



Topple the racists 2: decolonising the space and the institutional memory of geography

Gerry Kearns

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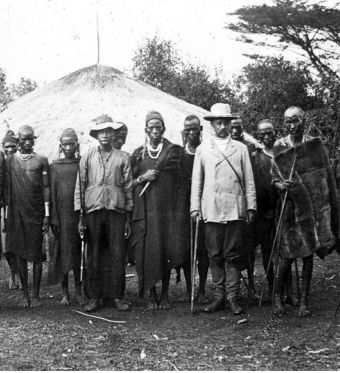


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ABSTRACT: In this, the second of two linked articles, I move from efforts to address the colonial legacy of our public spaces to consider the colonial marking of the spaces and institutional memory of the discipline of geography. I use the work and legacy of Halford Mackinder as exemplary of some of these colonial affiliations. By the standards of his time, Mackinder was an enthusiastic imperialist and a resolute racist. He believed that humanity comprised superior and inferior peoples and that the best of the former should use force to defend its global hegemony. When Mackinder's intellectual legacy is invoked it is all too often in order to promote a similarly bellicose colonialism as with the geopolitical imagination of Robert Kaplan. In his own practice of geographical adventuring, Mackinder himself set Black lives far below his own pursuit of geographical glory and those who vaunt his reputation in the spaces of the academy, burnish a glory that was most cruelly won.

In part 1 of this article (Kearns, 2020), I looked at some of the relations between anti-racism and colonial legacies as they have been raised by the activism of Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford (2015), whose aims were 'to decolonise the space, the curriculum and the institutional memory' of the university. Of course, some of that falls necessarily to Geography and the Uncomfortable Oxford project has been drawing attention to the colonial engagements of Oxford Geography. In October 2019, I was invited to speak on 'Mackinder's uncomfortable legacy' for an event held jointly by the School of Geography and Uncomfortable Oxford (Kearns, 2019). The legacy of Halford Mackinder (1861–1947) raises many of the same issues about race, colonialism, and public memory that I discussed in part 1 (Kearns, 2020). Mackinder was particularly committed to geographical education and was one of the founders of the Geographical Association (Wise, 1993). He saw geography as a way to inculcate among young people an informed loyalty to the British Empire.

In this article, I will look at a geopolitical triad; how race, environment and will/force intersect in Mackinder's global vision. I begin by showing how this perspective on international relations remains at stake in modern uses of Mackinder's work; and, in responding to a recent suggestion (Trolley, 2020) that a contextual approach to geographical texts can help teachers interest students in the continuing political salience of geographical ideas, I look at the continuities between Mackinder's triad and the writings on foreign affairs of Robert Kaplan. Then, I turn back to Mackinder and make evident the central importance of race in his understanding of empire. He educated people about an empire based on presumed racial superiority. Mackinder thought force was justified in defending that privilege. He naturalised inequalities by blaming them on racial difference rather than colonial exploitation. I propose that both Kaplan and Mackinder imagine that the world contains superior and inferior peoples and that this justifies the better directing the affairs of the lesser. Finally, I show how, with Mackinder, this racist denigration of lesser peoples sanctioned an indifference to the lives of African people where the higher goal of his own public status was at risk

and that he was responsible for the killing of several black porters when on an expedition to climb Mount Kenya.

Out of Mackinder

In a recent paper in *Teaching Geography*, Trolley (2020) proposes that taking exemplary geographical texts from the past, and showing how they were shaped by and addressed their context, can help students get over a naïve belief that modern geographical works are innocent or necessarily objective. Trolley uses work by myself (Kearns, 2009b) and by Gerard Toal (Ó Tuathail, 1992) to contextualise the works of Mackinder and employs it as an example with students so that they can do something similar for modern geographical studies, using the example of Tim Marshall's (2015) *Prisoners of Geography: Ten maps that explain everything about the world*. In *Geopolitics and Empire: The legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Kearns, 2009b), I tried to show that a contextual approach (Berdoulay, 1981) allows us to be specific about the political choices scholars make. In the book, I took central concepts in Mackinder's work and showed how they were treated very differently by some of his contemporaries. I concluded that Mackinder stressed racial hierarchies more than others, that he had an exceptional commitment to the use of force in international relations, and that he advocated Empire as a way to retain Anglo-Saxon privilege (Kearns, 2009b). With respect to education, I showed how Mackinder sought to inculcate in British schoolchildren a pride in Empire and a sense of its moral purpose. For children in the colonies, he emphasised British benevolence and incited them to a sense of grateful loyalty towards Britain. I do not want to repeat those arguments here, but let me develop them slightly differently.

