

## Elite schools and slavery in the UK – capital, violence and extractivism.

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### Abstract

Elite schools in the UK are bound to the history of British colonialism. This paper examines the material ties between these schools and the transatlantic slave trade. We combine a range of sources to examine which educational institutions and their alumni have accrued substantial economic capital derived from the enslavement of Black people. We find two principal forms of connection: first, in donations and foundations of schools from those who made their fortune in the slave trade: and second, through the sources of income of the boys attending these schools. Drawing on the Legacies of British Slavery dataset, we show that schools with the largest numbers of alumni benefitting from the slave trade are some of the most prestigious private schools for boys in England. This finding aligns with, and builds upon, existing accounts which suggest that Caribbean plantation owners frequently educated their sons at major private schools. Moreover, this paper traces the links between founders and private schools, as well as the histories of several secondary schools founded by, or in receipt of, substantial donations from slave-owning families. Combining these histories we provide a theorization of the relationship between elite education, capital, class formation, imperialism and slavery. In doing so, we argue that exploitative, extractive and violent forms of imperial capital accumulation have been, and remain central to, the formation and maintenance of elite educational institutions in England.

### Keywords

Elites, school, slavery, colonialism, philanthropy

### Intro

The last decade has witnessed the growing prominence of global decolonial movements demanding a reckoning with the continuing legacies of colonial violence, domination and control, with education being a critical site of struggle. Student and staff campaigns, from the USA to South Africa and the UK, have forced higher education institutions to acknowledge their involvement in and benefits received through slavery, colonialism and empire (Ahmed, 2020; Beckert et al., 2017; Chigudu, 2020; Mullen, 2021). Schools with similar legacies have been slower to engage in this process. Whilst there is now fairly considerable scholarship relating to universities and their ties to the slave trade, the same is not true for schools. This paper seeks to provide a clear account of the ties between secondary schools in the UK and the transatlantic slave trade. It situates this analysis within a theoretical discussion of the relations between power, elitism and the accumulation of capital.

Like Draper (2018, p. 95) in his study of universities financial ties' to Caribbean slavery, Eric Williams (1944) work, *Capitalism and Slavery*, was a major influence on this study. In his analysis of the formation of the 'West India Interest' within the British 18<sup>th</sup> century ruling class, Williams (1944, p. 86) notes that already in 1698, 300 children were being sent back to England for schooling, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Eton, Westminster, Harrow, and Winchester, were full of the sons of West Indians' (Williams, 1944, p. 91). The preference for schooling their children in England represented the great importance placed by white settlers on maintaining a British or English identity (Zacek, 2010, p. 12) with a metropolitan education providing 'the social finesse' required for that 'ultimate badge of success a return to the mother country' (Donington, 2019, p. 164). This was a small part of Williams' (1944, p. 210) analysis of how 18<sup>th</sup> century British capitalism was developed 'by means of slavery and monopoly [...] [helping] to create the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century'. Whilst Caribbean slavery reached

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its peak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Williams shows how during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the wealth created through Caribbean slavery was ploughed back into banking, insurance and manufacturing and railway development as well as into further colonial expansion (Hall et al., 2014, p. 9). Recently, Burnard and Garrigus (2016, p. 3) have argued the sugar plantation itself was ‘an industrial, or at least proto-industrial operation’, creating a dominant economic model of organisation reliant on careful management of capital, labour and time whilst stimulating the development of a racial and racist ideology of whiteness to justify the exploitation of enslaved people. As we will see below the alumni of these elite schools followed the geographical movement of the plantation system.

The ongoing economic, social and cultural legacy of the uneven development wrought by enslavement in the Caribbean and elsewhere has resulted in calls for reparation over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Biondi, 2003; Rauhut, 2018). The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) adopted a reparations framework in 2014 and a recent report quantifying the cost of enslavement placed the value of reparations at \$100-131 trillion (Bazon, 2023) with the UK owing \$26.2 trillion. In Scott’s (2014) words, ‘Caribbean debt is the other side of European *theft*’ and the politics of reparations recognise ‘what is owed to the Caribbean by former slave-trading and slave-owning nations as a matter of the justice of redress.’ As has been shown for universities, these questions of economic redress are not only matters for states but also the cultural and civic institutions that directly benefitted financially from slavery. We will explore two specific links which illuminate the connection between elite schools in Britain and the racialised, violent forms of economic exploitation and accumulation associated with the development of colonialism and empire which continued beyond the formal abolition of slavery in British colonies: (1) the role of school founders and (2) slave ownership by students or their families.

This paper is focused on both state and private schools that are now considered elite, either at a local or a national/international scale, with institutional status determined by academic, sporting or cultural success and the reproduction of class advantage (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). The first section maps the links between the slave trade and the founding of schools during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Our examination of the foundation of these schools by slave-owning wealthy elites seeks to comprehensively map their connection to the slave trade. Many of the schools that have continued to exist up to the present day tend to be private schools or prestigious state schools with considerable middle-class intakes - this is true for at least 20 of the 29 schools listed here. Capital clings to ‘successful’ elite educational institutions and these schools persistently seek to accumulate and manage their economic wealth (Gamsu, 2022). The formation and maintenance of educational success relies on this close relationship to capital. In practice, this ties these elite private and state schools to wider forms of capital accumulation and the violent, exploitative processes that underpin them. These relationships between Britain’s elite schools and the imperial project also extend beyond the formal abolition of slavery.

