The Many-Headed Hydra

Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic

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CHAPTER TWO

Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water

All I have to do in this world is to be merry,
which I shall if the ground be not taken from me.
—Francis Beaumont, The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1607)

Youth, youth it is better to be starved by thy nurse
Than live to be hanged for cutting a purse.
—Ben Jonson, Bartholomew Fair (1614)

The enemies at court of Sir Walter Raleigh, the archetypal imperialist adventurer, imprisoned him in the Tower after the accession of James I in 1603 on insubstantial evidence that he had intrigued with Spain to kill the king. In prison Raleigh wrote his History of the World and in it mentioned Hercules and “the serpent Hydra, which had nine heads, whereof one being cut off, two grew in the place.” Raleigh, of course, identified with Hercules, and he used the hydra to symbolize the growing disorders of capitalism. “The amorphous laboring class, set loose from the traditional moorings of the peasantry, presented a new phenomenon to contemporaries,” historian Joyce Appleby has noted.¹ Combining Greek myth with the Old Testament, Raleigh developed a historical interpretation of Hercules: “That he slew many thieves and tyrants I take to be truly written, without addition of poetical vanity,” he wrote, and “Sure it is that many cities in Greece were greatly bound to him; for that he (bending all his endeavours to the common good) delivered the land from much oppression.” Hercules helped to establish kingship, or political sovereignty, and commerce, under the dominance of a particular ethnic group, the Greeks. He served as a model for the exploration, trade, conquest, and plantation of English mercantilism; indeed, a cult of Hercules suffused English ruling-class culture in the seventeenth
Raleigh noted, “Some by Hercules understand fortitude, prudence, and constancy, interpreting the monsters [as] vices. Others make Hercules the sun, and his travels to be the twelve signs of the zodiac. There are others who apply his works historically to their own conceits.”

Francis Bacon, who as lord chancellor tried Raleigh in 1618 and was the first to inform him of his death sentence, turned the myth of Hercules and the hydra into a powerful conceit indeed. Born to a leading Elizabethan courtier and educated at Cambridge, Bacon was a philosopher who advocated inductive reasoning and scientific experimentation, and a politician who lost favor with the queen but regained it under James by betraying his erstwhile friends. He connected utopian thought with practical projects, writing *New Atlantis*, “Of Empire,” and “Of Plantations” while investing in the Virginia Company. He drafted his essay “Of Seditious and Troubles” after the Enslow Hill Rebellion (1596), in which food and antienclosure rioters in Oxfordshire planned to march to London to join rebellious apprentices. Bartholomew Steere, a carpenter and one of the rioters, predicted, “We shall have a merrier world shortly. . . . I will work one day and play the other.” Steere suffered two months of examination and torture in London’s Bridewell Prison at the hands of Bacon and other officials. While Bacon claimed that he sought to enlarge the “bounds of Human Empire to make all things possible,” his will to power violently crushed alternatives such as the one hoped for by Steere.

Bacon wrote about Hercules in his interpretation of Prometheus, who signified mind and intellect and thereby proved that man might be regarded “as the centre of the world.” The winds sailed the ships and ran the engines just for man; plants and animals furnished food and shelter just for him; even the stars worked for him. The quest for knowledge was always a struggle for power. The voyage of Hercules to set Prometheus free seemed to Bacon to be an image of God’s redeeming the human race. The story of Hercules was on Bacon’s mind when he came to write *An Advertisement Touching an Holy War*, published in 1622, a famine year and shortly after Bacon’s downfall and conviction on charges of bribery. He wrote it to pay his debts and to find his way back into the corridors of power. The treatise addressed the conflict between the king and the members of Parliament over who was to hold the purse strings of govern-
Frontispiece of Francis Bacon’s The Great Instauration (1620): a ship of discovery returns through the Pillars of Hercules. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
ment: Bacon advised that the only “chance of healing the growing breach was to engage the country in some popular quarrel abroad.” The recent national quarrel with Catholic Spain would not qualify, since James I favored a Spanish alliance. Hence Bacon looked elsewhere for enemies adequate to his proposed jihad.

He began by comparing war to capital punishment. The justification for both must be “full and clear,” in accord with the law of nations, the law of nature, and divine law, lest “our blessed Saviour” become a Moloch (i.e., an idol to whom sacrifices were made). A death sentence was justified against those unavowed by God, those who had defaced natural reason and were neither nations in right nor nations in name, “but multitudes only, and swarms of people.” Elsewhere in the same essay Bacon referred to “shoals” and “routs” of people. By taking his terms from natural history—a “swarm” of bees, a “shoal” of seals or whales, a “rout” of wolves—and applying them to people, Bacon drew on his theory of monstrousness. These people had degenerated from the laws of nature and taken “in their body and frame of estate a monstrosity.” In 1620 Bacon had called for the rigorous study of monsters, “of every thing . . . which is new, rare, and unusual in nature.” To him, monsters were more than a portent, a curiosity, or an exoticism; rather, they comprised one of the major divisions of nature, which were: 1) nature in course; 2) nature wrought; and 3) nature erring. These three realms constituted what was normal, what was artificial, and what was monstrous. The last category bridged the boundaries of the natural and the artificial and was thus essential to the process of experiment and control. These divisions are well-known features of Bacon’s thought. His An Advertisement Touching an Holy War, by contrast, is not well known, yet it reveals the form and temper of its age.

Bacon drew upon classical antiquity, the Bible, and recent history to provide seven examples of such “multitudes” that deserved destruction: West Indians; Canaanites; pirates; land rovers; assassins; Amazons; and Anabaptists. Having listed these, he wrote,

Of examples enough; except we should add the labours of Hercules; an example which, though it be flourishing with much fabulous matter, yet so much it hath, that it doth notably set forth the
consent of all nations and ages in the approbation of the extirpating and debellating of giants, monsters, and foreign tyrants, not only as lawful, but as meritorious, even divine honour: and this although the deliverer came from the one end of the world unto the other.

This is the crux, or crucial thought, where genocide and divinity cross. Bacon’s advertisement for a holy war was thus a call for several types of genocide, which found its sanction in biblical and classical antiquity. Bacon thereby gave form to the formless, as the groups he named embodied a monstrous, many-headed hydra. But who were these groups? And why did he recommend holy war against them?

The Curse of Labor

The answers to these questions may be found by continuing the analysis, begun in the previous chapter, of the processes of expropriation, exploitation, and colonization in the era of Raleigh and Bacon. We argue that the many expropriations of the day—of the commons by enclosure and conquest, of time by the puritanical abolition of holidays, of the body by child stealing and the burning of women, and of knowledge by the destruction of guilds and assaults on paganism—gave rise to new kinds of workers in a new kind of slavery, enforced directly by terror. We also suggest that the emergence of cooperation among workers, in new ways and on a new scale, facilitated new forms of self-organization among them, which was alarming to the ruling class of the day. Bacon saw the new combinations of workers as monstrous and used the myth of the many-headed hydra to develop his theory of monstrosity, a subtle, thinly veiled policy of terror and genocide. The idiom of monstrosity would gain special relevance with the emergence of a revolutionary movement in England in the 1640s, in which the proletarian forces opposed by Bacon would play a critical part.