In *Geopolitics and Empire*, I made a brief reference to Robert Kaplan (2000a) as a modern writer who, like Mackinder, lionised force as the basis for maintaining privilege, in Kaplan's case US global hegemony, and I put him in a family of conservative geopolitical theorists who repeated many of Mackinder's conceptual strategies with respect to history, environment and identity. Since then Kaplan (2009; 2012) has more explicitly endorsed Mackinder's vision and a review of his writings allows us to see what is at stake in vaunting Mackinder's legacy (Kearns, 2009a; 2013a). Kaplan's writings (2000b; 2012) popularise a certain environmentalism while promoting US global mastery. His own website tells us that: '*Foreign Policy* magazine twice named him one of

the world's "Top 100 Global Thinkers"' (Kaplan, n.d.). Kaplan was an enthusiastic supporter of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. When US general Stanley McChrystal was asked about how that war was sold to the US public, he was frank about the complicity of the media and when asked specifically about Kaplan, at the time a journalist for *The Atlantic*, McChrystal described him as: 'Totally co-opted by the military' (Hastings, 2012, p. 91).

A contextual reading of Kaplan's work would have to understand the affective and ideological consequences of embedding journalists like Kaplan with troops (Brandenburg, 2007; Lindner, 2009; Kaplan, 2005; 2007). In conversation with Kaplan, McChrystal described the war in Iraq in highly individualistic even vainglorious terms: 'We were hitting al-Qaeda in Iraq like Rocky Balboa hitting Apollo Creed in the gut' (Kaplan, 2010, p. 62; cf. Stallone, 1979). As Rocky is perhaps a little vulgar for the work of justifying military intervention to the readers of *The Atlantic*, Kaplan spreads over this a smear of middle-brow philosophy and reaches for Isaiah Berlin:

'The ur-text for a philosophical discussion of the role of the US military in the post-Cold War era is Isaiah Berlin's 1953 Oxford lecture, "Historical Inevitability", in which he condemns as immoral and cowardly the belief that vast impersonal forces such as geography, environment, and ethnic characteristics determine the direction of world politics' (Kaplan, 2010, p. 62).

Likewise, when he is told that under McChrystal success seems certain, Kaplan evokes an earlier, seemingly more cerebral reading of the region: "'Doubt", T.E. Lawrence wrote in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), is "our modern crown of thorns"' (2010, p. 61).

If the asymmetry of First and Third World is somewhat overdetermined (seemingly the product at once of geography, environment and ethnicity, as in Isaiah Berlin's formulation), then, for Kaplan at least, the agency of First World power is somewhat underdetermined (seemingly the expression of a pure will-to-power, as in McChrystal's evocation of Rocky). In defying constraints, the use of force by the USA comes from strategy not necessity, and can thus be described as idealistic, or so Kaplan proposes. For Kaplan, there was courage in the response of President Bush in 2007 to a worsening position in Iraq with a surge in troop deployments: 'Those supporting him were few, but they included neoconservatives, who essentially argued that human agency – more troops and a new strategy – could triumph over vast impersonal

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forces, in this case those of sectarian madness' (2010, p. 63). Among those urging Bush to greater aggression was John McCain who, in a letter of 12 December 2006, insisted that: 'The question is one of will more than capacity' (*Washington Times*, 2008). Throughout the article on McChrystal, Kaplan posed the question of whether the USA could 'overcome the vast, impersonal forces of fate [for] only the most difficult human landscapes require intervention in the first place' (Kaplan, 2010, pp. 71 and 62). The USA must understand what fate appears to decree and then, in an exercise of will over fate, must recognise the cost of defiance. Kaplan almost concedes that the Iraq war was not worth the cost: 'more than 100,000 American and Iraqi lives (and perhaps many more), more than a trillion taxpayer dollars, and untold amounts of squandered diplomatic capital' (p. 63). On Kaplan's reading, then, the world needs colonialism. Geography, ethnicity, and environment, then, determine that some places devolve into 'a fury of intercommunal atrocities' and 'primordial hatreds', but, guided by an appreciation of the causes of these problems, the USA can yet choose to intervene, 'paving the way for universalist ideas to triumph over terrain and history' (Kaplan, 2010, p. 63). To prevail, though, Kaplan claims the USA must deploy not only the military as:

'a weapon against fate and inevitability',

but it must also recognise that to do good, you must be

'willing to stay ... But that is an imperial mindset, with its assumption of a near-permanent presence, which today's Washington cannot abide, even as its own strategy drives toward that outcome' (2010, p. 70).

