eighteenth century most of Europe had applied this stereotype to the Spaniards.

Hispanic scholars most often attribute the Black Legend to Dutch and English Protestant propaganda. According to Anthony Pagden, the Black Legend can be traced to the relationship Spain had with the Netherlands:

Spanish atrocities in general, and the sack of Antwerp in 1576 in particular, led to the creation, at Flemish and English hands, of the so-called Black Legend. The Spanish image in Protestant Europe (and, it must be said, in many areas of Catholic Europe as well) as proud, cruel, and overbearing was in large part based on Dutch, and later English, propaganda. (Pagden 4)²

William Maltby agrees, adding that the Duke of Alba's notorious cruelty in the Netherlands became a popular motif in English and Dutch pamphlets and histories.³ Quite obviously, religion played an enormous role in the creation of the legend, as Protestants objected to the Catholic clericalism practiced by Spain (Maltby 4). In particular, English Protestants identified Spain as the champion of the Counter-Reformation, and therefore directed their hatred of Catholicism specifically at the Spanish (Maltby 29). Add to this the sometimes-exaggerated accounts of the Inquisition,⁴ and Spain's reputation for cruelty was solidified.

In addition, Spain's presence in the Americas provoked harsh criticism from European powers. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Euro-

peans, probably envious of Spain's hegemony in the Americas, condemned Spain's brand of colonial government. As Pagden maintains, Spain's imperial past was increasingly viewed as a

saga of conquest, repression, and needless bloodshed, its political objectives not the defence of Christendom, but the preservation, at whatever cost to its subjects, of the territories it had acquired through chance or dynastic manipulation.
(7)

Interestingly, seventeenth-century thinkers attributed to the Spanish precisely the same flaw that Defoe attributes to barbarous societies: intractability. For example, when describing the "barbarous" natives of Madagascar, Defoe's narrator labels them "wild, naked, black, barbarous, perfectly untractable, and insensible of any state of life being better than their own" (181). Intractability is likewise associated with the natives of Ceylon and Malaga; interactions between the crew and these natives explode into violence once the natives discard their passive acceptance of European trade standards in favor of their own. Defoe, as consummate imperialist, revels in the idea of perfectly docile and manageable natives, ones who do not assert any subjectivity; as consummate modern, he thumbs his nose at those who are unwilling to accept the "improvements" of the modern age.⁵ Similarly, Pagden writes that the "legendary cruelties" of the Spaniards arose from a "defect in an intractable national character" (8). The Spaniards' unwillingness to change their ways led to their downfall: "The image of the Spanish Empire changed, however, not because the Empire itself changed, but very largely because it failed to" (Pagden 2). The Black Legend helped accuse Spain of practicing an outdated form of government which was destined to fall.

Accounts of Spanish colonial practice peppered many Elizabethan travel narratives, and consequently furthered the Black Legend. The most influential text of this genre is undoubtedly Richard Hakluyt's twelve-volume *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, first published in 1589, and reissued in 1599-1600.⁶ Hakluyt's collection represents a compendium of navigational, geographic, and economic information, and seeks to promote English trade and colonization (Beeching 11, 24). Many of the narratives Hakluyt includes condemn Spanish colonial policies and practices. For instance, Raleigh's *The discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana* relates the Spaniards' "tyrannie and oppression" of the Guiana natives (Hakluyt 354). In his narrative, Miles Philips asserts that his crew's treatment by the Spaniards permanently scarred them: those sailors lucky enough to return to England carried "still about with them (and shal to their graves) the marks and tokens of those inhumane and more than barbarous cruell dealings" (Hakluyt 407). With descriptions such as

these sprinkled throughout, Hakluyt's collection surely fortified the Black Legend in England.

Although the Black Legend undeniably spread in part because of Europeans' envy of the Spanish empire, some of the most damning support for the legend comes directly from a Spaniard — the sixteenth-century Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas. Born in Spain in 1474, Las Casas was elected to priesthood in Santo Domingo in 1511. His 1514 sermon at Ciudad de Espiritu Santo inaugurated his life's work of defending the Indians from the tyranny of Spanish rule (Enzensberger 20, 21). By the end of his life he had acquired the title of "Universal Procurator and Protector of All the Indians of the Indies" (Marty 32). Although he penned numerous treatises depicting the plight of the Indians, his most famous work is *A Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies* (1542). In this text, Las Casas labels the Indians "the most humble, patient, and peaceable" people of the world (38). He then defends the Indians from the conquistadors' charges that they are barbarous and accuses the Spaniards of "killing, terrorizing, afflicting, torturing, and destroying the native peoples, doing all this with the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before" (39). His condemnation of the Spaniards in this text, as well as in his others, paved the way for Europeans to censure the Spaniards further.