## Literature review

Whilst an analysis of the material, economic ties between colonialism, slavery and education has focussed mainly on universities (Draper, 2018), there is substantial literature exploring the relationship between elite ‘public’ schools and the British Empire. The history of education has provided much of this work with more recent sociological analyses continuing to explore the contemporary entanglements of elite schooling and the colonial project. Mack (1938, p. 291) noted the ‘curious manner in which oil wells have sprouted almost literally from the bones of dead missionaries’. His analysis highlights how public schools are aligned to expansionist, violent and extractive economic projects since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, thus serving ‘primarily [as] a mint for the coining of Empire builders’ (Mack, 1938, p. 400). Indeed, schools for colonial and neo-colonial elites were and remain aligned to similar projects (Bolay & Rey, 2021). Public

school boys were not simply intent on imperial expansion for economic purposes. Indeed, these schools themselves inculcated a 'moral faith in empire' through their curricula (Wilkinson, 1964, p. 102). Pivoting on a sense of racial superiority; songs, debates, and speeches were presented as a question of duty, economic opportunity, military heroism, physical resilience during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mangan, 1980, 1993; 2000).

Makarchev's (2021) analysis of student debate manuscripts at Eton College between 1896 and 1914 shows there was some pluralism in students' views, including limited forms of criticism of empire. However, pluralism and occasional opposition to jingoism must be viewed in the context of a dominant culture of militarism, athleticism, racist imperialism and the celebration of former students' contribution to imperial rule, trade and war (Cowper, 1979, pp. 52-53; Worthington, 1977). This was not just the education of the apogee of colonial elites, as with Eton's domination of Indian viceroys, "to the glory and credit of mother Eton" (Cowper, 1979, pp. 38-39), but the formation of a larger white colonial middle and upper middle class engaged in business, farming, mining and the lower ranks of the military and colonial administration (Ranger, 1993; Worthington, 1977), as well as local, 'native' colonial elites (Rizvi, 2014). The spread of elite schooling on the Anglo-British model across the British Empire and beyond (to European countries and the USA) occurred through a process of diffusion and imitation of practices from sport to prefects (Sandgren, 2017). The education of Irish elites, both Catholic and Protestant, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century underscored the way that British schools were implicated in very proximate forms of colonialism and the rise of new elites (Courtois, 2018; O'Neill, 2014). These public schools were bound to the formation of power and systems of domination which established and maintained colonialism; they educated those at the apex of these systems and those in lower managerial or supervisory roles.

Central to the educational role of schools in Britain's imperial project was the creation of a morality embedded in ideologies of racial superiority where colonial exploitation could take place without guilt or moral qualms (Mangan, 1993, p. 11). Gaztambide-Fernandez and Angod (2019, p. 733) describe this as 'a way of being in the world that is *unhinged* from place and time'. There is perhaps a persistent history and ongoing present of 'unhinged' within elite schools. Over different periods of empire and colonialism, practices of whiteness, racism, class power and masculinity in operation in these schools have helped create subjectivities that allow the detachment necessary for the violent exercise of power along multiple dimensions of inequality. James Welldon, headmaster of Dulwich College and later Harrow, highlighted the explicit racialised dimension of teaching at elite public schools:

"He who would give his pupils what I have called an imperial education, will profoundly believe in the imperial destiny of the British race. I believe and I want my pupils to believe that the British race is the best in all the world." (Welldon, 1895. In: Cowper, 1979, pp. 42-43).

Imperialism combined the deeply engrained arrogance and elitism of the British ruling class with ideologies of white supremacy and racial superiority, creating an 'alliance between colour-consciousness and class consciousness, [in which] the public schools played their part' (Wilkinson, 1964, p. 104). Preparatory schools, attended prior to entering public school at thirteen, fostered imperialist ideology, racism and racist violence for minoritized students (Mukherjee, 2022, pp. 12-13; Pearce, 1991, p. 47). Racism continued to be deeply embedded within the public schools into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Onyeama's (1972) book vividly illustrating the experience of racism in 1960s Eton. Despite work on the specificity of racism in elite schools in North America (Angod & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2019; French, 2017; Keddie et al., 2021) and South Africa (Epstein, 2014; Hunter, 2015), this remains an understudied area in research on UK private schools. In the aftermath of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, media articles and campaigns by Black alumni of private schools highlighted their experiences of racism at school (Adebayo et al., 2020). Following these protests, some private schools with

direct connections to slavery began to acknowledge and confront these histories more publicly and seriously than before.

Gaztambide-Fernández and Angod (2019, pp. 742-743) have argued that the sociology of elite schooling has tended to 'do class without race', with the whiteness implicit in Bourdieu's framework contributing to this. Angod's (2015) work carefully traces how whiteness is carefully managed within elite Canadian private schools, restricting the numbers of international students as an act of policing and protecting the whiteness that is key to elite institutional status and identity. Ayling's (2019: 74) important work provides another counterpoint, combining Fanon and Bourdieu to analyse how the 'colonial habitus' remains embedded in choices and perceptions of wealthy Nigerians where 'whiteness has become the symbol of quality education in contemporary Nigeria'. Epstein's (2014, pp. 247-249) paper on race and gender at an elite private school in South Africa built on the path of the Slave Route, notes the presence of a 'neglected, dusty display of slave remains found beneath the school during a building programme, not visited by the school's own students'. These schools, like their elite, predominantly white students become 'unhinged from – their own histories of racial subjectification' (Gaztambide-Fernández & Angod, 2019, p. 732).