It is striking that a certain version of geography seems so congenial to Kaplan's philosophical defence of the USA as Rocky. In a sense, Mackinder's geographical theory explains the necessity for US imperialism (both as intervention and as occupation). Reviewing Kaplan's *The Revenge of Geography* for *The New York Times*, with its explicit reference to Mackinder, Slaughter (2012) referred to Mackinder as one of those authors whose proposals would 'sound politically incorrect today – imperialist and racist'. This was too much for the author of *Halford Mackinder: A biography* (Blouet, 1987) who wrote in protest to the editor of *The New York Times*. Blouet insisted, on the basis of a talk 'On Thinking Imperially', that Mackinder (1907) was 'not a racist' since he wanted a 'federated' Empire, balanced economies across the Empire, the recognition that Muslims were not pagans, and a 'multicultural Empire/commonwealth' (Blouet, 2012). Toal (Ó

Tuathail, 1992) had noted the anti-democratic tone of this speech and also the extent to which in it Mackinder implied a clear hierarchy of races. However, in *Geopolitics and Empire*, I did not discuss this talk myself; therefore, to illustrate the place of race and colonialism in Mackinder's discussion of Empire, I turn now to 'On Thinking Imperially' and the claims about it made by Blouet (2012) in his letter to *The New York Times*.

Race and Empire

In 'On Thinking Imperially', Mackinder's (1907) intention was clear. He wanted to encourage among British people, an imperial identity. This was the logical corollary of the change in the geographical context of its economic and military activity. Although in times past, some people might have identified with Wessex or Northumbria, in later periods people came to think of themselves as English, and then later still, argued Mackinder, the United Kingdom became the potent political referent. Now, suggested Mackinder, the empire was the 'new and larger national idea' (1907, p. 34). Mackinder identified four obstacles to the development of properly imperial thinking. First, he felt that the bulk of the British population was ignorant and with democratic accountability on the rise, the need for public education was evident:

'We have a few thousand people [who are] intellectual and well informed; then we have a great number of fairly intelligent and fairly informed business people; outside this ... some millions of a limited intelligence and information; and finally there is a bed rock of people who do not really belong to the present age of the world' (1907, p. 34).

Second, there was a sense among some British people that the countries of the empire should not be allowed to be in competition with the UK in the advanced sectors of the economy: 'We shall only make the Empire by recognising equalities' (p. 35). Third, there was a danger that British people might not be willing to 'carry on this fight' for an empire out of 'provincial contempt of other races' (p. 37), instead the British needed a 'spirit of Imperial tolerance' (p. 39). Finally, there was a danger that this contempt would be broadcast also from some of the states in the empire as an immigration ban on people of colour in support of a policy of 'white Australia and white Canada' (p. 40).

If we follow Mackinder threading race through this labyrinth, we will find an argument for imperialism that is kin to Kaplan's with its overdetermination of asymmetry and underdetermination of agency. For all his denigration of the ignorance of the British

and of their need for education, Mackinder identified with this (white European) group that remained his main concern. The remainder of the empire, he implied, should service the British people, both those living in the UK and those now resident in the colonies and ex-colonies. In 1907, the British Empire was a variegated space. As one textbook classified its component parts (Baker, 1907, pp. 209–10), there were, beyond the UK, the Indian Empire, colonies with partial self-government, colonies without self-government, dependencies administered by chartered companies, protectorates, the administrative possession of Egypt and some eight self-governing colonies (the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Dominion of Canada, Newfoundland, Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange River Colony). These last were the places of significant European settlement and by self-government was meant the government of those places by their white inhabitants. When Mackinder spoke of a 'league of equals' (p. 35), it was with these places only in mind. In this speech of early 1907, he was worried that:

'[w]hen the Colonial Premiers arrive here in May they will, I fear, often be shocked ... by the assumption, at the back of most of our minds, that the permanent function of the Mother Country is to manufacture, and of the Dominions overseas to grow food and raw materials for the Mother Country' (p. 34).

These white dominions are the places he is thinking of when he speaks of balanced economic development and when Mackinder asked that his listeners 'not be shocked by the expression of a hope that British battle-ships will soon be built in Nova Scotia as well as in England' (p. 35). There was no suggestion that Indian shipyards might compete with British.

Race was integral to Mackinder's world view far beyond this one speech and it was, indeed, more general in public discourse than now. When, as an Oxford undergraduate, Mackinder was taking classes in history, the Regius Professor of History was Edward Freeman whose racism was liberal in most senses of the word (Parker, 1981; Kearns, 2009b). Freeman was one of the few academic sources Mackinder (1904) explicitly cited in his landmark paper on 'The geographical pivot of history.' He disagreed with Freeman's view that, in Mackinder's summary, 'the only history which counts is that of the Mediterranean and European races' (p. 422). He agreed about their superiority, for among them 'have originated the ideas which have rendered the inheritors of Greece and Rome dominant throughout the world' (p. 422), but

Mackinder insisted that pressure from other races quickened the ambition of the Europeans, much as a 'repellent personality performs a valuable social function in uniting his enemies' (p. 423). The asymmetry is evident. Throughout Mackinder's writings, both early and late, he insists on this asymmetry.