One reason Las Casas was so widely used to perpetuate the Black Legend was the simple fact that he himself was a Spaniard. As Maltby explains, if the Spaniards spoke so "ill of one another, the English could scarcely be blamed for doing likewise" (12). "Insider criticism," that is, criticism from a member of one's own group, always holds more weight than criticism from an outsider. I would take Maltby's argument one step further and suggest that Las Casas' position as a Dominican friar, as well as his eye-witness status, added weight to his criticisms. Since the Spanish conquest of America ostensibly stemmed from a desire to convert the Indians to the Catholic faith, Las Casas' charge that the conquistadors had "lost all fear of God" rendered the avowed purpose meaningless (67). Indeed, Las Casas' primary complaint about the Spanish colonization arose from the conquistadors' methods of conversion. The conquistadors forcibly baptized the Indians and killed any who refused. Las Casas, on the other hand, believed that the Indians should be instructed in the Catholic faith before they were baptized (Hanke 20).⁷ That Las Casas was a Catholic condemning Catholic practice provided the European Protestants further ammunition for the Black Legend.

By the late seventeenth century, Las Casas' treatise had been translated into several European languages, and three translations had been published in English during the seventeenth century alone (Hanke and Fernandez 234). These transla-

tions are usually somewhat loose, and at times exaggerate Las Casas' rhetoric in order more fully to condemn the Spanish and promote the English. For example, John Phillips' 1656 translation clearly bears the stamp of English nationalism; it reminds the reader of the proud legacy of civil and religious liberty in England, while simultaneously condemning the Spanish for their "principal design" of the "conquest of the earth" (Hanke and Fernandez 234). The 1689 edition blames the cruelty of the Spaniards on their Catholicism; the colorful title reads:

Popery truly display'd in its bloody colours: or, A faithful narrative of the Horrid and unexampled massacres, butcheries, and all manner of cruelties, that hell and malice could invent, committed by the popish Spanish party on the inhabitants of West-India. (Hanke and Fernandez 241)⁸

In other words, these translators seemed far more interested in cementing the Black Legend than in protecting the Indians, which was Las Casas' avowed motive.

Defoe, too, capitalizes on European translations of Las Casas in order to castigate the Spaniards in *A New Voyage*. Although questions of Defoe's library are tricky at best, he did appear to have the 1642 Lyon edition of Las Casas, and I would argue that he knew Las Casas' work fairly well.⁹ For example, Las Casas maintains that in order to avoid the harsh rule of the Spaniards, many Indians fled to the mountains to live (43). In Defoe's text, too, "many of the nations of the Chilians had been driven to live in the hills, and some even beyond them, to avoid the cruelty and tyranny of the Spaniards" (187). In addition, Defoe echoes Las Casas' claim that the Spaniards were the aggressors and that the Indians never initiated attacks. Las Casas declares: "never have the Indians committed any act against the Spanish Christians, until those Christians have first and many times committed counts cruel aggressions against them" (42). Similarly, Defoe's narrator reports that it is the Spaniards' "breaking faith with [the Indians] that first teaches them ingratitude, and inures them to treat their new-comers with breach of faith, and with cruelty and barbarity" (176).

Perhaps the most interesting parallel between Las Casas' works and Defoe's travel fiction springs from the idea of "insider criticism." Some of the most cogent analysis of Spanish policies and actions in South America comes from the Spanish Planter living in Chile. When the narrator compliments the Spanish Planter on the great wealth amassed by the Spanish in America, the Planter remarks: "We Spaniards are the worst nation in the world that such a treasure as this could have belonged to" (213). This criticism sounds all the more persuasive precisely because the Planter identifies himself as part of that "worst nation" with his use of the first-person pronoun. In addition, the Planter has no name — he is referred to solely by his nationality — he is always simply "the Spaniard." The use

of the definite article “the” also reinforces the idea that this Spaniard represents the race as a whole. In other words, the Planter seems to represent the stereotypical Spaniard.