We will concentrate in this chapter on the making of “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” a phrase adopted in the authorized version of the Bible published in the year The Tempest was written (1611), and one that has flourished in modern social description. The alliteration (wood,
hewers of wood and drawers of water

water) and the assonance (hewer, drawer) have provided some of the attraction, but since the actual work that the phrase describes is menial, onerous, and dirty, the essential uses have revolved around dissonance and irony. Seventeenth-century London artisans used the phrase in their protests against deskilling, mechanization, cheap labor, and the loss of independence. Swift employed it in 1729 to describe the position of the Irish beneath their English lords, as did Wolfe Tone in 1790 and James Connolly almost two centuries later. In 1736 Bolingbroke, the aristocratic high Tory, added a racial spin: “The herd of mankind” constituted “another species,” “scarce members of the community, though born in the country,” “marked out like the Jews, a distinct race, hewers of wood and drawers of water.” In the nineteenth century the British Chartists gave the phrase animal connotations: “The labouring classes—the real ‘people’—[have] been roused in the attempt of making the working classes beasts of burden—hewers of wood and drawers of water.” In Emmanuuel Appadocca (1854), the first anglophone novel published in the British Caribbean, Maxwell Philip wrote of the Africans, who “gave philosophy, religion, and government to the world, but who must now stoop to cut wood, and to carry water.” Osborne Ward noted in The Ancient Lowly (1888), “They were not only slaves but they formed, as it were, another race. They were the plebeians, the proletariat; ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water.’ The use of the phrase was extended into the twentieth century when Samuel Haynes, a follower of Marcus Garvey and president of the Newark branch of the NAACP, wrote the national anthem of Belize, which culminates, “By the might of truth and the grace of God,/No longer shall we be hewers of wood.” W. E. B. Du Bois explained that the aim of the black artisan was “to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water.” One of the exegetical tasks of pan-Africanism was to show that these biblical terms also applied to white people. The words were crucial to the formation of the African National Congress in South Africa in 1912 and figured again in Nelson Mandela’s speech about the dismantling of apartheid in 1991. George Jackson, the black revolutionary, emphasized the concomitant state of propertylessness: “Has any people ever been independent that owned neither land or tool? . . . more of the same, the hewing of wood and the carrying of water.”
While hewing and drawing suggest timeless travails, the phrase in fact originated in the early era of capitalism. William Tyndale coined “hewers of wood and drawers of water” in his translation of the Old Testament in 1530. It appears in two contrasting biblical contexts. The first is in Deuteronomy 29, where Moses makes a covenant at Jahweh’s command. He reminds the people of their deliverance from Egypt, the forty years in the wilderness, the battles of conquest. He calls together the captains of the tribes, the elders, and the officers and commands: “Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water” must enter into a covenant. Jahweh then curses for a dozen or more verses. The covenant is inclusive, constituting a people or nation, under threats and in dread. The second context is in Joshua 9:21: “And the princes said unto them [the Gibeonites], Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation.” Two verses later, the punitive nature of the phrase is explained: “Now therefore are ye cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.” The Gibeonites have been punished with enslavement, yet they remain within the covenant.

For the African, European, and American hewers of wood and drawers of water in the early seventeenth century, work was both a curse and a punishment. These workers were necessary to the growth of capitalism, as they did the work that could not or would not be done by artisans in workshops, manufactories, or guilds. Hewers and drawers performed the fundamental labors of expropriation that have usually been taken for granted by historians. Expropriation itself, for example, is treated as a given: the field is there before the plowing starts; the city is there before the laborer begins the working day. Likewise for long-distance trade: the port is there before the ship sets sail from it; the plantation is there before the slave cultivates its land. The commodities of commerce seem to transport themselves. Finally, reproduction is assumed to be the transhistorical function of the family. The result is that the hewers of wood and drawers of water have been invisible, anonymous, and forgotten, even though they transformed the face of the Earth by building the infrastructure of “civilization.”
The Labors of the Hewer and Drawer

The hewers of wood and drawers of water had three main functions: they undertook the labors of expropriation; they built the ports and the ships and provided the seafarers for Atlantic commerce; and they daily maintained the households.

Labors of expropriation included the clear-cutting of woods, the draining of marshes, the reclamation of fens, and the hedging of the arable field—in sum, the obliteration of the commoning habitus. Woodlands contained flourishing economies of forest people in England, Ireland, Jamaica, Virginia, and New England; their destruction was the first step toward agrarian “civilization,” as summarized by Hercules when he gave land to the cultivators in neolithic times. This was and is the language of cultivators and “improvers,” of settlers and imperialists, and even of a money-hungry government, as when the early Stuarts disafforested crown lands in a reckless search for revenues. The felled trees fueled the growing iron, glass, brewing, and shipbuilding industries, resulting in a threefold increase in the price of firewood between 1570 and 1640. In the latter year the “Act for the Limitation of Forests . . . was the signal for the beginning of widespread destruction of forests.”10 In 1649 the Parliamentary Committee for the Preservation of Timber was formed to check the depredations of the “looser and disordered sort of people” who continued to insist upon their common rights in the forests. In the year 1636 it took twenty-four oxen to drag the giant oak that would serve as main-mast to the Sovereign of the Seas; scores of people labored simultaneously, in precise alignment, to lift it onto wheels or wain. By the end of the seventeenth century only an eighth of England remained wooded.

Similarly, in America, settlers claimed and cleared the ground for agricultural colonies. In Virginia, “the spade men fell to digging, the brick men burnt their bricks, the company cut down wood, the Carpenters fell to squaring out, the Sawyers to sawing, the Soldier to fortifying,” as cooperative labor built the first settlements. The colonists were at first unfamiliar with the broadax and the felling ax, but after the Pequot War, which opened the way westward, they soon learned to saw, fell, cleave, split, and rive, making timber and its products the basis of an export economy to Barbados and other parts of the West Indies. Servants and
slaves hacked away at the rain forest of Barbados, slowly clearing the lands for plantations and sending home to England the new settlements’ first cash crop: timber. When the English took possession of lands overseas, they did so by building fences and hedges, the markers of enclosure and private property.11

Another major work of expropriation was the draining of the fens. An Act of Parliament of 1600 made it possible for big shareholders in the fens to suppress the common rights that stood in the way of their drainage schemes. New plans and works, requiring unprecedented concentrations of labor, proliferated. King James organized hundreds in the draining and enclosure of parts of Somerset in the early seventeenth century, turning a commoning economy of fishing, fowling, reed cutting, and peat digging into a capitalist economy of sheep raising. Coastal lands were reclaimed and inland peat moors drained in the Somerset “warths.” Some eleven thousand workers were required to drain the fens around Ely during the 1650s, when drainage engineers from Holland, “equipped with a literally world-changing technology,” diverted rivers to create artificial
watercourses as large as any since Roman times, leaving in their wake an entirely new landscape of straight ditches and square fields. A poet of the area, Michael Drayton, described the land as “plump-thigh’d moor and full flank’t marsh.”

The “battle of the fens” began in 1605 between capital owners such as Lord Chief Justice Popham (“covetous and bloodie Popham”) and the fowlers, fenmen, and commoners. The terms of battle ranged from murder, sabotage, and village burning on the one hand to protracted litigation, pamphleteering, and the advanced science of hydraulics on the other. Sporadic outbursts of opposition to the drainage grew into a sustained campaign of action as commoners, often led by women, attacked workmen, ditches, dikes, and tools in Hatfield, on the Isle of Axholme, and elsewhere in the late 1620s and 1630s. Oliver Cromwell, who became a commissioner for draining the Great Level, sent a major of his own regiment to suppress the rioting commoners and received in return two hundred acres of drained land. A poet who equated common rights with theft celebrated the victory in verse:

\[
\text{New hands shall learn to work, forget to steal} \\
\text{New legs shall go to church, new knees shall kneel.}
\]

In 1663 Samuel Pepys passed through the “most sad fennes, all the way observing the sad life of the breedlings,” as he called their inhabitants. The sadness was the consequence of a specific defeat. Thomas Fuller wrote in 1655, “Grant them drained, and so continuing; as now the great fishes therein prey on the less, so the wealthy men would devour the poorer sort of people . . . and rich men, to make room for themselves, would jostle the poor people out of their commons.” Another result of the contradictory process whereby dispossessed commoners labored to dispossess others was the creation of the idyllic “English countryside,” in which, again, the toil of those who made it possible was rendered invisible.

The second labor of the hewer of wood and the drawer of water was building the ports for long-distance trade, a task that, like the clearing of the land for commercial agriculture, was essential to the new capitalist order. John Merrington has drawn attention to the first political economists, who emphasized the rigid division of land into town and country-
side in the transition to capitalism. Of special significance within this larger division was one particular kind of city and one particular kind of countryside: the port and the plantation. The early seventeenth century was the critical formative moment for each.