The British, or at least the English, were special (and even this distinction was racialised as shown in Mackinder's (1902) chapter on 'Racial geography' in *Britain and the British Seas*, and as I discuss when describing Mackinder's use there of the term 'nigrescence' to separate Irish from English (Kearns, 2019b). The Home Counties was, for Mackinder, a region that had produced a unique variety of the human species:

'Within this natural region we have the English blood, one fluid, the same down through the centuries, on loan for the moment in the forty million bodies of the present generation. John Bull in his insularity is the exemplar of the myriad separate bloods and saps, each the fluid essence of a local variety or species of animal or plant' (1931, p. 326).

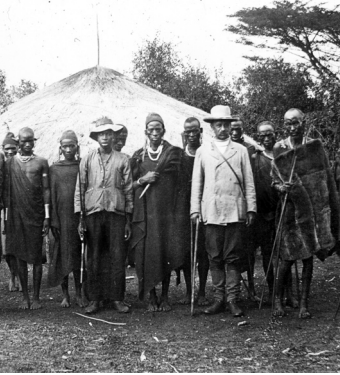
This 'English race, the English blood, is valuable as carrying a certain character [which] is, it seems to; me, something physical, and therefore not wholly transferable except with the blood' (Mackinder, 1925, p. 726). This character embodies a commitment to representative government; democracy is literally in the blood. Mackinder's racist belief was that environments made races, races were different, and some were superior. Mackinder was perfectly comfortable speaking of the 'white ruling race' to the audience that came to listen to him 'On Thinking Imperially' (1907, p. 38). In the context of a broader empire, he wanted the British to consider themselves as 'trustees for half-civilised millions' (p. 41). He did not doubt that it was possible to 'reconcile the Australian idea with the Imperial idea' (p. 40). He had every sympathy with:

'the ideal of a white Australia, which seeks ardently to avoid the difficulties experienced in the United States, where two races, white and negro, are geographically mixed, which have totally different characteristics, are in wholly different stages of civilisation, and are fitted for wholly different methods of government' (Mackinder, 1907, p. 40).

He was sure that no race willingly sought miscegenation. Japanese people, he said, 'tell me that they on their part wish for no inter-marriage with white men, no mixture of blood' (p. 40). More generally, all people 'white and yellow alike, have

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apparently no desire for that kind of colourless cosmopolitanism which is to be observed in certain circles of the great capitals of Europe' (p. 40). In this context of racial separation, Mackinder spoke of a certain imperial tolerance that should be cultivated among the ruling race. He contrasted democratic rule in Britain with bureaucratic rule in India, and worried that a democratic spirit in Britain might insist on the same for India. For him, this would be to repeat the folly of Rome for, he remarked: 'The freedom of Rome was lost when institutions were evolved for the rule of the barbaric subjects of the Empire' (p. 39). To rule bureaucratically in India required a further tolerance for 'we must not think of the Mohammedans as mere pagans' (p. 37), but rather should see them as 'one end of a religious scale which has Protestantism at the other end, and Greek Christianity and Roman Catholicism as intermediate stages' (p. 37). Indian Muslims, at least, were part of a single family of monotheistic religions and, with time, they might advance towards further enlightenment. This promise of ultimate or eventual equality was important, Mackinder thought, for otherwise he did not think Indian people would long tolerate 'the imposition of British constitutional and moral ideals', nor would the British be able to 'add willingly Indian strength to the Imperial strength' (p. 39). British rule and the inclusion of Indian troops within the military force under British command required the toleration of the ambition for self-rule among educated Indian people. This self-government might be a very long time off, given that Mackinder thought even the UK had a 'a bed rock of people who do not really belong to the present age of the world' (p. 34). This far-distant promise ought to be accepted by British, Australian and Canadian white people, who would also be quite justified, he implied, in defending their race with controls on immigration. This, then, is the tolerance: separate but eventually equal. This, then, was the formula for reconciling democracy at home with empire abroad or, as he put it in a contemporaneous article that invited the British to see 'the Empire as the protection of their manhood. Herein, half consciously, lies the reconciliation of Colonial Liberalism with protection, the exclusion of coloured races, and imperialism' (Mackinder, 1905, p. 143). Despite Blouet's claims, I find this a thoroughly racist world-view. Furthermore, this racist empire would need to be defended by force but, here, another modern commentator (Ashworth, 2010) finds a definitive break in Mackinder's work from the biological perspective of his earlier writings to the realist perspective of his later works. I want to turn, now, to this further attempt to rehabilitate Mackinder.

Race and force

Realist accounts of international relations see the world as a parallelogram of forces with each state defined by its own self-interest and seeking alliances or pursuing war and rumour of war. States thereby express human nature writ large and, it is claimed, this account of international relations marks a singular break with earlier explanations in the terms of the biological struggle between races, or the cultural struggle between civilisations. However, I question how far behind Mackinder left his racial thinking when, in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919), he emphasised this kind of social physics.