The specific approach we develop here integrates this analysis of race, colonialism and slavery with an analysis of (economic) capital. More specifically, we focus theoretically on how the wealth that pays for elite schooling has often been tied to violent imperialist forms of capital accumulation. Thus, maintaining a close proximity to violent sources of capital enabled through colonialism far beyond the formal abolition of slavery within the British empire helped ensure longevity, stability and domination for schools, both nationally and internationally (Gamsu, 2022). Establishing the material ties between elite schooling, wealth and capital is the core focus of this special issue. As we note in the introduction (Gamsu et al., 2024), this approach is still in its relative infancy within the literature on elite schooling, despite its use in literature examining the political economy and marketisation of state-funded school systems (Reckhow, 2012). We add to this literature by exploring the 'social life' of commodities, tracking the trajectories of economic activity (Appadurai, 1988, pp. 3-6) which turned enslaved people into commodities. The economic capital extracted was then transported and transformed into value within specific educational settings through 'philanthropic' activity.

This tradition is well-established within the sociological analysis of economic life (Christophers, 2011; Dodd, 2016; Hughes-McLure, 2022) and can be directly linked to theorizations of capital within the sociology of education. The founding or funding of schooling by the wealthy, works to both sanitise or even sanctify (Steeds & Ball, 2020, p. 239) and consecrate that wealth. Bourdieu's (1986, 1989; 1970) analyses emphasised how education allows the conversion of economic capital into cultural capital in the form of certification of academic prowess which in turn can be converted back into economic advantage on the labour market. Enabling capital conversion is central to the survival and core function of elite schooling. Interrogating the sources of economic wealth, either held by students or their parents or by the institutions themselves, allows us to tie the sociology of education back into analyses of global political economy and highlight the importance of colonial relations within this (Bhambra, 2020). It simultaneously allows us to analyse how the sources of institutional power and prestige held and conferred by certain schools are underpinned by wider violent forms of extractive and racialised economic exploitation associated with empire and enslavement, and comprehend the formation and reproduction of British and imperial elites and middle classes and their schools.

## Data and methods

The list of schools identified here (Table 1) draws on existing sources, in particular the UCL Slavery Legacies database, research from Draper (2018, pp. 105-106) and Dresser (2007). The focus here is on still extant or successor secondary schools. Historical research and

community campaigns raising these ties, often long before 2020, are also drawn on here. Some schools are described here whose association with slavery has not previously been recognised. Most have already been recognized by existing research, though in some cases this research has not received much attention or examined the school histories in detail. Three case study schools have been chosen to examine in greater detail how schools were founded with wealth from enslavement. The Bristol and Liverpool schools provide examples of schools that have had high-profile and, in Bristol especially, long-running campaigns about the legacy of enslavement and use of that wealth for schooling. Christ's Hospital was chosen as an example of a school which has been comparatively silent publicly, until very recently, about its links to the slave trade. The school's history also indicates the significant role of Charles II and the way that investing capital gained through enslavement in schooling was also instrumental to developing mathematical education essential to navigation. All three cases provide examples of investment in schooling resulting in former pupils then going to work roles or industries associated with imperial expansion, particularly on ships. These cases were chosen as schools that were either founded with or received major donations of capital from the slave trade. Additional data was collected on the schools listed in Table 1 with more minor or complicated connections to slavery through buildings, bursaries, book donations. This is available on request.

The UCL Slavery Legacies database allowed us to identify the students that attended schools in England who were either the sons of slaveowners or were later compensated following the formal abolition of slavery. We are grateful to Keith McClelland and Rachel Lang who provided an excerpt of the data for individuals who had either received or unsuccessfully claimed compensation. Many of the major slave-owning families had ended their financial involvement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the 1830s only the hardcore remained with the focus of the British colonial economy and the plantation system shifting elsewhere (Manjapra, 2018; Wyman-McCarthy, 2018). The LBS data thus provides only a partial snapshot of the connections between these schools and the education of those who profited from slavery. This data was cleaned and aggregated in R to provide the data presented in Table 2 which lists the number of compensated alumni attending particular schools. In addition to this, the school lists for pupils attending Eton College 1791-1877 are drawn on to examine the continuing presence of the sons of plantation-owners during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These lists, alongside those for Harrow and Marlborough College, allow us to explore the changing relationships between these schools and the colonial economy.

School histories and websites are drawn on to examine current and past recognition and commemoration of the individual founders. There are limits to school histories which vary 'across a spectrum from backslapping, to disinterested, to disapproving' (Kenway et al., 2017, p. 18). We would add that there are also genuine scholarly works amongst this genre which allow us to highlight significant 'absences' (Ibid.) within official histories.

## Section 1: Founding schools with capital from slavery

The foundation of these schools saw several institutions established with donations from slaveowners and slave-traders. Starting in the fifteenth century, grammar schools were established on a large scale through 'philanthropic' wealth (Jordan, 1974) with merchants being a key group of benefactors. Mercantile wealth was frequently converted to land assets providing an annual income for these 'endowed' schools. Table 1 below provides a list of schools with links to the slave trade. In what follows below we examine the foundational history of these schools, as well as the elite education of sons of slaveowners.

Table 1 List of schools with financial links to slavery (excluding fees – see Table 2)