In 1611 John Speed published his atlas in four volumes, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, in which he depicted the bridges, palisades, towers, bastions, gates, walls, and outworks of the harbors and ports of England, Ireland, the Mediterranean, West Africa, the West Indies, and North America. “The pestilent marsh is drained with great labour, and the sea is fenced off with mighty barriers,” wrote Adam Ferguson in explaining the progress from rude nations to the establishment of property. “Harbours are opened, and crowded with shipping, where vessels of burden, if they are not constructed with a view to the situation, have not water to float. Elegant and magnificent edifices are raised on foundations of slime.” London and Bristol had long been port cities, but both expanded as the hewers and drawers laid the stone and built the wharves to accommodate their new bulk trades. Liverpool, incorporated in 1626, grew quickly after the midcentury. In Ireland, Belfast (1614) was built on reclaimed land, using the giant oaks felled by Carrickfergas hewers; Dublin became a “Bristol beyond the seas” as its workers exported grain and built ships; and Cork and Waterford grew behind their channels, islands, and winding rivers, while Wexford prospered with the fishing trade. Derry, both port and plantation, was rebuilt in the early seventeenth century, after British conquest, by the labors of the conquered natives. In Scotland, Glasgow’s merchants were slowly making their first connections with the tobacco fields of Virginia. Mediterranean ports also played a role in commerce, from the shallow crescent bay within the walls of Tripoli to the port of Algiers and the Sallé in Morocco, all built in part by European slaves captured upon the high seas. In West Africa, Cape Coast Castle was erected in 1610 by the Portuguese, operated by the Dutch, and finally taken by the English in 1664; the Dutch were also busy off Dakar, establishing, with the labor power of African and European workers, the slave-trading port of Goree Island in 1617. The earliest European trading factory on the West African coast, Elmina, was rebuilt in 1621. West Indian ports—Bridgetown in Barbados and Port Royal and Kingston in Jamaica—were constructed to handle the tobacco and even-
tually the sugar produced on the plantations. On the North American mainland, Boston flourished behind its numerous harbor islands; New York and Philadelphia evolved from Dutch and Swedish origins to become major anglophone ports; and Charlestown, founded in Carolina in 1670, became the largest port in the South.

These nodes of the Atlantic nautical networks were built by workers who hauled the rubble to create a breakwater—a mole, or jetty, or pier—to protect the anchorage; hewed the stone, transported it, and arranged it on the seabed; and piled rocks to form retaining walls, or seawalls, with drainage and weepholes. They hewed the wood, carried it, and secured it upon the stone foundations in cribworks of timber. They dug and hauled the dirt for the aprons, quays, and basins. As John Ruskin observed in *The Stones of Venice*, “There is no saying how much wit, how much depth of thought, how much fancy, presence of mind, courage, and fixed resolution there may have gone to the placing of a single stone. . . . This is what we have to admire,—this grand power and heart of man in the thing; not his technical or empirical way of holding the trowel and laying mortar.”

The “grand power” thus displayed was the power of cooperation among numerous carters and diggers, spalpeens and barrowers, who used rudimentary tools such as shovels, picks, axes, spades, pots, jugs, pails, and buckets to lay the foundations of the port cities.

The third labor of the hewer of wood and drawer of water was maintaining the life supports for communities on land and at sea, from chopping and gathering to pumping and toting. On ships as on plantations, in families as in entire cities, wood and water were the basis of life. Early Jamestown, Virginia, was known for its “fresh and plentie of water springs” and its “wood enough at hand.” Dixcove, an English fort in Ghana, was called in 1692 “a good place for corn and at wooding and watering.” Fort slaves brought these life supports to ships, which were often “in distress for wood and water.” A boat a day, for example, carried water to the Dutch slavers anchored at Shama, west of Elmina; indeed, even at Elmina rainwater cisterns were not built until 1695.

If the hewers of wood were male, the drawers of water were almost inevitably female. Adam Clark’s biblical commentary about drawers of water (1846) drove home the point: “The disgrace of this state lay not in
the *labouriousness* of it, but in its being the common employment of the *females.*” In his novel *Barnaby Rudge,* Dickens in the 1840s looked back upon the Gordon Riots, with their insurrectionary and democratic danger, and introduced a servant woman with the pronouncement that “if she were in a more elevated station of society, she would be gouty. Being but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, she is rheumatic. My dear Haredale, there are natural class distinctions, depend upon it.” John Taylor wrote as truthfully in 1639, “Women are nothing but your drudges and your slaves. . . . A woman’s work is never at an end.” Pepys collected testimony of revolt: “Other women’s husbands can rise in the morning and make their wives a fire, fetch them in water, wash shitten clouts, sweep the house, scour the Andirons, make the Bed, scrape Trenchers, make clean chooves, rub Stockings, air Apparel, and empty the Pot.”19 Bridget Hill has emphasized the drawing of water as the foundation of housework.20 A drudge or “slavey” fetched the water and carried out the slopes in the Victorian household, while “endless trips by the mother and older children with jugs, basins or buckets” provided water for daily reproduction.21

The drawing of water was part of state-sponsored science in the seventeenth century, not least because agriculture and mining depended on hydraulics, whether to drain the fens or to pump water from flooded mines. The latter need stimulated Thomas Savery, John Calley, and Thomas Newcomen to develop the steam engine. An eighteenth-century theorist wrote:

Men have already invented mills for grinding of corn, by the wind or water, the sawing of boards and the making of paper; the fire engine for the raising of water, the draining of mines, etc. and thus relieving mankind from drudgery: and many more engines, of this general kind, may doubtless be constructed, and should employ the thoughts of inventive and mechanical philosophers, in order still farther to ease mankind from too severe bodily labor, and the exertion of mere brutal strength: for even hewers of wood, and drawers of water, are men in a lower degree.22

In actuality, mechanization increased the number of hewers and drawers of water, as did technological changes in water-delivery systems. At the
end of the fifteenth century, when water was drawn to London through wooden pipes from Islington or Tyburn, the Fellowship of the Brotherhood of Saint Christopher of the Waterbearers of London did most of the hauling from the conduits. Water was free. In 1581 this changed as the first privately owned, pumped water supply was constructed at the London Bridge. “We have water companies now instead of water carryers,” wrote Jonson in 1598. Indeed, in 1600 “the whole company of the poor Water Tankard Bearers of the Cittie of London and the suburbs thereof, they and their families being 4000 in number,” petitioned Parliament against the private quills, as water pipes were known. Privatization nonetheless continued with the New River Company, chartered in 1619, which brought water from Hertfordshire to Clerkenwell reservoirs, through wood pipes and then from lead pipes to private subscribers. By the 1660s the era of free water by right had ended—another commons expropriated. The poor were thrown back on the wells and gravity-fed conduits to obtain water for themselves.

In summary, the hewers of wood and the drawers of water built the infrastructure of merchant capitalism. They clear-cut the forests, drained the fens, and created the fields for capitalist agriculture. They built the ports for capitalist trade. They reproduced the households, families, and laborers for capitalist work. The labors of hewing and drawing were usually carried out by the weakest members of the demographic structure: the dispossessed, the strangers, the women, the children, the people in England, Ireland, West Africa, or North America mostly likely to be kidnapped, spirited, trepanned, or “barbadosed.” Terror was inherent, for such work was a curse, a punishment. The formless, disorderly laboring class had been given a new form, and a productive one: whether waged or unwaged, the hewers of wood and the drawers of water were slaves, though the difference was not yet racialized.