In mercantilist terms, we might think of power as determined in part by mass, a product of volume and density. The problem for empire was that while the British may have had the greater vigour, or density, other forces in the world might yet accumulate superior volume through conquest. It was never only a matter of numbers. The problem of problems, then, was to affiliate sufficient volume to the British cause. This would include solidarity with the British overseas, both those within the Empire – the self-governing colonies (who should be wooed with preferential tariffs and the creation of an imperial government), and those without – the ex-colonies of the USA (who should be offered a military alliance, including the offer of Britain as 'a moated aerodrome' (Mackinder, 1943, p. 604)). It would also mean retaining as adherents to the cause the territories under bureaucratic rule – the Indian multitude who would be promised eventual self-rule. So much for mass, but force is a product also of acceleration; in these terms the impulsion of will, or the discharge of energy. Mackinder was always trying to gin up the British to be ready for the fight. In some respects, the war-weariness at the conclusion of the First World War (1914–18) was a most trying period for Mackinder, but even at this time, he was urging the British to accept the logic of geopolitical realities that, for him, imperilled the post-war reconstruction of a world for peace; those dangerous democratic ideals.

In *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Mackinder (1919) appeared to repudiate the guiding environmentalist principles of his earlier writings for he insisted that 'human victory consists in our rising superior to ... mere fatalism' (p. 3). Yet, this is rather like Kaplan's invocation of Isaiah Berlin in presenting the USA's military as taking up again its mission 'to overcome the vast, impersonal forces of fate' (2010, p. 71). Mackinder knew that in 1919 the British were weary of war, but he was ready with another jeremiad. He worried that the geopolitics



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Figure 1: The final panel of Sigismund Goetze's mural (painted 1912–21) for the Foreign Office, entitled 'Britannia Pacificatrix', expresses a view akin to Mackinder's. It shows Britain at the head of the self-governing colonies receiving the gratitude of its allies after victory over Germany in the First World War. Just off to the right a Black child holds aloft the gift of a basket of African produce. Photo: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (OGL v1.0).

of force would get neglected and that Britain and its allies might 'allow merely juridical conceptions to rule our thoughts in regard to the League of Nations?' (p. 4). The horror of war served as 'a screen between us and the things which happened earlier' (p. 1). The old logic of geographical variation shaping economic inequality would recur. On the basis of this work, Ashworth sees Mackinder as one of the progenitors of the realist school of international relations theory, finding a break with the earlier sense of 'inevitable biological conflict' (2010, p. 298) characteristic, for example, of the 'Pivot' paper (Mackinder, 1904). It seems to me, however, that race, environment and will are a permanent triad in Mackinder's work.

In the case of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Mackinder, 1919), we need only think what a world without conflict would mean to realise that the making of it would commit the victors from the First World War to the continual preparation of a next. The world would be at peace only were Anglo-American hegemony beyond challenge (Figure 1). Immediately after the First World War, Mackinder was in Russia serving Winston Churchill's vision of a new front, or several new fronts, for a military adventure to displace the Bolsheviks (Kearns, 2009b; 2013b). Having warned, in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, that Germany would restore its military strength, 'the North German [being] one of the three or four most virile races of mankind' (p. 201), Mackinder noted publicly the accumulating evidence for this; and when the Second World War

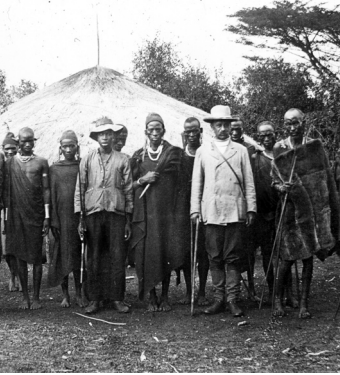
was in process he referred in private correspondence in 1940 to 'this great hour of our nation'; likewise in 1942 to 'these tremendous days' (Kearns, 2009b, p. 136). In this enthusiasm, as in a lot besides, Mackinder had much in common with Churchill, who declared during the darkest days of the First World War: 'I am so happy. I know this war is smashing and shattering the lives of thousands every moment – and yet – I cannot help it – I enjoy every second I live' (Fromkin, 1989, p. 135).

Churchill believed that there were parts of the world unsuited to democracy, and yet sufficiently unstable that intervention and then occupation in some form were desirable. This is precisely the strategy that Kaplan (2010) praises McChrystal for trying in Afghanistan. It is the logic of empire. In this parallelogram of forces, the states are not all alike, and for Mackinder (even in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*), the calculation of forces was weighted by racial characteristics of virility and the biological imperatives of room to grow. This treatment of race as destiny conveniently obscures the brutal colonial histories that have produced the inequalities that racists treat as natural, and defensible (Bhambra *et al.*, 2020). I turn now to this work of forgetting and Mackinder's contribution to it with his many school textbooks.