School	Year founded	School type	Type of link	Public recognition or response
Eton College	1440	Private	Library donations from slaveowners.	No.
Bristol Grammar School	1532	Private	Founded with capital from slavery.	No.
Christ's Hospital	1553	Private	Major donations of capital from slavery.	Yes. (After news coverage of this research)
Queen Elizabeth's Hospital	1586	Private	Small donations of capital from slavery.	Yes.
Lady Hawkin's School	1632	State	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes (caveats).
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School*	1690	Private	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes (but no longer on school website).
Liverpool Blue Coat School	1708	State	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes.
Colston's School <sup>1</sup>	1710	Private	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes.
Sir John Cass School <sup>3</sup>	1710	State	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes.
Royal Hospital School	1712	Private	Charitable foundation owned enslaved people (Greenwich Hospital)	No.
Godolphin School	1726	Private	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	No.
George Watson's College	1741	Private	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes.
Inverness Royal Academy	1792	State	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes (prior to 2020, not via school website)
James Gillespie's School	1803	State	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes (though only on primary school page)
Fortrose Academy	1811	State	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	No.
Tain Royal Academy	1813	State	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	No.
Dollar Academy	1818	Private	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes.
Bathgate Academy	1833	State	Founded with capital from slavery	Yes. (Very minimal)
Llandoverly College	1848	Private	Founded with capital from slavery	No.
Queen's College London	1848	Private	Indirect. Co-founded by slaveowner (Rev. D Laing)	No.
North London Collegiate School	1850	Private	Bursary donations of capital partially from slavery (via widow of Rev. D Laing)	No.
St John's Leatherhead	1851	Private	Major donations of capital from slavery.	No.
St Edward's College Liverpool	1853	State <sup>a</sup>	Indirect. Between 1848-1938 housed in mansion erected by slave trader	No.
Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College*	1875	State	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes (but no longer on school website).
Haberdashers' Aske's Girls' School*	1875	Private	Founded with capital partially from slavery.	Yes (but no longer on school website).
Colston's Girls School <sup>2</sup>	1891	State <sup>b</sup>	Founded by the Governors of Colston's School and Merchant Venturers	Yes
Rendcomb College	1920	Private	Indirect. Founded with capital from Wills tobacco family.	No.
Douglas Ewart School	1922	State	Successor school to Douglas Free School (1834) which was founded with capital from slavery.	No.
Stowe School	1923	Private	Indirect. Building previously owned by slaveowner, gardens commemorate 18th C colonial wars.	No.

<sup>1</sup>now renamed Collegiate School; <sup>2</sup>now Montpelier High School; <sup>3</sup>now Stepney All Saints School; \*now with "Aske's" removed from their names

<sup>a</sup> private until 1997; <sup>b</sup> private until 2008

## Case study 1: Edward Colston and the Bristol Schools

Certain schools in Bristol hold a particular place in the overlap between the histories of slavery and charity school foundation. Bristol is unusual in the UK in the scale, extent and success of vocal and active political and community organising around the politics and legacies of slavery and colonialism in the city. Forms of criticism and protest against the commemoration of Edward Colston date back to at least the 1920s and accelerated over the 1990s (Ball et al., 2021). This has involved directly targeted campaigns like Countering Colston (Countering Colston, nd), the work of the Bristol Radical History Group (BRHG), as well as artists and musicians. The BRHG have created a substantial critical literature describing Edward Colston's life, his involvement in the slave trade, his commemoration, attempts to challenge this commemoration and the response to his statue being toppled on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Colston came from a wealthy merchant family and accumulated further wealth through ship ownership, trade of commodities with West Africa, ownership of shares in the Royal Africa Company (RAC) and through loaning money (Ball, 2017). His benefaction and subsequent commemoration across the city were substantial (Dresser, 2009; Steeds & Ball, 2020) including several schools.

Colston was central to the founding and funding of schools in Bristol including several schools that subsequently became private schools. He funded scholarships for pauper children to study at Queen Elizabeth's Hospital and in 1702 donated £500 for building work there (the equivalent to a project labour cost of £1.161m in 2021) (measuringworth.com, n.d.; Wroughton, 2002). Via the Merchant Venturer's Society, who had already funded a writing and navigation school which by 1700 housed 62 boys, Colston founded what became Colston School, now Collegiate School (renamed through a consultation after 2020). Colston agreed in 1708 to provide for the education of 100 boys through an annual income of £1278 16s (equivalent to a relative income value of £3.495m in 2021), provided from ground rents of property/estates across England and Wales (Wroughton, 2002, p. 8). He made further substantial contributions to the School, including clothing, bedding, towels and cutlery for the first cohort of boys (Wroughton, 2002, p. 9) and purchased a manor house for the school for £1300 in 1706 (ibid.). This provided the economic basis for what in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century began to become an academically successful fee-paying private school with ties to Oxbridge (Wroughton, 2002, pp. 221-228).

## Case Study 2: Bryan Blundell and Blue Coat School, Liverpool

The city of Liverpool also has long and well-known connections with empire and the transatlantic slave trade. Bluecoat School is the only grammar school in the city, having preserved a selective entry exam. Its selective nature results in it having the third lowest proportion of Free School Meals eligible pupils in the city in 2020-21 at 13.1% compared to the city average of 43.2% for state-funded secondary schools (DfE, 2022). Bluecoat was founded by Bryan Blundell whose links to the slave trade were clearly and publicly acknowledged by the school following the emergence of BLM in 2020. These links have been public knowledge for several decades, if not longer (Kelly, 2005; Millard, 1992). The city's ties to the slave trade have also been widely researched, and whilst official recognition in museums and by local government dates from the late 1980s/early 1990s, the city's Black community and activists like the late Eric Lynch, had been drawing attention to the legacies of slavery since at least the 1970s (McLernon & Griffiths, 2002).

Blundell and his sons, who were more deeply, frequently and directly involved in the slave trade, donated at least £2,992 5s (£6.25m as a project labour cost) to Bluecoat between 1709 and 1796 (Girvan, 2022, pp. 6-7). The construction of the school itself was completed in 1725, with Blundell's fundraising efforts resulting in a further seventeen subscribers to fund its construction, two-thirds of whom were also involved in the slave trade (Jones, 2016, pp. 7-8). Some pupils were also apprenticed to sea, with at least 30 apprenticed to work on ships for members of the Blundell family between 1742 and 1792 (Girvan, 2022, p. 11). As at both

these schools in Bristol and Liverpool, the next case study school has a long history of students leaving to work in occupations associated with colonialism, naval commerce and warfare (Gardy, 2011; Mansell, 2011).