Terror

In England the expropriation of the peasantry was accompanied by systematic violence and terror, organized through the criminal sanction, public searches, the prisons, martial law, capital punishment, banishment, forced labor, and colonization. Magistrates used cruel and pitiless
legislation to whip, dismember, brand, hang, and burn thousands; privy searches rounded up thousands more masterless men and women. The judicial decision known as *Gateward’s Case* (1607) denied common rights to villagers and propertyless commoners. Despite these cruel expropriations, a residue of paternalism remained: it was still expected that, to quote from Ben Jonson’s play *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Justice Overdo would “give puddings to the poor, . . . the bread to the hungry, and custards to his children.”

The real-life equivalents of Justice Overdo routinely sent the poor, the hungry, and the young to prison, an institution that was central to the regime of terror in England. Thomas Dekker listed thirteen “strong houses of sorrow” in London alone. Bridewell became a prison in 1553 for orphans, vagrants, petty offenders, and disorderly women. Houses of correction were erected across England—in Essex, for example, in 1587, 1607, and 1609. The prisons and bridewells forced labor upon thousands of the men, women, and children who passed through them. The combination of pain and work entailed was described by one inmate in 1596: “Every dayes taske is to bunch five and twenty pounds of hempe or els to have no meat. And then I was chaunied nyne weekes to a blocke and a month besides with it and five monthes without it in Little Ease and one of the turrents which is as bad, and fiyve wekes I went in the myll and ten dayes I stood with bothe my handes stretched above my head againste the wall in the standinge stocks.” The prison thus joined punishment to production to create work-discipline.

Capital punishment embodied the ultimate, spectacular power of the regime of terror, whether expressed by the provost martial who executed summary death upon the vagabond or by the slower-moving criminal justice system. Edmund Spenser remembered the execution of Murrogh O’Brien in Limerick: “I saw an old woman which was his foster mother took up his head whilst he was quartered and sucked up all the blood running there out, saying that the earth was not worthy to drink it, and therewith also steeped her face and breast, and tore her hair, crying and shrieking out most terribly.” For Spenser, the woman’s behavior, far from being justified, furnished proof of Irish barbarity.

London, whose suburbs housed the unprotected, rebellious workers of the putting-out system, was itself ringed by reminders of the death
penalty. To the south, the heads of malefactors were stuck on pikes and lodged for display at the southern end of London Bridge. To the east, pirates were hanged at a gallows erected at Execution Stairs, or drowned in Wapping by the rising tides of the Thames. To the north, at Smithfield, the “fires” martyred many Protestants during Queen Mary’s reign, though after 1638, when the market was established, it was principally cattle that were consigned to slaughter there. Finally, to the west, standing near what is now Speaker’s Corner, was the Tyburn gallows, which remained active until 1783. To “go west” became proverbial for death.

Hangings were staged throughout the realm: seventy-four persons were hanged in Exeter and another seventy-four (coincidentally) in Devonshire in 1598. In all the forty English counties, some eight hundred went to the gallows in each year of the seventeenth century, according to James Fitzjames Stephen, the Victorian historian of criminal law. Of the 436 people hanged in Essex between 1620 and 1680, 166 were burglars, 38 were highway robbers, and 110 were thieves. In the 1630s thieves were hanged for stealing goods valued at as little as eighteen pence. Edward Coke concluded in the Third Institute, “What a lamentable case it is to see so many Christian men and women strangled on that cursed tree of the gallows, insomuch as if in a large field a man might see together all the Christians that, but in one year throughout England[,] come to that untimely and ignominious death, if there were any spark of grace or charity in him, it would make his heart to bleed for pity and compassion.” If Coke felt pity, the “water poet” John Taylor believed in “the necessitie of hanging,” and wrote more than a thousand lines of verse in praise of it:

Of Hangings there’s diversity of fashions
Almost as many as are sundry Nations:
For in the world all things so hanged are
Than any thing unhang’d is strange and rare.

When Taylor visited Hamburg in 1616, he was fascinated by the execution of a poor carpenter who was smashed to pieces on the wheel by an executioner. Compared to “our Tyburn Tatterdemalion or our Wapping winde-pipe stretcher,” the poet exclaimed, the Hamburg executioner seemed like one of the pillars of Hercules! Taylor made explicit the rela-
Many poor women imprisoned, and hanged for Witches. Ralph Gardiner,
England’s Grievance Discovered (1655). Rare Books Division,

Women were a specific target of terror, as four thousand witches were burned and hundreds more hanged after 1604, when the punishment for “bewitchment” was made more severe. The terror had three peaks, in 1590–97, 1640–44, and 1660–63. Between 1558 and 1680, 5 percent of all English indictments, and fully 13 percent in the Home Circuit, contained charges of witchcraft. James I had himself interrogated women accused of witchcraft and had written a treatise of erudite misogyny, Daemonologie, to assert against skeptics the reality of witchcraft and the need for capital punishment. Silvia Federici has shown that the European witch-hunt reached its most intense ferocity between 1550 and 1650, “simultaneously with the Enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade and the enactment of laws against the vagabonds, in countries where a reorganization of work along capitalist lines was under way.” The ducking stool, the cart’s tail, branding, the pillory, the cage, the thw, and the branks were all used for the torture of women.26
In all its forms, terror was designed to shatter the human spirit. Whether in London at the birth of capitalism or in Haiti today, terror infects the collective imagination, generating an assortment of demons and monsters. If Francis Bacon conceptualized the science of terror from above, Luke Hutton’s *Black Dog of Newgate*, written in 1596, expressed the folklore of terror from below. Hutton had been indicted for theft in 1589 (specifically, for stealing surgical instruments) and served a short bid in Newgate; though he composed a great ballad of banditry and remorse (“Be warned, young wantons, hemp passeth green holly”), his life would end at the gallows in York in 1598. He dedicated *The Black Dog* to Chief Justice Popham, who had probably pardoned him for an earlier conviction and for whom the poem was an ambiguous kind of payback. It tells the story of Hutton’s arrest, detention, and first days in Newgate. In the poem the black dog is a diabolical fury that first appears as a broom man quietly cleaning the streets, reminding us that terror often masks itself as cleanliness: the Privy Council “swept” the street of vagabonds. The sweeper is then transmogrified into a beast, like Cerberus (Hydra’s sibling), a dog whose ears are snakes, whose belly is a furnace, whose heart is steel, whose thighs are wheels, and who seizes Hutton and tosses him into Newgate. The burden of the poem is to name the dog, a burden that is never lifted; the inability to name the oppressor thus becomes a first disability of terror.

The myth of the black dog originated in the Middle Ages, at a time of famine. A scholar jailed in Newgate—for conjuring which “by charms and devilish witchcraft had done much hurt”—was deemed by the other prisoners to be “passing good meat.” His fellow inmates watched in horror as the scholar turned into a dog, “ready with his ravening jaws to tear out their bowels”; driven to a fearful, insane frenzy, they then killed the prison-keeper and escaped, “but yet whithersoever they came or went they imagined the black dog to follow.” Some said that the black dog was a standing stone in the part of the dungeon called Limbo, “the place where the condemned Prisoners be put after their Judgement, upon which they set a burning candle in the night, against which, I have heard that a desperate condemned Prisoner dashed out his brains.” In certain respects the black dog of Newgate parallels the voodoo *backa*, or dog of repression, who also feeds on human beings. The *backa* is a form taken
by the living dead, or zombie: “It was a walking spirit in the likeness of a black dog gliding up and down the streets a little before the time of execution.” In Ireland Edmund Spenser observed zombies among the defeated Irish, who “looked like anatomies of death; they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves.”

Newgate’s black dog led Hutton and many others to that acme of the regime of terror, the hanging:

Yon men which thou beholds so pale and wan,
Who whiles look up, and whiles look down again,
Are all condemned, and they must die each man.
Judgment is given that cord shall stop their breath
For heinous facts—as murder, theft and treason.
Unworthy life! To die law thought it reason.

The sermon ended, the men condemned to die,
Taking their leaves of their acquainted friends,
With sorry looks, pacing their steps, they ply
Down to a hall where for them there attends
A man of office who, to daunt life’s hopes,
Doth cord their hands and scarf their necks with ropes.