By referring to this individual by a sole national marker, however, Defoe invites us to critique the nature of stereotypes. Modern psychologists Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Vincent Yzerbyt, and Georges Schadron draw a distinction between stereotypes and the process of stereotyping:

To use a given stereotype is to consider that all members of a category such as an ethnic group share the attributes embedded in the stereotype; for instance, the Germans are orderly, industrious, and intelligent. On the other hand, *the process of stereotyping individuals is the process of applying a—stereotypical—judgement such as rendering these individuals interchangeable with other members of the category.* For example, Yanelia is an introvert and thus possesses all the behaviors that are typical of introverts. (11)

Defoe engages in the process of stereotyping with the Spanish Planter. By labeling him a “Spaniard,” Defoe thus imbues him with all of the expected characteristics of the “Spaniard” (cruelty and greed, for example, as illustrated from the Black Legend). However, as Defoe develops the Planter’s character, we see none of these stereotypical qualities in him. In fact, Defoe portrays the Spaniard favorably — the narrator likes this character, and the reader is supposed to like him, too.¹⁰ As evidence of this affection, the narrator, who spends a good part of his journey closely guarding his true motives, eventually discloses his plan to the Spaniard: “Here it was that I entered into a confidence with my patron, the Spaniard, concerning my grand design” (281). In other words, Defoe’s narrator trusts this Spaniard, which consequently encourages the reader to trust him as well.

What has happened, then, to the negative image invoked by the category “Spaniard”? The content of the stereotype does not match its category, and we see the dangers of the nature of stereotyping. Stereotypes are formed when one examines a group of individuals and determines shared traits. The insidious danger comes, however, when the process is reversed. Instead of a group of individuals determining a stereotype, the stereotype determines the individual: because the Planter is a Spaniard, he automatically is greedy and cruel. Yet Defoe’s presentation of the Spaniard turns the stereotype on its ear — the Spanish Planter is neither cruel nor greedy. Readers’ expectations are disrupted momentarily upon realizing this incongruity, but the power of the stereotype is reinforced because the Planter himself spouts anti-Spanish propaganda.

The Spanish Planter, in fact, becomes a better spokesman for English colonialism than the narrator ever could be. For example, he corrects some of the current

misperceptions about Spain's position in the New World. One of the most important of these is the number of Spaniards in the Americas. Defoe's narrator is astonished to learn that "there is not one Spaniard to a thousand acres of land ... throughout New Spain" (214). More importantly, the areas which are the most densely populated are the least productive ones. The city of Mexico, the Planter relates, has the "greatest number of our people" (214), yet it offers neither silver nor gold. Chile and Peru, on the other hand, where gold and silver are abundant, together make up only half of Mexico City's population (216). By informing his readers that Spain's presence in South America is weaker than they suppose, Defoe hopes to convince them that an English colony would thrive.

What most surprises Defoe's narrator, however, is not just the paucity of colonists in New Spain, but also their lack of curiosity and desire to develop its resources. The narrator assumes that because of the "infinite wealth of the country" (213) the Spaniards who live there take advantage of their situation to plant and mine. This, he discovers from the Spanish Planter, is not true. In fact, the Planter explains that most of the "wealth of the country lay hid" (216) because the Spaniards do nothing to procure it. The Planter asserts: "there is more gold every year washed down out of the Andes of Chili into the sea and lost there, than all the riches that go from New Spain to Europe in twenty years amount to" (217). This image of the Andes literally spilling over with gold tantalizes the narrator. He incredulously asks if the Spaniards living there are all "rich as princes" (217). The Planter replies by explaining that pride and sloth prevent the Spaniards from enjoying the wealth:

We have so much pride that we have no avarice, and we do not covet enough to make us work for it. We walk about sometimes ... on the banks of the streams that come down from the mountains, and if we see a bit of gold lie on the shore, it may be we will vouchsafe to lay off our cloak and step forward to take it up; but if we were sure to carry home as much as we could stand under, we would not strip and go to work in the water to wash it out of the sand, or take pains to get it together; nor perhaps dishonour ourselves so much as to be seen carrying a load, no, not for all the value of the gold itself. (217)