Race and colonial forgetting

Race is a historical creation, but it is also one that denies its history. As a concept, race might be

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understood as positing what Heimer (1985) in a very different context described as a community of fate. That is, to be ascribed to a race is to be described as inheriting characteristics of inferiority or superiority that one has not chosen and that one cannot surrender. This would comprise both biological and cultural racism (Blaut, 1992). While this is self-evident in Mackinder's accounts of global asymmetries, it is also there in the way Kaplan describes 'primordial hatreds' that erupt along lines of '[e]thnic and sectarian differences' (2010, p. 63). The propensity to hatred and conflict is seemingly written into identities that shape a person and culture in unavoidable ways. This way of viewing things came from the imperial mindset as it was shaped by the making of the modern world capitalist system. It is also a product of legitimating that creation by forgetting it. The treatment of some people as lesser humans in the process of extorting from them their capacity to labour was legitimated by suggesting that they would not work under any lesser compulsion and by implying that such inferior persons must be directed in their work by more civilised persons.

These relations and ideas are reproduced at each capitalist frontier: in Ireland, where the English found the people 'given to a wandering and idle

lyfe' (Dymmok, 1600, p. 5) when in the 16th century they came to take their land; or in New England in the 17th century, when the Puritan who first preached at Plymouth Rock penned a justification for plantation, 'the going into and inhabiting of foreign desert places' (Cushman, 1621, p. 239), and described the indigenous people as making no use of their land, saying that they 'do but run over the grass, as do also the foxes and wild beasts. They are not industrious' (p. 243). These racist imaginings of the Irish (Figure 2) and of the native peoples of the Americas mean that the colonial taking is not a taking at all, for the land was fallow and its inhabitants inert. In this sense, and as Gilmore argues (2020), racial capitalism precedes slavery. However, after the taking, the racist stereotypes persist and now they serve to explain the poverty that follows the earlier expropriation. This is the forgetfulness that occludes the creation of the racial imaginary and then explains the asymmetry as a consequence of initial conditions.

Thus Mackinder explains the poverty of India, the land of monsoons, in terms of its physical conditions: 'in the abundance of moisture humanity appears to lack the incentive to development' (1931, p. 331). There is that laziness again. When he describes, for British schoolchildren, the industry now found in India, he tells them that 'in these mills you will find that the machinery bears the names of Dundee and Leeds makers for the [jute] industry is relatively new to India' (Mackinder, 1910, p. 43). As if textile manufacture had been introduced into India by the British when, of course, the British had destroyed the local cotton manufactures in order to create markets for British goods. In the 17th and 18th centuries, India had been the leading exporter of cotton textiles in the world and there was so little produced of value in Britain that these goods were exchanged only for South American gold and silver (Mukherjee, 2010). From the early 17th century, Indian external trade was subject to European interference and from mid-18th to the mid-20th centuries India was under some sort of British rule. Thus, when British textiles were mechanised in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Indian domestic market could not be defended and most British imperial markets were likewise closed to India. Furthermore, under British rule, the Indian domestic economy was subject to extortionate colonial taxes. Under unequal terms of trade and then colonial expropriation, the Indian economy fell behind. In 1600 the GDP per capita for India was about three-fifths of the British, by 1800 it was about a quarter, and by 1871 it was down to one-seventh (Broadberry *et al.*, 2015). Inspection of

Figure 2: 'The relative nigrescence of the British population'. Source: Mackinder, 1902.



time series for the late 19th century and after (Bolt *et al.*, 2018) give grounds for believing that the gap grew wider, so that by the time Mackinder was writing on the eve of the First World War, Indian GDP per capita was probably as little as one-eighth of that of Great Britain.

This is the colonial history obscured by the triad of race, environment and will. Treating results as causes, Mackinder could imply, in the putative voice of Indian schoolchildren, that only British ingenuity and justice stood any chance of elevating Indians out of idleness and that thus they should venerate 'the Empire to which we owe so much' (1909, p. 6). The violence of colonial India was ascribed to the indigenous people: in a textbook for British schoolchildren, the uprising of 1857 was ascribed to 'agitators [who] were able to play on the superstitions and prejudices of the ignorant [Indian] soldiers' (Mackinder, 1910, p. 64). While punishment was mentioned ('Retribution soon came to the mutineers', p. 63), no details were given of the spectacular executions of Indian insurgents who were strapped across the mouths of cannons and blown to pieces. Rather, the British children were told: 'We may well be proud of the heroic deeds of those of our race who in 1857 suffered and fought and died to save the British Raj in India' (p. 67). Decolonising geography means revisiting the history of how colonialism produced these inequalities and also understanding how race was produced as a social category during that process and then served to explain away those inequalities as somehow natural. It means to 'renew the nerve of outrage' (Thompson, 1980, p. 179) or, in Adorno's terms, to restore the force of 'affect in the face of the gravest matters' (1960, p. 214).