Thus roped and corded, they descend the stairs:
Newgate’s black dog bestirs to play his part.
And does not cease for to augment their cares,
Willing the carman to set near his cart.
Which done, these men, with fear of death o’erhanging,
Bound to the cart are carried to be hanged.

This rueful sight, yet end to their doomed sorrows,
Makes me aghast and forces me bethink.
Woe unto woe! And so from woeful’st borrows
A swame of grief. And then I sounding sink.
But by Time’s aid I did revive again.
Might I have died it would be lesser pain!

Overwhelming horror thus conduced to a desire for death, a second disability of terror. The black dog did the work of reason and law, using
The Black Dogge of Newgate: both pithie and profitable for all Readers.

Vide, Lege, Causa...

Time shall trie the trueth.

by Luke Hutton

Imprinted at London by G. Simson and W. White.

*The Black Dogge of Newgate. Luke Hutton, The Discovery of a London Monster called, the black dog of Newgate (1638).*
death to elaborate a culture of fear that was indispensable to the creation of labor-power as a commodity. 30

If the prison, house of correction, and gallows expressed one aspect of capitalism in England, military adventure, colonization, and plantation expressed another around the Atlantic. When Sir Humphrey Gilbert established the first English colony in the New World, in Newfoundland in 1583, the chronicler of the settlement compared it to the military adventures of Joshua, who conquered “strange nations,” took their lands and divided them among God’s people, and kept the vanquished at hand “to hewe wood and to carie water.” Gilbert’s hewers and drawers included not only “savages” but his own countrymen—those men, women, and children who had “live[d] idly at home” and might now “be set on worke” in America, mining, manufacturing, farming, fishing, and especially “felling . . . trees, hewing and sawing . . . them, and such like worke, meete for those persons that are no men of Art or science.” Both Gilbert and Richard Hakluyt, the main propagandists for English exploration and settlement, saw an advantage in England’s late entry into the European scramble for New World colonies: the expropriations that coincided with colonization meant that England, unlike Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, or France, had a huge and desperate population that could be redeployed overseas. 31

Authorities emptied the jails for the Cadiz expedition of 1596 and again for Mansfield’s army in 1624. According to the Beggar Act of 1598, the first-time offender for begging was to be stripped and whipped until his back was bloody; second-time offenders were banished from England, beginning the policy of transportation. Several thousand soldiers were recruited from London’s Bridewell between 1597 and 1601, and in 1601 and 1602 four galleys were built and then manned by felons. After 1617 transportation was extended as a statutorily permitted punishment for felons; at each assize thereafter, half a dozen men were reprieved for galley service and ten conscripted for the army. Sir William Monson expressed the relationship among expropriation, theft, terror, and slavery when he wrote:

The terror of galleys will make men avoid sloth and pilfering and apply themselves to labour and pains; it will keep servants and ap-
prentices in awe; . . . it will save much blood that is lamentably spilt by execution of thieves and offenders, and more of this kingdom than any other. . . . And that they may be known from others, they must be shaved both head and face, and marked in the cheek with a hot iron, for men to take notice of them to be the king’s labourers, for so they should be termed and not slaves.32

Banishment legislation was aimed at the Irish, the Gypsies, and Africans after the 1590s. The English conquest of Ireland in 1596 laid the material foundation and established the model for all conquests to follow. Land confiscation, deforestation, legal fiat, cultural repression, and chronic crises of subsistence caused the Irish diaspora, sending men and women in waves to England and America. In 1594 all native Irish were commanded to leave England. Ulstermen found in Dublin were shipped to Virginia as slaves, as were Wexford rebels in 1620. The Gypsies, a nomadic people who had brought Morris dancing to England, offered an example of life lived without either landownership or master. By an Act of Mary, any Gypsy who remained in England longer than one month could be hanged; an Act of Elizabeth expanded the capital laws to include those who “in a certain counterfeit speech or behavior” disguised themselves as Gypsies. In 1628 eight men were hanged for transgressing these laws, and their female companions transported to Virginia. In 1636 another band of Gypsies was rounded up; the men were hanged and the women drowned at Haddington. Africans, too, commanded the attention of Queen Elizabeth I, who in 1596 sent an open letter to the lord mayor of London and to the mayors and sheriffs of other towns: “Her Majesty understanding that several blackamoors have lately been brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already too many here . . . her Majesty’s pleasure therefore is that those kind of people should be expelled from the land.” In the same year, she engaged a German slave dealer to confiscate black people in England in return for English prisoners of war. In 1601 she proclaimed herself “highly discontented to understand the great numbers of negars and Blackamoores which . . . are crept into this realm.”

Another part of the terror was forced labor overseas, a different kind of “going west.” Through the transatlantic institution of indentured ser-
vitute, merchants and their “spirits” (i.e., abductors of children and adults) shipped some two hundred thousand workers (two thirds of all those who left England, Scotland, and Ireland) to American shores in the seventeenth century. Some had been convicted of crimes and sentenced to penal servitude, others were kidnapped or spirited, while yet others went by choice—often desperate choice—exchanging several years’ labor for the prospect of land and independence afterward. During the first half of the seventeenth century, labor-market entrepreneurs plucked up the poor and dispossessed in the port cities (London and Bristol especially, and to a lesser extent Liverpool, Dublin, and Cork) and sent them initially to Virginia, where the practices and customs of indentured servitude originated. In order to entice settlers to and secure labor for the infant colony, the investors of the Virginia Company of London fashioned a covenant between the company and the workers. Imperial and local rulers of other colonies, most notably Barbados, adapted the new institution to their own labor needs. Indentured servitude, Eric Williams has remarked, was the “historic base” upon which American slavery was founded.33

Prisons of various kinds—including the ship’s hold, the tender boat, the hulk, the crimp house, the pressroom, the “cook-house” (London), the barracoons, the storehouse, the factory (Gold Coast), the trunk (Whydah), the cage (Barbados), or the city jail (almost anywhere)—were, as Scott Christianson has shown, indispensable to the various Atlantic slave trades, whether the prisoners were sailors, children, or felons, whether they were from Africa or from Europe.34 Many indentured servants, Thomas Verney explained in 1642, came from the “bridewells, and the prisons.” Sir Josiah Child claimed that “the major part” of the women servants were “taken from Bridewell, Turnball Street, and such like places of Education.” It was a time when “jayls [were] emptied, youth seduced, infamous women drilled in.” According to a pamphlet of 1632, the plantations they were destined for “were no better than common ‘sinkes,’ where the commonwealth dumped her most lawless inhabitants.” Virginia’s servants were said to “have no habitations, & can bring neither certificate of their conformity nor ability and are better out than within the kingdom,” while Maryland’s were “for the most part the scum of the people taken up promiscuously as vagrant and runaways from their English masters, debauched, idle, lazy, squanderers, jailbirds, and the
like.” John Donne promised in a sermon of 1622 that the Virginia Company “shall sweep your streets, and wash your dores, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and employ them: and truely, if the whole Countrey were such a Bridewell, to force idle persons to work, it had a good use.” He wanted America to function as a prison, and for many it did. \(^{35}\)

Among those many were thousands of children, for the hewers and drawers were young. The Virginia Company made arrangements with the city of London for the transportation of several hundred poor children between the ages of eight and sixteen from the city’s Bridewell to Virginia. London’s Common Council approved the request, authorized constables to round up the children, and shipped off the first young laborers in the early spring of 1619. When a second request was made, the council was again accommodating, but the children themselves had other ideas, organizing a revolt in Bridewell and declaring “their unwillingness to go to Virginia.” \(^{36}\) Their resistance apparently drew attention, and it was soon discovered that the city lacked the authority to transport the children against their will. The Privy Council, of which Francis Bacon was then a member, jumped into the fray, granting the proper authority and threatening to imprison any child who continued to resist. Of the several hundreds of children shipped to Virginia at this time, the names of 165 were recorded. By 1625 only twelve of those were still alive; the other 153, or 93 percent, had died. There is little reason to assume different outcomes for the fourteen to fifteen hundred children said to be on their way to Virginia in 1627, or for the four hundred Irish children stolen “out of theyre bedds” in 1653 and sent off to New England and Virginia. \(^{37}\)