According to the Spanish Planter, then, the primary traits of the Spaniards are their "pride and sloth" (217), not their greed and cruelty as Las Casas had maintained.¹¹ Sloth, in fact, becomes an innate quality of the Spaniards: the Planter confesses that Spaniards are "naturally addicted ... to reap the harvest which had the least labour and hazard attending it" (242). The transformation from greed and cruelty to pride and sloth is easily understood, however, given the nature of the Spanish conquest and occupation of South America. The Spaniards' early avarice and

savagery had made slaves of the Indians, which simultaneously fostered excessive pride and sloth on the part of the Spaniards. By the time Defoe is writing, the Spaniards' barbaric practices, as well as European diseases, had killed the majority of the Indian population (Todorov 133). Consequently, the Spanish settlers no longer had as much access to slave labor; however, their reputed pride and sloth still remained.

Here again, though, we must critique the idea of the stereotype. If the category "Spaniard" remains stable, but the content constantly mutates, then clearly we are not meant to privilege the content. What we must instead investigate is the form of the category and the function of that form. A brief detour into the work of contemporary theorist Slavoj Žižek will help explain this concept. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek identifies similarities in Marx' and Freud's analyses of commodity and of dreams (11). Žižek maintains that in "both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form: the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, the 'secret' of this form itself" (11). The same holds true for stereotypes. As we have seen, the content hidden by the form of the stereotype is fluid; what remains rigid is the form itself — the label "Spaniard." What becomes interesting, then, is not what the stereotype means, but rather how it is used — the "secret" of its form. In *A New Voyage*, Defoe uses the stereotype of the Spaniard in order to dichotomize English and Spanish forms of colonialism. By doing so, he is better able to sanction and promote English colonial activity in South America.

The heart of Defoe's objection to Spanish colonialism lies in the Spaniards' unwillingness to take advantage of their resources in the Coasta Deserta region. The fact that the Spaniards have this immense wealth at their fingertips, yet do nothing to procure it, horrifies Defoe. This idea of work, manifesting itself in "improving" the land, is for Defoe closely tied to ownership of that land. Defoe's narrator tirelessly engages the Spanish Planter in discussions about the lands that Spain claims (268). The Planter maintains that Spain does not really own the lands of South America because the settlers do nothing to "improve" them (268). When the narrator suggests that the King of Spain claims a title to possession of the lands, the Planter responds that the King's possession is based on a right given him by the Pope for the "propagation of the Christian faith among the infidels" (271). Since England is not Catholic, the Planter wonders at the legitimacy of that claim in their eyes. He continues:

I have heard that it has always passed for a maxim in Europe, that no country which is not planted by any prince or people can be said to belong to them; and

indeed I cannot say but it seems to be rational that no prince should pretend to any title to a country where he does not think fit to plant and keep possession.
(271)

The emphasis here is on ownership based on use — if the settlers *use* the resources of a country, the country belongs to them. This type of criticism had been leveled at Spain before, especially in conjunction with Las Casas. Hispanic scholar Hans Enzensberger explains that the Spanish *conquista* was problematic precisely because “no ‘development policy’ of whatever kind served as justification — only a veneer of Christianity that proposed to convert the heathens, inasmuch as they survived the Christians’ arrival” (11). The idea of use as a standard of ownership also helps explain why the English do not feel the Indians own the land any more than the Spaniards: neither group mines the gold and silver.

Accordingly, while Defoe condemns the Spanish brand of colonialism, he does not condemn colonialism in general; in other words, he does not try to free the Chileans from the bonds of servitude, but instead tries to prove that servitude to Englishmen is superior to servitude to Spaniards. He learns from the Indians that their hatred for the Spaniards is passed on from father to son, and that even the Indians view the Spaniards through the lens of the Black Legend: “the pride and cruel and haughty temper of the Spaniards was such still to those of the country people who came under their government as makes that aversion continually increase” (185). Defoe’s narrator seems to admire this natural animosity for the Spaniards; he is pleased at the discovery of the Chileans’ “mortal aversion” for their oppressors (185).