### Case study 3: Christ's Hospital School, West Sussex and its unacknowledged histories

The links between Christ's Hospital School and the slave trade were first acknowledged by Dresser (2007) who highlighted that the school's statues of Sir John Moore and Sir Robert Clayton. Moore was heavily involved in the Royal African Company (RAC) and a major investor in the Guinea Trade and British East India Company (EIC). Clayton also invested in and held a senior position within the RAC and married into the Trott family who owned estates and slaves in Bermuda, as well as ships that traded slaves (Bernhard, 1999, p. 120; Dresser, 2007; TONRG, n.d.). Moore contributed £4000 in 1695 to the cost of Christ's Writing School building (Trollope, 1834, pp. 115-116), a labour cost equivalent to £9.8m in 2021 (Foxall, 2008). Clayton also paid at least £5000 (£12m as a labour cost in 2021) and possibly double this sum, towards the (re)construction of school buildings after the fire of London, and was instrumental in providing the political and financial means to found the Royal Mathematical School between 1675 and 1682 which aimed explicitly to produce navigators and sailors (Ellerton & Clements, 2017, pp. 15-16; Wilson, 1842, pp. 13-14). The founding of the Mathematical School had been ordered and initially funded with a £1000 endowment over seven years and an annuity of £370 10s (a relative income value of £1.527m) by Charles II in 1672 "for the instruction of forty boys in navigation" (Wilson 1842: 11-12). This grant was directly tied to the provision of naval apprenticeship for trade and naval warfare if required (Jones, 2015, p. 33). Charles was simultaneously seeking to improve English naval strength (Ellerton & Clements, 2017, pp. 13-15) and tax the Atlantic trade more intensively, issuing a new charter to the Royal African Company as part of these efforts (Pettigrew, 2013, pp. 23-25). The creation of a new school focussed on navigation, with the political (Ellerton & Clements, 2017, pp. 15-16) and financial (Wilson, 1842, p. 13) support of Robert Clayton, a prominent RAC member, is not incidental.

During the seventeenth century, navigation was undergoing rapid development and transformation due to colonial expansion and exploration (Neal, 2002). Investing in a school oriented towards navigation was not mere philanthropy. Instead, Clayton, Charles II, Colston, Blundell and the Merchant Venturers made calculated investments aimed at ensuring the development the expertise necessary for realising imperial expansion. At Christ's Hospital, the Royal Mathematical School would continue to educate navigators that would be instrumental to colonial exploration and expansion well into the 1800s (Allan & Morpurgo, 1984, p. 22; Driver & Martins, 2002). Jones' (2015) detailed history of the Mathematical School provides the lists of the ships on which the boys went to work on. This includes many ships that can be found in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (SlaveVoyages, nd) and ships heading for the East Indies. Students also left to work directly for the EIC and the RAC in the late 1600s (Allan & Morpurgo, 1984, pp. 107-108; Grier, 2018; Jones, 2015, pp. 33-37). Whilst we focus here on connections between schools and the wealth accumulated through enslavement in the Caribbean, the connections of Christ's Hospital to the EIC underline the links between elite schools and the wealth extracted through colonialism in South Asia which is subject to similar historical amnesia (Finn, 2021) and warrants further attention. The tendency of elite schools to be housed in former country mansions (Walford, 2021), which were often built or renovated with East India money (Finn, 2021), provides one obvious avenue for further research.

### Section 2: Who pays the fees? Ties to slavery and violent extractivism through the fee-payers

The source of wealth of those paying the fees, provides another major type of financial connection to slavery for elite schools in Britain. Sons of West Indian plantation owners were



commonly educated at Westminster, Harrow, Winchester and Eton during the eighteenth century (Williams, 1944, p. 92). Using the UCL Slavery Legacies database, we can quantify this relationship more explicitly drawing on a subset of 326 individuals with data on schooling (Hall et al., 2017). To focus on those who were definitely directly financially benefitting from enslavement, we removed individuals who received no compensation or were associated with a failed claim leaving a subset of 300 individuals shown in Table 2. The top five schools by number of individuals associated with a claim and the number of enslaved people owned is Eton, Harrow, Charterhouse, Winchester and Westminster. Eton dwarfs the other four with 107 alumni associated with compensation claims worth £653,452 (£905.8m in 2021 prices as an income value; measuring worth, n.d.) for 27,766 formerly enslaved people. Together 221 alumni from these five schools were associated with the enslavement of 59,727 people and compensation claims valued at £1,417,989 or an income value of £1.966bn in 2021 prices. Of the 55 individuals who received or were associated with compensation of £10,000 or more, 18 attended Eton, 8 Harrow, 6 Charterhouse, 3 Winchester, 2 each attended Stonyhurst, Rugby, Westminster and Glasgow High School.