The experience of seventeenth-century servitude has survived in two firsthand accounts, written by James Revel and an anonymous woman who called herself a “Trapann’d Maiden.” Convicted of theft and sentenced to hang, Revel entered the land of the living dead when his execution was transmuted to fourteen years’ labor in Virginia. When he arrived there after midcentury, he was purchased by a planter, given a “hop-sack frock in which I was to slave,” and set to work on a plantation alongside ten European and eighteen African slaves. Emphasizing the terror of his sentence, he said he “had much rather chuse to die than go” to America. For her part, the female servant was “cunningly trapann’d”
by a spirit and likewise sent to Virginia, where she suffered years of “Sorrow, Grief, and Woe.” She wore rags, slept on a bed of straw, drank only water, and ate poorly, being given no meat. She hewed wood (“The Axe and the Hoe/Have wrought my overthrow”) and drew water (“The water from the spring/Upon my head I bring”), all the while withstanding the abuse of “my Dame.” There was “No rest that I can have,/Whilst I am here a slave.”

In 1609 the author of *Nova Britannia*, who saw the project of coloniza-
tion as “farre excelling” the heroic deeds of Hercules, explained the con-
nections among the dispossessed, the new penal code, and the rise of a
new mode of production: “Two things are especially required herein,
people to make the plantation, and money. . . . For the first, wee need not
doubt, our land abounding with swarmes of idle persons, which having
no meanes of labour to relieue their misery, doe likewise swarme in lewd
and naughtie practises, so that if we seeke not some waies for their for-
raine employment, we must prouide shortly more prisons and correc-
tions for their bad conditions.” By 1617 ruling-class policy was to ship the
expropriated to far-flung labor markets, and various slave trades grew up
to accommodate and extend the policy. Thus began what in a later day
would be called the middle passage. Terror was instrumental; indeed, it
was a mechanism of the labor market for the hewers and drawers. They
had become deracinated. This was a third disability of terror.

The Specter of Hercules

If some used the biblical concept of “hewers of wood and drawers of
water” to give form to the formless, others saw the amorphous class as a
many-headed hydra and conjured Hercules to terrorize and destroy the
beast, especially during the revolutionary circumstances of the 1640s,
when the incipient class began to find new means of self-organization.
Paradoxically, the worst sites of oppression and terror offered opportu-
nity for collaboration. For example, the prison, like the shipwreck, was
something of a leveller, where the radical protestant, the sturdy rogue,
the redundant craftsman, the Catholic recusant, the wild Irishman, the
commonist, and the cutpurse met on roughly equal terms. Lovelace in
the Westminster Gatehouse in 1642 penned the lines, “Stone walls do not
a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.” E. D. Pendry, a historian of Elizabe-
than prisons, argues that the wave of prison riots that occurred during the second decade of the seventeenth century was due less to a deterioration of conditions than to the meeting of heretics and thieves, or political and common prisoners. Martin Markall, the beadle of Bridewell, stressed the association of landed offenders, such as Irish rebels, Gypsies, and Robberdsmen, with those of the sea, such as mariners and pirates. English, Latin, and Dutch were the languages of communication in prison. The prison, like the ship and the factory, organized large numbers of people for purposes of exploitation, but it simultaneously was unable to prevent prisoners from organizing against it. Hewers and drawers helped to inaugurate the English Revolution. If we return now to Bacon’s theory of monstrosity, we can see that his “holy war” was really a campaign of extirpation and genocide. To understand his murderous prescriptions of 1622, we must hold the seven heads of his hydra up to the “Satanic light” of history-from-below. The “wise man” of the scientific revolution gave original voice to Conrad’s cry in the Congo in 1897: “Exterminate all the brutes.”

The first target of the holy war was Caliban. Bacon called him the West Indian, an appellation that would have applied to any Native American, whether in the Caribbean or in North, South, or Central America, and especially to any group that dared, like the Caribs, to resist European encroachment. The native peoples of the Americas stood outside the law of God and nature, according to Bacon, because of their nakedness, their illiteracy and ignorance of horse riding (“thinking that horses did eat their bits and letters speak”), and their “eating of men.” Imperialists had long used charges of cannibalism to justify expropriation (though of course they themselves were the cannibals: many upper-class people took medicinal “mummy,” concocted from human cadavers and believed to be particularly potent when made from the hanged or from Libyans). Bacon explained that “wild and savage people are like beasts and birds, which are fere nature, the property of which passeth with the possession, and goeth to the occupant.” He wrote this just after the Powhatan attack on the Virginia colony in 1622, in which 347 European settlers (nearly one quarter of the population) had been killed. In An Advertisement Touching an Holy War, Bacon gave the Virginia Company and other colonizers something more lasting than revenge: a theory of genocide.
A second category of person who might be exterminated was the Canaanite, he or she who had lost land to the Israelites—in short, a dispossessed commoner. This would have included the many thousands of dispossessed in England, the wild Irish beyond the pale, and Africans. Bacon wanted workers for the colonies—“work-folks of all sorts [who] will be the more continuously on work without loss of time”—and expected them to be made available by enclosure, by the wars of attrition in Ireland (where the plan was “to burn all the corn and kill all the cattle, and to bring famine,” as Spenser wanted), and by the slave trade. Later William Petty would estimate that some 504,000 Irish perished between 1641 and 1652, “wasted by the sword, Plague, Famine, Hardship and Banishment.” Thomas Morton saw a New English Canaan, or New Canaan, in Massachusetts, to quote the title of his 1637 book, but he advocated acquiring the land through cooperative trade with the Native Americans. He praised their midwives, medicine men, and uses of the land. His followers, servants and fugitives of several languages and colors, hoisted the maypole and joined the round dance, earning the wrath of the Puritans, whose attitude toward the sensuality of popular culture was similar to Bacon’s. The architect of empire wanted Canaanites—borderless hewers and drawers—for the plantations; indeed, Africans were already at work in Virginia. But such people had no place in his ideal society, as he explained in New Atlantis (1627). Here Bacon imagined a future chaste nation, the “virgin of the world,” and contrasted this patriarchal dream with the “Spirit of Fornication” represented by a “little foul ugly Æthiop.”

A third “multitude” or “swarm” of people deserving extinction was pirates, “the common enemy of human society.” In selecting this enemy Bacon was acknowledging the corsairs of North Africa, who during the reign of James I and after attacked not only English shipping (taking almost five hundred ships between 1609 and 1616 alone) but the coasts of England and Ireland in slaving raids. The men they captured from ships, a figure put at twenty thousand during the 1620s, helped to quarry the rocks for the Barbary harbors. Some northern European seamen, English and Irish included, were not captured by but rather deserted to the Algerian pirates—or “turned Turk,” as they called it—bringing skill, technology (the “round ship,” for example), and experience to the polyglot com-
munity of Mediterranean pirates. These renegades included Henry Chandler (later Ramadan Raïs), a former Somerset farm laborer; Peter Easton, who commanded forty vessels in 1611; and John Ward, born “a poore fisher’s brat” in Faversham, Kent, who led a mutiny in 1603, stole a ship, renamed it Little John, and commenced pirating. The pirate port of Sallé, wrote Father Dan, the first European historian of the corsairs, was thus “made . . . into a republic,” a compound culture of heretics and religious radicals (Ranters and Sufis). Bacon wished to eradicate the “receptacle and mansion” of pirates in Algiers.45