The violence of racial affect

Renewing the nerve of outrage means remembering that when Kaplan refers to the US invasion of Iraq as having cost 'more than 100,000 American and Iraqi lives' (2010, p. 63). This comprises about 4500 American soldiers for the period 2003–11, perhaps 26,500 dead from the Iraqi resistance (Wikipedia, 2020) and the remainder Iraqi civilians, although the number may be much higher than Kaplan notes since one reliable and conservative estimate puts the total Iraqi deaths from the first three years of the war at about 150,000 (Iraq Family Health Survey Study Group, 2008). That phrase 'American and Iraqi lives' screens the fact that upwards of 95% of these lives were Iraqi, the people of the country invaded, just as Mackinder's reference to 'swift

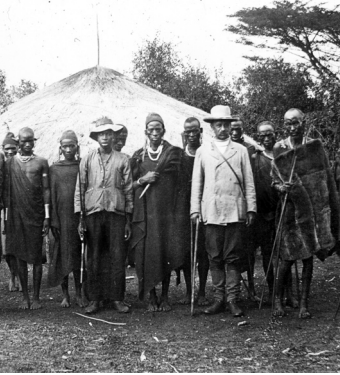
retribution' in a description of the Indian uprising of 1857 stands in front of the spectacular violence of the British in its aftermath (Herbert, 2008). However, Mackinder did not only theorise violence, he practised it.

Let me conclude, then, with one further 'absence of affect in the face of the gravest matters' (Adorno, 1960, p. 214). I mentioned above that Blouet (2012) insists Mackinder was an imperialist but no racist. In an article on 'The imperial vision of Halford Mackinder', Blouet noted the failure of Mackinder's 1899 expedition to Mount Kenya to return with a full complement of scientific specimens because 'some demoralized porters lightened loads by jettisoning boxes. Punishments were administered but specimens were lost' (2004, p. 124). 'Punishments' remain unspecified, but Blouet does note that the expedition 'had problems' although, he implies, not such as to seriously embarrass Mackinder since he 'reported his results in scientific journals and society meetings' (*loc. cit.*). Blouet is trying to explain why Mackinder's account of his expedition was never published and concludes that it is most likely because the typescript was prepared from Mackinder's diary by his wife, Emilie, whose estrangement from Mackinder meant that it did not leave her custody until after Mackinder's death; when she sent it to Oxford University's School of Geography. I do not doubt this, but it is significant that the explanation offered by the editor who prepared the typescript for publication some decade or so before Blouet's article, suggested that the interruption of plans to publish might have been coloured by, as one local respondent told him, 'something odd [that] occurred between H.J.M. and his porters' (Barbour, 1991, p. 23).

Mackinder's expedition was ill-advised. It had to happen when it did because Mackinder had a brief sabbatical lasting from Easter 1899 until October of that year when he should be back as Reader to teach geography at the University of Oxford (Kearns, 2009b). To secure in 1887 the establishment of the Readership, the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) had funded for a five-year period half the cost, and this was renewed for a further five years in 1892. However, in 1893 the presidency of the RGS passed to Clements Markham, and in directing the Society the educationalists were displaced by the explorers. There was no agreement to renew the funding of Mackinder's post in 1897 and any attempt to establish a Chair in Geography at Oxford would, likewise, not have as fervent support from the RGS as may have seemed to be maturing during the ten years it had funded the Readership. In an

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unpublished memoir from about 1940, Mackinder was frank about his ambition to be the first European to reach the summit of Mount Kenya, the second-highest mountain in East Africa: 'it was still necessary at that time for me to prove that I could explore as well as teach' (Kearns, 2009b, p. 97). However, the region close to the mountain had been bled dry of resources by the labour employed in the building of the Uganda Railway and it was now in the grip both of famine and of an epidemic of smallpox. At Nairobi, Mackinder heard that the Ugandan government authorities at Naivasha, some 80km north-northwest, were preventing caravans from moving into the area for fear of spreading smallpox. Mackinder, with his own caravan of porters, left immediately for Mount Kenya (about 145km north-northeast) before the order was extended to include caravans leaving Nairobi. He knew this was reckless and several officials in Uganda tried to caution him into the delay that would imperil the project altogether (Figure 3).