Table 2 Number of alumni of different schools recorded as having received financial compensation in UCL Slavery Legacies database

School attended (or tutor/location)	Compensation (£)	Enslaved	No. of alumni
Eton	653451.61	27766	107
Harrow	277321.28	11978	41
Westminster	129131.9	6519	33
Charterhouse	203122.62	8152	27
Winchester	154961.33	5312	13
Rugby	67234.89	2943	7
Glasgow High School	34170.19	1657	4
Bury St Edmunds School	13005.86	720	3
Edinburgh High School	13495.58	450	3
Manchester Grammar School	5368.09	290	3
St Paul's	9712.61	661	3
Exeter	171.07	7	2
King Edward VI FGS Bury St Edmunds	120.89	5	2
Stonyhurst College	59422.63	1116	2
Tonbridge	1783.43	113	2
'At Ealing'	901.7	136	1
'Under Mr Gee, Vicar of Thaxted'	502.25	40	1
Birmingham	4207.62	252	1
Blundell's sch. 1773-5	2425.54	88	1
Bridgnorth	5368.09	290	1
Bristol	6851.31	427	1
Bruce Castle School, Tottenham	6620.07	290	1
Catterick School	6945.33	121	1
Chelmsford	9661.44	269	1
Cheshunt Grammar School, Hertfordshire; then taught privately	2482.81	199	1
Codrington College, Barbados	3304.24	160	1
Dr Horne's School, Chiswick	2998.43	143	1
Edinburgh Academy	2956.78	194	1
Private: Rev Francis Fitchett (on Thorpe estate, then Joe's River Estate)	6045.26	271	1
Giggleswick	4148.5	231	1
Grammar school at Audlem, Denbigh	7205.03	420	1
Grammar school in Bath	100.68	5	1
Hackney	1541.08	92	1
Heref. School, Newport, Essex	3480.81	126	1
High School of Glasgow	2070.46	107	1
High School, Edinburgh	2983.47	158	1
In Barbados; then Stowe	6396.77	265	1
Keith Academy	4101	202	1
Langley, Kent	2925.21	172	1
Macclesfield	13406.01	714	1
Marischal College, Aberdeen	3136	160	1
Martley, Worcestershire	2770.86	174	1
Merchant Taylors'	2922.81	195	1
Middlebie Parish School	29717.96	1755	1
Miss Heywood's school; Chetham's School; Dissenting schools: Pillington; Unitarian School. All Manchester	1904.99	108	1
Moravian College	17847.79	915	1
Mr Blanchard's school, Nottingham	4320.69	220	1
Norwich (Mr Leman)	3119.54	160	1
Norwich school	15057.24	792	1

This data emphasises how Eton had the strongest ties to the wealthiest members of the slave-owning class of plantation owners over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This fits with later work on the intake of the most prestigious private schools in the 1800s and early 1900s, compared to its closest peers, Eton stands apart in educating the largest number of highly wealthy and/or powerful members of the British elite (Rubinstein, 1986). A small number of elite schools, with Eton in the lead, have maintained proximity to

whatever form of capital is most profitable to the ruling class within a particular period (Gamsu, 2022).

Education in Britain played a key role in solidifying the formation of an early colonial era ruling class. Two intertwined processes were at work: the rise of an increasingly dominant fraction of the British ruling class whose wealth and power relied on slave-ownership and the beginnings of modern forms of transnational education amongst colonial, extractivist elites (Flavell, 1999). O'Shaughnessy (2000: 20-22) suggests that from 1698-1776, 172 sons of slaveowners in the West Indies attended Eton, while 37 attended Harrow. The link between slavery derived wealth and the financing of boys attending elite schools thus predates abolition. Racism and fears of children being brought up in the Caribbean by Black domestic servants or slaves were central to the motivation of sending children to school in Britain (O'Shaughnessy 2000: 10). Attending renowned boarding schools bound the white planter elite of the Caribbean to the 'mother country', and indeed many did not return to, or as absentee slaveowners never visited, the Caribbean (Burnard, 2004). For the sons of Caribbean slave-owners an elite education led to entry to the professions in the Caribbean (O'Shaughnessy, 2000, p. 26), enabled successful continued ownership of slave plantations, or provided the means for entry into the British ruling class in the metropole. Williams (1944: 85-97) documented the rise of 'West India interest' and the depth of the integration of this Caribbean slave-owning, mercantile class into the aristocracy and key offices of the nascent British state from the late seventeenth century onwards. A similar rise of an imperial elite occurred a little later through the British East India Company, with opposition from other members of the existing Anglo-British ruling class to this new wealth from expansion and violence in India (Finn, 2021). During the eighteenth century, public schools played a key role in defining Georgian aristocratic culture and providing a political education for the ruling class (Wallbank, 1979). Entry to these schools for the sons of 'the West India interest' played an important role in the cultural fusion of the transnational colonial ruling and upper middle class with the political and aristocratic elite in Britain. This represented the absorption of a class fraction which drew on new imperial sources of capital and processes of accumulation that were intrinsically related to this early form of racial capitalism.

An analysis of the Eton College School List for 1791-1877 (Staylton, 1884) shows how the school continued to be tied into the education and reproduction of colonial elites in the Caribbean. Over this period, at least 76 boys who attended the school were either from or went to work in British Caribbean colonies. Of this group, 32 were estate owners who were either compensated for themselves or whose fathers or other relatives were compensated during abolition. These Eton alumni mostly entered the school before 1841, with only six students from Caribbean estate-owning families entering the school afterwards. In addition to these students from estate and slave-owning families, the school educated nine British governors of Caribbean colonies and eleven soldiers, six clergy and two judges who worked in the Caribbean. The relative decline of individuals connected to estates over the nineteenth century underlines the changing nature of the colonial economy, and role of the public schools within it.