Defoe’s admiration for the Chileans allows him to portray them as the counterpart to the South Sea Islanders, his role models for “good” natives, that he presents earlier. He praises them in the same terms as he praises the Islanders: “nothing could be more honest, quiet, and free from design than those people, except the poor honest people where we dressed up the king and queen, as above” (248). In addition, these natives take advantage of the fertile land: “The place we were in was green and flourishing, and the soil well cultivated by the poor, industrious Chilians” (254). Although the Chileans do not mine the precious metals, at least they till the soil, and thus they appear better than the Spaniards.

This is not to say that Defoe’s narrator thinks the Chileans should be totally free from colonial power, only that they should live under English rule instead. While he does commend the Chileans, he never implies that they are entitled to the *Coasta Deserta* region. Whenever he discusses the Chileans’ discontent with Spanish rule, he always emphasizes the weakness of the Chileans. The narrator repeatedly mentions the natives’ appeals for help: “They let us know that if any

nation in the world would but come in and assist them against the Spaniards, and support them in their rise against them, they would soon rid their hands of the whole nation” (185). Later in the text, the Spanish Planter echoes this sentiment:

Were not the natives so utterly destitute of support from any other part of the world as not to be able to have either arms or ammunition put into their hands, it would be impossible [for the Spaniards to maintain possession of South America], since I might easily see they were men that wanted not strength of body nor courage, and it was evident they did not want numbers, seeing they were already ten thousand natives to one Spaniard. (269)

What this situation needs, the narrator implies, is English colonial power. With English weapons and Chilean numbers, the Spanish empire in South America can surely be toppled.

It is important to remember that Defoe is not out to defend the Indians as much as he is to condemn the Spanish. In order for his project to succeed, Defoe must assure his readers that conditions are right for an English colony in the Coasta Deserta region. Note that the Chilean natives do not really assert themselves as subjects here, but merely passively await European assistance. Those natives who do fight the Spaniards receive negative press: they are “warlike and obstinate” (243), “wild mountaineers” and “heathens and savages” (269). The implication is that although the Chileans rightfully despise the Spaniards, they should only act on their hatred when they are supported by the English. Colonization is not evil, only the Spanish form of it is.

Defoe shares this attitude with Las Casas. Great defender of the Indians that he was, Las Casas did not object to colonization — in fact, he actively supported it. Like Defoe, Las Casas opposed the Spanish brand of colonialism, but for rather different reasons. While Defoe envisioned the colonization process in South America as one based upon economic profit, Las Casas envisioned Christianity as the great colonial unifier. The true purpose of colonialism should be the avowed aim of the Spanish crown — to convert the Indians to the Catholic faith. However, the Spaniards’ methods involved waging “cruel and bloody wars,” even though, according to Las Casas, the Indians were open to the Catholic faith and even eager to convert (41, 39). Violence is not necessary, Las Casas maintains, if Christianity is allowed to flourish (Todorov 168). Substitute “trade” for “Christianity” and the previous sentence could be Defoe’s.

In some ways, “trade” for Defoe and “Christianity” for Las Casas become the great equalizers in the colonial experience. In interactions with natives throughout his journey, Defoe’s narrator almost always tries to trade peacefully first. Only after the natives have tried to assert their own standards for trade do they become

“barbarous,” causing the crew to deal with them violently. Unlike Las Casas, however, Defoe does resort to violence if he feels it is justified. With his depiction of the South Sea Islanders, Defoe presents an almost utopic trade experience — natives who are at once generous, hospitable, and tractable. Defoe’s narrator recognizes the natives’ difference, but virtually erases it by fashioning the islanders as aspiring European imitators. Their tractability denies them any real cultural identity, and they adopt European ways as quickly and easily as a chameleon changes colors. By engaging in trade with the crew, the islanders prove their similarity to the Europeans, and thus their “difference” is effectively effaced in Defoe’s eyes.

Las Casas, too, ultimately rejects the idea of difference by illustrating that the Indians are potential Christians. He insists that the Indians possess Christian traits; in fact, he professes that their “most characteristic feature is their resemblance to Christians” by using such descriptors as “humility,” “obedient,” and “peaceful” (qtd. in Todorov 163). The Indians evince little interest in material wealth not because they are lazy (as the Spanish ironically claimed), but rather because they possess a Christian morality (Todorov 165). Yet if the Indians are potential Christians, then they are fundamentally no different from the European Christians sent to proselytize them. According to Tzvetan Todorov, then, while Las Casas refuses to condemn the Indians because they are different, he simultaneously refuses to admit that they are different (167). Consequently, Las Casas is able to justify colonization on spiritual grounds, and maintains that it should be carried out by priests instead of soldiers (Todorov 171).