The fourth class Bacon marked for destruction consisted of land rovers, from highway robbers to petty thieves, the same people Hercules had slain in delivering his own land from oppression. Their existence is recorded in the coney-catching pamphlets of Thomas Dekker and Robert Greene. Dekker warned, “The abram cove is a lusty strong rogue . . . a face staring like a Saracen. . . . These walking up and down the country, are more terrible to women and children, than the name of Raw-head and Bloody-bones, Robin Goodfellow, or any other hobgoblin.” This is an early description of what has since been called the lumpenproletariat, lazzaroni, or underclass. In the glossaries of cant or thieves’ talk we are given a veritable dramatis personae of the land rovers, all those who rejected wage labor: the Abraham-men, palliards, clapperdudgeons, whip-jacks, dummerers, files, dunakers, cursitors, Roberds-men, swadlers, prigs, anglers, fraters, rufflers, bawdy-baskets, autem-morts, walking morts, doxies, and dells. At the head of them all was the uprightman, of whose kind Thomas Harman, the Kentish squire, wrote, “Of these ranging rabblement of rascals, some be serving-men, artificers, and labouring men traded up in husbandry. These, not minding to get their living with the sweat of their face, but casting off all pain, will wander, after their wicked manner, through most shires of this realm.”46

The fifth group was assassins. Stuart kings lived in deathly fear of assassination. As attorney general, Francis Bacon interrogated Edmund Peacham, an old clergyman, because a sermon had been found in his house foretelling a rebellion by the people and the death of the king. No plot was discovered, though he was “examined before torture, in torture, between tortures, and after torture.”47 John Webster wrote a play about a Roman general who did not pay his troops, an obvious reference to the
King’s favorite, Buckingham, who was killed by an angry, unpaid sailor in 1625. One day the general, Appius, is held in awe by the people; the next he is in prison and fettered:

\[
\text{The world is chang’d now. All damnations}
\]
\[
\text{Seize on the Hydra-headed multitude,}
\]
\[
\text{That only gape for innovation!}
\]
\[
\text{O who would trust a people?}
\]

The tyrannicides of the early Stuarts (Buckingham in 1625 and Charles Stuart in 1649) point to the insurrectionary danger caused by courtiers’ and republicans’ contending for state power—a sordid situation that Bacon himself knew well. The sixth group suggested for extirpation was another collective enemy of Hercules, the Amazons, whose “whole government public and private, yea the militia itself, was in the hands of women.” Armed women frequently led popular disturbances in Bacon’s era. The Irish pirate queen Grace O’Malley, the “nurse to all rebellions for forty years,” commanded heterogeneous followers of different clans and terrorized merchants far and wide until her death, in 1603. In 1607 “Captain Dorothy” led thirty-seven women wielding knives and throwing stones against the enclosures of Kirkby Malzeard in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Bacon knew of this struggle, for as Lord Chancellor ten years later he would observe that “Clubb Lawe” had prevailed. Armed women also spearheaded food riots, in 1595 seizing food corn at Wye, in 1605 marching on the Medway ports to prevent the export of grain, and in 1608 going so far as to board grain ships in Southampton to keep their cargo from being shipped away. During the Western Rising (1629–31), women again led food riots, thus time in Berkshire and Essex. In 1626 the Star Chamber proceeded against women who had threatened to destroy Gillingham (Wiltshire) forest enclosures. “A certain number of ignorant women” pulled down enclosures in 1628. In Braydon Forest, meanwhile, “Lady Skimington” was the alias of male rioters who disguised themselves as women.

The final and perhaps most dangerous group against which holy war might be waged was the Anabaptists, who in sixteenth-century Münster had held “all things to be lawful, not according to any certain laws or rules, but according to the secret and variable motions and instincts of
the spirit; this is indeed no nation, no people, no signory, that God doth
know.”51 Here was the specter of communism! And Bacon wanted to
“cut them off from the face of the earth.” As attorney general in 1615,
Bacon had sentenced to death John Owen, whose writings he deemed
Anabaptist, inclined to “the pulling down of magistrates” and the bind-
ing of “Kings in chains and their nobles in fetters of iron.” One of
Bacon’s enemies was Robert Browne, the advocate of congregational
churches governed from below, by mutual consent, rather than from
above, by elder, king, or nation, and organized on principles of lawful de-
bate, dispute, protest, and questioning. Browne had directly influenced
Stephan Hopkins, who had led the resistance on Bermuda in 1609.
Browne’s theory of self-organization had revolutionary implications,
calling as it did for democratic covenants. Earlier, Thomas Nashe had
written of the repression of the Anabaptists in the German peasant re-
volt: “What is there more as touching this tragedie that you would be re-
solved of? say quickly. . . . How John Leyden dyed, is that it? He dyed
like a dogge, he was hanged & the halter paid for. For his companions,
doe they trouble you? They troubled some men before, for they were all
kild, & none escapt, no not so much as one to tell the tale of the rain-
bow.”52 In his work as a torturer (in 1619 he stretched a schoolmaster,
Samuel Peacock, on the rack until he fainted), Bacon perhaps indulged
a similar vanity, believing that “the tale of the rainbow” itself could be
extirpated. He thus used Hercules and the hydra to suggest an expansion
and intensification of state terror.

Bacon’s theory of monstrosity and terror was carried into the middle
of the seventeenth century by Thomas Edwards, who studied the here-
esies of revolutionary England and published Gangraena: Catalogue and
Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious
Practices of the Sectaries of this time, in three volumes in 1646. Edwards
cataloged 176 different heresies in volume 1, twenty-three in volume 2,
and fifty-three in volume 3, for a total of 252. In his dedication he de-
scribed his combat against the “three bodied Monster Geryon, and the
three headed Cerberus,” and “that Hydra also, ready to rise up in their
place.” At the beginning of volume 2 he noted that “whilest I was writ-
ing this Reply, had even finished it, striking off this three headed Cer-
berus, new heads of that monstrous Hydra of Sectarism sprung up.” The
heads of Bacon’s hydra lunge out of Edwards’s work, in the shape of re-
igious radicals, indigenous Americans, Africans, commoners, sailors, and women.

The “Anabaptists” denounced by Bacon had multiplied during the subsequent generation, posing a revolutionary challenge during the 1640s and 1650s and setting men such as Edwards to work. Some of these heretics, Edwards explained, favored communism, claiming “that all men are Commoners by right” and that “all the earth is the Saints, and there ought to be a community of goods, and the Saints should share in the Lands and Estates of Gentlemen, and rich men.” An associated belief was the millenarian notion that Christ would visibly reign for a thousand years, putting down all oppressors, while Christians lived in worldly delight (though no one seemed to know when to begin the calculation of the millennium!). Many of the Anabaptists were also antinomians, believing that the “moral law [was] of no use at all to believers,” that the Old Testament was not binding on God’s chosen, and that faith and conscience took priority over good works and lawfully constituted authority. Indeed, some held that it was “unlawful for a Christian to be a magistrate,” while others felt that secular government itself was an oppression. Skepticism toward rules, ordinances, and rituals abounded, as did revelations and visions. Some religious radicals asserted that the “body of the common people is the Earthly Sovereign.”

Like Bacon, Edwards adopted an international perspective on his subject, remarking that many of the heresies had been promoted by persons “cast out of other Countries.” He condemned the numerous spiritual extremists of New England:

How many cast out of New England for their Antinomianisme, Anabaptisme, &c. have come over, and here printed Books for their Errors, and preach up and down freely; so that poor England must lick up such persons, who like vomit have been cast out of the mouth of other Churches, and is become the common shore and sinket to receive in the filth of Heresies, and Errors from all places; what was said of Hannibals Army, it was colluvies omnium gentium, the same may be said of us for all kinde of sects and sectaries, Anglia colluvies omnium errorum & sectarum.

The core of Hannibal’s army was African, and indeed the continent to which English slave traders were flocking in the 1640s was never far from
Edwards’s mind. Many of the heresies of seventeenth-century England seemed to Edwards to be variations of the North African heresies of early Christianity, such as those of the Donatists. He wrote, “Error, if way be given to it, knowes no bounds, it is bottomlesse, no man could say how farre England would goe, but like Africa it would be bringing forth Monsters every day.”