Eton and other British public schools were increasingly educating a larger and broader colonial elite and middle class responsible for controlling colonised peoples through legal, military, religious, administrative or infrastructural means. This continued to include individuals who were involved in violent exploitation of colonised peoples or colonial workforces, including through indentured labour. The global travel of racialised, plantation capitalism to other British colonies (Manjapra, 2018) is reflected in the school lists; in the same list for Eton we find planters of coffee (6), indigo (5), tea (3), sugar (1), oranges (1) primarily in India and Sri Lanka. The Harrow Register for 1800-1911 lists around 80 planters, largely of tea and again predominantly in India and Sri Lanka. Another example is William Gibb, who also funded Keble College, Oxford's Chapel (Robinson, 2020), sent his son to Eton in 1865. Gibb had earlier worked directly in a company involved in the Atlantic slave trade but most of his vast wealth was derived from using indentured Chinese labour in inhumane, violent and dangerous

conditions digging for fertiliser on the Chincha islands off of Peru. He became one of the wealthiest men in England (Miller, 2006, p. 32) and his wealth was symptomatic of how capitalism was bound to imperialism and the dispossession, exploitation and exhaustion of other people's land. Just as agriculture based on enslavement exhausted the soil and nature, modern forms of agriculture under more contemporary forms of racial capitalism were leading to exhausted infertile soil in Britain itself (Clark & Foster, 2009, pp. 315-316; Williams, 1944, p. 7). We find in the school lists not only planters but cotton merchants or factory owners and proprietors of coal and later oil (Marlborough College, 1905; Staylton, 1884; Welch et al., 1911). Extractive violence over both people and nature has been central to paying for elite education for a very long time. Whilst for some schools their close geographical location to these extractive industries has underlined their ties to these industries as Bolay and Rey (2021) have shown with the Malaysian oil industry, for elite schools in the UK this relationship to extractive, violent forms of profit-making has been more hidden and geographically distant. The advantage of the historic school lists is we can identify individuals who would today be anonymous and hidden from view.

### Section 3: Reckoning with the past

Following the racist murder of George Floyd at the knee of police officers in Minneapolis in 2020 and the subsequent BLM protests in Britain, Black alumni of Britain's private schools mounted campaigns and penned articles highlighting the racialised realities of their schooling (Adebayo et al., 2020). As shown in Table 1 above, fourteen of the twenty-nine schools found to have links to the slave trade have sought to acknowledge their past publicly. These acknowledgements have varied between more thorough historical examination of these financial links, democratic consultation of staff, students and parents, top-down decision-making and minimal, brief statements to the press. Even where these histories have been acknowledged, the depth of the engagement has varied significantly and in several cases this appears to have been temporary with references now absent from school websites despite public comment during 2020 or 2021. In this section we take a closer look at how our three case study schools have/have not responded to their historical links to imperialism and the violent extraction and accumulation of wealth derived from enslavement.

As noted above, criticism and protest against the commemoration of Edward Colston can be traced back to 1920s (Ball et al., 2021). There was also an intensification of such protests from the 1990s. At the same time, the school's extensive veneration of Colston, the 'Parent of the School' (Colston's School, 1960, p. 32) continued well into the twenty-first century. This took multiple forms such as commemoration days, eating of buns and girls wearing Colston's favourite flower after the school's Governors were forced to open Colston's Girls School in 1891 (Ball, 2018). After the toppling of Colston's statue into Bristol Harbour during local BLM protests in 2020, the Girls' School announced a review and subsequently changed its name to Montpelier High School, with Colston's School later changing its name to Collegiate School. Both schools have detailed discussion of their links to Colston and slave trade on their websites, including interviews with historians, politicians, links to relevant research, news articles and the details of consultation processes and outcomes (Montpelier High School, 2021). However, there remains a relative absence of explanation of previous, and very recent, reluctance to adopt a name change (Steeds & Ball, 2020, pp. 252-253; Yong, 2017). Certain actors, notably the Society of Merchant Venturers, are discussed positively despite their role in attempting to block, oppose and dilute criticism of Colston (Steeds & Raval, 2020).

As in Bristol, there was no acknowledgement of Blundell's links to the slave trade on the Blue Coat School's website prior to 2020. Instead, Blundell links to the slave trade were similarly whitewashed with Blundell referred to as a 'master mariner' and 'a humane ship captain' (Owen, 1965, p. 453). The school also continued to commemorate him during 'Founder's Fortnight', while within the school one of the school houses and the sixth form bistro, Blundell's Bistro,

were named after him. There is also a memorial to Blundell in the school chapel, as well as two large portraits of Blundell and his son in the sixth form library and commemoration (Blue Coat School, 2022). The legacies of slave ownership and empire are physically engrained in the architecture (Smith, 2014) of the schools at Blue Coat's and several other schools in Table 1.

Following the BLM protests in 2020, a petition receiving over 1700 signatures and an open letter signed by current students, parents and alumni pressured management over ties to Blundell and slavery, calling for the removal of Blundell's name, formal acknowledgement of the school's links to slavery and racism, as well as for work to be done with organisations across the city to address issues of diversity amongst students and teachers (Scanlon, 2020; Various, 2020). Comments on the petition included one alumni who remembered these issues being raised in the 1990s, and another alumni of 'Blundell' house, describing how Blundell:

'was held up as a philanthropist who saw the error of his ways and turned to charity, the implicit lesson being that good deeds to one group of people somehow cancel out the evil perpetrated on another' (Scanlon, 2020).

The school leadership and chair of the trustees (Hill & Yates, 2020) began a review which produced a detailed historical report (Wainwright & Blue Coat School History Society, 2021). Following this, Blundell's name was removed from the house and bistro. Yet Blundell remains part of Blue Coat' architecture as plaques were added beneath the portraits, alongside a memorial explaining Blundell's involvement in the slave trade (Blue Coat School, 2022; Yates, 2022).