Defoe, on the other hand, contends in *A New Voyage* that the purpose of colonization is not conversion, but rather the creation of a profitable market for the mother country. The Coasta Deserta region is a prime location for an English colony because it overflows with precious metals, boasts rich and fertile soil, and offers tractable natives. Since the Spaniards do not take advantage of the wealth proffered by the South American lands, Defoe argues that their colonies are not legitimate in the eyes of other European colonial powers.

Not only do the Spaniards not develop their South American resources, but they also enforce impossibly strict trade embargoes. Spain’s American ports were unconditionally closed to any and all foreign trade, thus rendering legitimate trade impossible (Maltby 61). Defoe’s unremitting faith in commerce, however, encourages him to pursue trade legally or illegally. For example, although the English crew (masquerading as French at this point) is forbidden to traffic its goods on the shore, the crew nonetheless “hint[s]” about the “cargo of goods” on the ship, and the Spaniards pretend to look the other way as they “pay for whatever they bought” (184). As Jane Jack notes, throughout the text Defoe “emphasizes that

trade may always be done, even where it would seem to be least encouraged, by depending on the common interests of merchants of all nations and by the irresistible attraction of buying cheap, even against the law” (80-81). While Defoe certainly takes advantage of clandestine trading as a way to frustrate the Spanish commercial monopoly in the Americas, he nonetheless feels that this monopoly should be overturned. If his English readers take his advice and colonize the Coasta Deserta region, this feat could be accomplished, and Spain’s tyrannical hegemony in the Americas would all but disappear.

Defoe’s use of the Black Legend, then, allows him to advertise his colonial scheme in South America by asserting that the Spaniards are unfit to colonize. His manipulation of the Spanish stereotype in order to further his own colonial designs raises interesting questions about the nature of the Black Legend itself. Revisionist scholars have argued that the Black Legend served as a convenient scapegoat for European justifications of colonialism. By using the Spaniards as the gold standard for “bad” colonialism, other European powers, especially England and Holland, were better able to ignore their own sometimes atrocious treatment of natives.¹² In addition, some scholars argue that European nations created the Black Legend in order to “cover up their own rapacity” (Retamar 19). According to Todorov,

the Spaniards are not worse than the other colonial powers; it just so happens that they are the people who occupied America at the time, and that no other colonizing power has had the opportunity, before or since, to cause the death of so many at once. The British and the French, in the same period, behave no differently; only their expansion is not on the same scale, hence the damages they can cause are not on such a scale either. (133)

Regardless of the truth of his claim, Todorov speaks to an important function of the Spanish stereotype for the English people. By engaging this stereotype, the British people were able to set themselves apart from the Spaniards, to oppose “us” and “them.” As Richard Helgerson argues in *Forms of Nationhood*, “England necessarily defined itself and the character of its overseas expansion in terms of its relation to Spain” (Helgerson 182).¹³ In order to assert the authority of a British colony in the Americas, then, the English promoted the Spanish stereotype, thus making their colonial agenda appear more benign. The stereotype’s accuracy was irrelevant, and as we saw with the English translations of *Las Casas*, its content was consistently exaggerated by English writers. Contemporary African-American theorist bell hooks argues in a different context that stereotypes are “like fictions.... They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken or are not allowed” (170). In

the race for colonies and the contest for the most powerful nation, “real knowing” was indeed not allowed. Instead, writers like Defoe invoke stereotypes to create a distance between “us” and “them.” Defoe’s manipulation of the Spanish stereotype creates a fiction that avows to be “true” in much the same way that his travel fiction itself purports to be true. Both serve as smoke screens in order to promote his English colonial agenda for South America. ✱

Notes

¹ Because *A New Voyage* so directly reflects the project Defoe proposes in his letter, and because the narrative is written in first person, it is difficult to separate Defoe from his nameless narrator. Although the narrator clearly represents a fictitious creation (Defoe himself never traveled to South America, of course), his views and outlooks so closely mirror Defoe’s own that I use “Defoe” and “Defoe’s narrator” fairly interchangeably in this piece.