At various points in the expedition Mackinder and other Europeans either ordered or themselves administered whippings to Swahili porters who, famished and at times malingering, Mackinder described variously as 'faithful dogs' with 'slave blood ... in their veins' (Kearns, 2009b, p. 108), and as little more than 'human camel[s]' (p. 111). He explicitly noted that he 'did not like this slave driving, for that is what it really was' (p. 111). But

he did it. The Kikuyu porters he found more recalcitrant and, although they were little more than 'famine stricken skeletons' (p. 108), Mackinder regularly threatened them with the 'moral suasion of my Mauser' (p. 108); firing off rounds to show his serious intent. On 23 September, some six days before reaching the safety of Naivasha and the end of the expedition for the porters, Mackinder described 'an epidemic' of porters discarding scientific specimens they had been charged with carrying; more beatings, 20 strokes (p. 111). Mackinder was at this time the European in charge of 14 Swahili and eight Kikuyu porters. Two days later as he was leading the group back towards Naivasha, Mackinder discovered that one of the Swahili men (a man who could speak French and, as an askari, was entrusted with a gun in order to keep others in check, and whom Mackinder referred to in his diary as 'the trusted Musa'), had thrown away some three-quarters of the botanical specimens; 30 strokes. Sometime in the next four days, Musa was 'shot by orders' (p. 111). The orders must surely have been given by Mackinder.

Waiting for Mackinder at Naivasha was another member of his party, Campbell Hausburg, who was entrusted with the return of the porters to Boustead, Ridley and Company at Zanzibar. Mackinder dashed back to Oxford, not pausing to give the required explanation to the Company for the non-return of porters. Nor did he await the

Figure 3: Glass lantern slide showing Halford Mackinder, with armed Swahilis from his expedition and villagers, Kenya, 1899 (photograph by Campbell Hausburg). Source: Geography Collections, Radcliffe Science Library, University of Oxford, Historic Environment Image Resource (used with permission).



adjudication of whether in passing beyond the permitted flogging of porters, the 'Europeans or Americans' in charge had acted properly in deciding that the safety of the caravan required these executions: 'a competent Court may be called upon to decide whether they have improperly exercised their discretion' (Mathews and Hardinge, 1894, p. 267). In fact, Hausburg annotated a list of the Swahili porters with 17 ticks and for eight of these made a further poignant remark: 'shot by orders'. I have suggested (Kearns, 2009b, p. 111) that these 17 probably comprise the 14 that came down on the last stretch of the expedition with Mackinder plus three more whose return also had not been managed already by Hausburg. One porter had died earlier of dysentery and two had been killed by a local tribal leader (Wangombe) during some of the many excursions to extract food from unwilling villages. There is some ambiguity here, but Hausburg's list gives eight porters as 'shot by orders' and this number certainly includes Musa Wadi Shabani, the only Musa among the Swahili porters hired at Zanzibar. Barbour concluded that 'the idea of a punitive slaughter of Swahilis is not as extraordinary as it might otherwise appear to be' (1991, p. 23). That is putting it mildly, although not as mildly as Blouet, with his references to 'problems' and 'punishments', and 'demoralized' porters (2004, p. 124).

In notes about his life, Mackinder described 1899 as 'in some ways the culminating year of my life' and 'my Kenya year' (Kearns, 2009b, p. 98). When we think of the role of geography as a discipline in the studied forgetting of the making of race as a category with which to legitimate colonial extortion, we must also remember the racialised coercion of labour that supported the exploration that conferred prestige upon so many manly men. As he recognised himself, and it was a central theme of his inaugural discussion 'On the scope and methods of geography' (Mackinder, 1887), the geographical writings of his day lay athwart the transition from the era of the explorer to that of the scholar. In both respects, asymmetries figured as racial were intrinsic to Mackinder's practice, and to his legacy.

One of the ways to address the legacies of racism is precisely to place 'under erasure' (Spivak, 1976, p. xiv) the veneration that once attached to figures like Halford Mackinder or Cecil Rhodes. While Oriol College is perhaps moving towards the removal of Rhodes' statue and name, it is fitting that the main lecture theatre in the School of Geography is now to be marked as 'formerly the Mackinder Lecture Theatre' and a plaque at the door in explaining why

will include the names of the eight porters (Klinke, 2020). In this way, the trace of the former elevation recalls a history whose legacy we must continue to challenge in the 'fierce urgency of now' (King Jr, 1963); whether that legacy forgives past denigration and violence as mere context, or repeats the historical amnesia that treats empire in the present as justified by natural asymmetries. Much more remains 'to decolonise the space, the curriculum and the institutional memory' (Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford, 2015) of our discipline, but Oxford Geography has taken an important step. Of course, it yet retains its Mackinder Chair of Geography.

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Professor Gerry Kearns is Head of the Geography Department at Maynooth University, County Kildare, Ireland (email: gerry.kearns@mu.ie; Twitter: @geogturn; Web: <https://geographicalturn.wordpress.com>).