When Edwards singled out for particular scorn those monsters he described as “hairy, rough, wilde red men,” Caliban reappeared in revolu-
tionary England, as did native America more generally. In much the same vein, the editor of an English newsbook reported in April 1649 the sayings of two “savage Indians” at the French court:

[One Indian] observed two things which he stood amazed at. First, that so many gallant men which seemed to have stout and generous Spirits, should all stand bare, and be subject to the will and pleasure of a Child [Louis XIV]. Secondly, that some in the City were clad in very rich and costly Apparel, and others so extream poor, that they were ready to famish for hunger; that he conceived them to be all equaliz’d in the ballance of Nature, and not one to be exalted above another.

The editor denounced the natives as “two Heathen Levellers.” In the Americas, fear of Indian attacks and slave revolt went hand in hand with fear of “familisme [the doctrine of the sixteenth-century sect called the Family of Love], Anabaptisme, or Antinomianisme,” and the many-headed hydra summarized the threat in a powerful rhetorical figure. Edwards wrote that John Calvin, who attacked popish heresy as well as the heresies of libertines and Anabaptists, was a “Christian Hercules, overcoming so many monsters.”

Bacon’s Amazons were also animated in Edwards’s account, in the heresy “that tis lawful for women to preach, and why should they not, having gifts as well as men?” Equally threatening were women who held it unlawful “to hear any man preach, either publickly or privately.” Dispossessed commoners and land rovers were likely the ones expressing the “jubilee” heresy that Christ came into the world to preach deliverance to the captives (in prison), or the critique of capital punishment, “God doth not hang first, and judge after.” Other heretics opposed Bacon’s whole strategy of warfare, holy or unholy, insisting “that tis unlawful to give thanks for victories for one man’s killing another”—that in short, “tis unlawful to take up arms, or to kill any man.” More specifically, a “godly Citizen” had told Edwards of hearing a “great Sectary that belonged to the Army say, speaking of Ireland, he doubted, and so did many more in the Army, whether it were lawfull to go fight against the Irish; and that that Country was theirs, as well as England was ours.”

Bacon, in sum, approached the hydra from above, identifying subjects to be acted upon: the swarms, shoals, and routs, as he called the multi-
tude. A generation later, Edwards approached the monster from below, reactively, where it formed covenant ed churches, politicized army regiments, rural communes, and urban mobs. The commoners, the vagabonds, the soldiers and sailors, the servants and the slaves, the masterless men and women, the hewers of wood and the drawers of water—all those many new slaves—came from far and wide and traveled further, preaching, interrupting, spouting, ranting, and organizing. As Edwards wondered, “How do persons cast out of other Countries for their Errours, not only live here, but gather Churches, preach pub likely their Opinions! what swarms are there of all sorts of illiterate mechanick Preachers, yea of Women and Boy Preachers! What a number of meetings of Sectaries in this City, eleven at least in one Parish!” Across the ocean, on Bermuda, in 1640, an eight-year-old mulatto girl named Sarah Layfield was brought to court on charges of uttering “foolish and dangerous words touching the person of the King’s majesty.”

During the December Days of 1641, the London crowd, or mob, assembled tumultuously at Whitehall and Westminster, lending support to the radicals in the House of Commons whose views of liberty and restrictions on kingly power were listed in the Grand Remonstrance, which was printed in the same month. The king denounced them as a “multitude of Brownists, Anabaptists and other sectaries.” Two Common Councilmen for London were accused of contriving the tumult: they were said to have gone “from house to house and brought this Hy dras Head to Westminster, and put in their mouths to cry out, ‘No Bishops, No Popish Lords.’” The hydra, composed of sailors, mechanics, watermen, apprentices, the lowly and the base—or, put another way, the revolutionary urban proletariat—was now taking independent action. Francis Bacon’s sometime secretary Thomas Hobbes took notice of such new forms of organized power when, for example, mariners and ’prentices used the instruments of street warfare (a cudgel, a musket, an oar, a farmer’s trine, a bill hook) to break open the prisons on Mayday 1640—and noted, as well, the king’s inability to control them through the usual means, money. Hence Hobbes’s interpretation of the hydra:

B. You have read, that when Hercules fighting with the Hydra, had cut off any one of his many heads, there still arose two other heads in its place; and yet at last he cut them off all.
A. The story is told false. For Hercules at first did not cut off those heads, but bought them off; and afterwards, when he saw it did him no good, then he cut them off, and got the victory.

The king would not in the end “get the victory” because, as some said, he did not deploy sufficient violence and terror against the hydra. Strafford advised hanging some aldermen who refused to loan Charles money; instead, two young rioters were hanged, one after being tortured on the rack, the last time the device was used in England.58 After Charles I was beheaded at Whitehall on January 30, 1649, Anthony Ascham wrote Of the Confusions and Revolutions in Government (1649), reminding all of the need for a new Hercules “to tame Monsters.” Thus was the role of Oliver Cromwell and the revolutionary bourgeoisie defined. Their task was to turn the many-headed hydra back into hewers of wood and drawers of water.


40. Smith, A Map of Virginia, 2:370; Percy, “A Trewe Relacyone,” 266; Helen C. Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), and Pocahantass People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990). See also Kirkpatrick Sale, The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 271, 301; James Axtell, “The White Indians of Colonial America,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 32 (1975): 55–88. Rountree (The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 87) calls Powhatan society an “incipient class system,” but the evidence for this is unpersuasive. What minimal social distinctions there were did not grow out of differentiation of economic function or property holding, but rather were based on hunting ability or capacity for leadership.


Chapter Two


3. Francis Bacon, Of the Wisdom of the Ancients (1609).


5. Against Charles Tilly, whose view of European proletarianization emphasizes “natural” increases in fertility, ignores enclosure, and occludes terror, we return to the interpretation of Marx, who says that expropriation is “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.” Indeed, the branding of the recalcitrant (with letters made from the admixture of blood and fire) was part of the terror. Where Tilly ignores slavery, Marx writes, “It is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, played the greatest part.” Charles Tilly, As Sociology Meets History (New York: Academic Press, 1981), chap. 7, and “Demographic Origins of the European Proletariat,” in David Levine, ed., Proletarianization and Family History (New York: Academic Press, 1984).


12. Polyolbion (1613). Michael Williams, The Draining of the Somerset Levels (Cam-


17. *New Life of Virginea: Declaring the Former Successe and Present State of that Planta-


24. William Fenner, *The Counter’s Commonwealth; Or, A Voyage made to an Infernal Is-

25. Taylor’s Travels of Hamburgh in Germanie (1616) and *The Praise and Vertue of a Jayle and Jaylers with the most excellent mysterie and necessary use of all sorts of Hanging*, in *All the Works of John Taylor the Water Poet 1630* (facsimile edition, London, 1977).


27. *The Black Dog of Newgate* was first published in 1596; it was published in another edition in 1638 as *The Discovery of a London Monster*.


29. Spenser, *View of the Present State of Ireland*.


36. A series of riots against spirits and kidnappers in the 1640s and 1650s led to legislation
designed to regulate the servant trade and hence also to the first set of records, kept in Bristol beginning in 1654, upon which statistical analysis of the trade has been based.


41. [Samuel Rid], Martin Markall, beadle of Bridewell, His Defense and Answers to the Bellman of London (London, 1610).


48. Appius and Virginia (1625–27?).


51. Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena, or, A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies, and pernicious practices of the Sectaries of this time* (1646–47).

52. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller; Or, the Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594).


Chapter Three


5. The Broadmead Records were published by E. B. Underhill in 1847. A second edition, printed in 1865 by Nathaniel Haycroft, preserved much of the orthography, emphatic typography, capital letters, and paragraph divisions of the original. This formed the basis of a third edition, published in 1974, edited and with a long, scholarly introduction by Roger Hayden. Our analysis is based on a scrutiny of the manuscript text at the Broadmead Church in Bristol.