² Examples of such propaganda can be found in Thomas Wood’s 1624 translation of Jacobus Verheiden’s *An Oration or Speech appropriated unto the most mightie and illustrious Princes of Christendom wherein the Right and Lawfulness of the Netherlandish Warre against Phillip King of Spain is approved and demonstrated*. Another popular source was Sir Roger Williams’ 1618 text, *The Actions of the Low Countries* (Maltby 46).

³ See, for example, Thomas Churchyard’s *A Lamentable and pitiful Description of the wofull warres in Flanders*, published in London in 1578 (Maltby 47).

⁴ According to Maltby, the first in-depth description of the Inquisition practices published in England was *A Discovery & Plaine Declaration of sundry Subtill Practices of the Holy Inquisition of Spain*, written by Reginaldus Gonsalvius Montanus, and translated into English in 1568 (32-33). A more popular source of Inquisition activities came from the several editions, beginning in 1563, of John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (33). In particular, Foxe’s work warned Englishmen of the Spaniards’ misuse of power in order to gain riches. Foxe relates “the extreme dealing and cruel ravening of these Catholic Inquisitors of Spain, who, under the pretended visor of religion, do nothing but seek their private gain and commodity, with crafty defrauding and spoiling of other men’s goods” (qtd. in Maltby 35). Although neither of these texts appears in Defoe’s library, it is likely that he was familiar with them.

⁵ In both cases, Defoe’s narrator criticizes the natives for their refusal to accept the colonial subject’s authority and superiority; consequently, the natives are labeled “untractable.”

⁶ Defoe’s library contained both of these editions.

⁷ Hanke explains that Las Casas participated in a controversial debate with philosopher Juan Ginez de Sepulveda over this very issue. Meeting before a jury of theologians

and counsellors in Valladolid in 1550, Las Casas and Sepulveda argued opposing positions to this question: "Is it lawful for the King of Spain to wage war on the Indians before preaching the faith to them in order to subject them to his rule, so that afterwards they may be more easily instructed in the faith?" (38). Sepulveda sought to illustrate the "natural rudeness and inferiority" of the Indians by relying on Aristotle's doctrine of "natural slavery" — that is, "one part of mankind is set aside by nature to be slaves in the service of masters born for a life of virtue free of manual labour" (44; 13). Las Casas, on the other hand, insisted that the Indians were not naturally inferior, and consequently should be converted without violence (13). Although the debate continued for several days (Las Casas' speech alone lasted five days), the jury was unable to reach a verdict, and Spanish colonial practice changed little as a result of this debate (38-74).

⁸ Significantly, these translations appear in periods of increased anti-Spanish sentiment in England. From 1655-1660 England was at war with Spain, and thus the 1656 translation reflects English patriotism. The 1689 edition, of course, falls in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, the English Protestant triumph over Stuart Catholic claims to the throne.

⁹ See Helmut Heidenreich, ed., *The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell* (Berlin: 1970). In his introduction, Heidenreich explains that Defoe's and clergyman Phillips Farewell's libraries were joined at the time of sale, thus making it virtually impossible to assign texts to each individual. Heidenreich indicates that the 1642 Lyon edition, titled *Histoire des Indes Occidentales*, appeared in the collective libraries. However, given Defoe's fascination with travel literature and colonialism, his reading knowledge of French, and his pervasive treatment of the Spanish in the Americas (see also his *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*), I feel fairly confident in marking the edition of Las Casas as Defoe's.

¹⁰ The Spanish Planter more closely resembles the Spaniards in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* than he does his countrymen in this text. In *The Farther Adventures*, the Spaniards on Crusoe's island are infinitely more "civilized" than Will Atkins and his band of English rogues, and the Spanish Planter bears a striking resemblance to the Spanish Governor on the island.

¹¹ Transformations in national characters were common by Defoe's day. As A.J. Hoenslaars demonstrates in his study of English and foreign characters on the Elizabethan stage, images of national characters were "constantly changing and that ... change was a part of a complex and many-faceted process" (237).

¹² See, for instance, Martin Marty's *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (33).

¹³ Linda Colley argues, in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, that later Britons defined themselves against the French, not the Spanish (5). Her argument is instructive because it illustrates that national identity is forged from oppositions with a powerful foreign Other.

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