In contrast to the responses we have seen in our first two cases, Christ Hospital School only publicly acknowledged that fact that it has been financed by the profits of slavery following early coverage of this research in *The Guardian* in May 2023 (Adams, 2023; Reid, 2023). In 2020, the history department at Christ reviewed the content of their curriculum, as well as receiving a lecture from Bristol journalist, Priyanka Raval about the tearing down of Colston's statue (Christ's Hospital, 2020, 2022b). However, it is not clear whether there has been meaningful discussion regarding the place of the Sir John Moore or Charles II statues which continue to mark the landscape of the 'Big School' which was historically used for prize giving ceremonies, speech days and assemblies (Morpugo, 1985: 81). Not only this, Christ's Hospital still mentions the foundation of the Royal Mathematical School in 1673, as well as the Writing School being 'built at the expense of Sir John Moore, President of CH from 1684 to 1702' (Christ's Hospital, 2022a).

As Table 1 and this brief discussion shows, there is a degree of collective amnesia as well as a reluctance to publicly engage deeply amongst some of these schools. Whilst several schools have acknowledged these histories, only a small number have undertaken a more detailed and public examination. Two of our case study schools, Colston School and Bluecoat's appear to have engaged in more detailed reckoning with their imperial past. However, there are notable cases with very clear ties, such as Llandoverly College, where public acknowledgement has been completely absent. Some schools publicly acknowledged their historical links during 2020 BLM protests and afterwards but have not retained these on their website (BBC, 2021; Elliott, 2020) or have not made internal research and discussion publicly available (Dollar Academy, 2019). Questions about the extent and long-term nature of these historical interrogations remain. Whether this specific linkage with the racial violence of capital accumulation under empire will be seen in isolation or as an opening to a wider examination of these schools' ties to empire and colonialism also remains to be seen. These perspectives could be explored in further research which could also examine whether there will be any attempt at any form reparative action, particularly in the wealthier institutions included here.

## Conclusion

The end of slavery did not substantively change the relationship between exploitative and often violently produced personal wealth and elite schools in Britain. This relationship between elite education and the violent extraction of capital derived from slavery is intrinsic to education under capitalism. There is, in the end, no morality in this relationship; ‘the reasons for slavery [...] “are not moral, but economical circumstances; they relate not to vice and virtue, but to production”’ (Gibbon Wakefield, cited in Williams, 1944: 6).

Drawing together histories and evidence which establish the connection between these schools and enslavement, several common threads have been identified. First, certain elite schools in Britain were named after or commemorate powerful, wealthy white men who did not want to be forgotten. Colston and Blundell either named schools after themselves or emblazoned buildings with their name or statues. Theoretically what is central here is the role of the school in a complex form and relation of capital conversion tied to British imperialism. This extends a Bourdieusian understanding of capital accumulation and conversion, allowing us to see how these schools became sites where violent forms of extractive and destructive profit-making was, for too long, rendered as either benevolence and/or invisible. Elite schools are a site where the violence associated with producing wealth is soluble, dissolving and reconstituting itself as a form of cultural power for these institutions and their attendees.

Second, and relatedly, elite schools founded in London, Bristol and Liverpool in particular, exhibit a close relationship with naval expansion and commerce. These schools were not simply acts of philanthropy. Investment in the teaching of mathematics and navigation was *constitutive* of imperial capital accumulation. The institutions examined in this paper were designed precisely to support imperial expansion through expanding naval power. The growth of the British Empire that followed provided a direct return on investments made in these schools. The sons of slaveowners, whose fees flowed into Eton, Harrow, Westminster and other, now well-established, elite schools, underline the multiple and long-lived relations between the capital produced through enslavement (and later indenture), elite education and class formation. The global colonial plantation economy was providing both fee payers and career destinations for these schools: British ruling class formation and elite reproduction through education was inseparable from the colonial economy. Ties to Caribbean slavery was the first stage of a mutually supportive social and economic relationship between elite schooling in Britain and the violent, environmentally destructive, racialised profit-making associated with colonialism and capitalism.

While some elite schools have acknowledged their historical links to colonialism and slavery following the 2020 BLM protests, many have not retained such reckonings on their websites or made internal research and discussion public. As our case studies show, even schools that are openly reckoning with this history still have questions to answer about how deeply these ongoing historical legacies are being confronted. There are differences in the extent of these ties which require further analysis and, as noted above, the financial links to other forms of colonial exploitation warrants greater attention. Other schools might follow Rugby School’s lead and commit to fund doctoral research that examines the schools’ ties to Empire (na, 2022). Projects such as this might produce a deeper historical acknowledgement of the links between these schools, colonialism and racialised violence. However, doing so, would be only one aspect of how the idea of ‘race’ and racism is present within Britain’s elite schools today and debates over reparations raise larger questions about how schools should respond. There remains substantial work to be done exploring how contemporary formations of race and class are being configured within the British elite in ways that either maintain, erode and/or transform racialised identities and forms of racism.

The other issue that this paper raises relates to the contemporary relationship between violent and racialised forms of wealth accumulation and elite schools. What are the ethics of these

schools towards *contemporary* neo-colonial and violently accumulated wealth that rely on racial, environmental and economic systems of subjectification and exploitation? Questions have recently been raised over universities' contemporary links to questionable sources of wealth (Adams & Greenwood, 2018; Jacob, 2019), further research is needed to explore these questions for elite schools. It must be hoped that it will not take 300 years for these relationships to face public scrutiny.

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<sup>i</sup> All following references to equivalent costs were calculated used the measuring worth website. Labour cost was chosen as the donations for buildings as this represents the cost of a project measured as a multiple of the average wage of workers over time. In some cases other measures were used to indicate income or commodity values (where reference is made to purchasing property, regular annual income from land or annuities or payment to individuals).



**Citation on deposit:** Gamsu, S., Ashe, S., & Arday, J. (in press). Elite schools and slavery in the UK – capital, violence and extractivism. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*

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