

## **Ep13\_BetweenAcrossThrough\_ScanlanAmelioration**

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[music]

**00:02 Yana Romero:** This is Between, Across and Through.

[music]

**00:21 YR:** Close your eyes and imagine the life of a sugar cane slave, the back-breaking labor, the physical, mental, emotional abuse, the lack of freedom, the lack of hope, the lack of a future to call your own. Now imagine hearing that across the world, slavery is ending, and in the British colonies of the Caribbean, a new word is floating around, amelioration, the hope that your life and that of all your loved ones will be safer, better, kinder, and that one day it will lead you to freedom. But what if that word is being spoken by both the people who want to free you and those that want to keep you chained? Today, Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, sits down Professor Padraic Scanlan from the University of Toronto. We will discuss how the rhetoric of amelioration in British Caribbean colonies during the 19th century was used as a means to promote the discourse of both abolitionists and slaveholders, and what this did to solidify a racial hierarchy for generations to come. Please join us as we travel between, across and through.

**01:44 Kevin Lewis O'Neill:** Hi, I'm Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, and we're speaking with Professor Padraic Scanlan. Welcome to the show. Padraic, why is it important to study amelioration now?

**01:53 Padraic Scanlan:** Well I think one of the consequences of Brexit in the UK has been a re-appraisal of the relationship between Britain and its empire from both sides of the question of imperialism. So you have Brexit here celebrating the empire as Britain's greatest achievement and talking about the "independent United Kingdom" as being a place from which to launch a new empire 2.0, and people actually use that turn of phrase, empire 2.0, to refer to whatever constellation of free trade agreements Britain will have after Brexit, and look to that as a possibility for the United Kingdom. But at the same time, I think the fracturing politics of the UK have led to a lot of serious questions about the relationship between Britain and its empire. And so thinking about Britain's relationship to slavery and the relationship between slavery and imperialism and slavery and colonialism is especially important now, and especially pertinent in the kind of contemporary British political discourse.

**02:52 KO:** And why was amelioration so important to both abolitionists and pro-slavery groups?

**02:57 PS:** So amelioration was, I think, a moment where pro-slavery ideology, or at least defenses of slavery put forward by slaveholders ground up against anti-slavery ideology. So as the first challenges to slavery in the 1730s and 1740s were met with a really easy slaveholders response, which was, "Well, the conditions that enslaved people live under are way better than the conditions of poor people in Britain." That was the kind of default defense against attacks on slavery or the slave trade in Britain or North America.

**03:32 KO:** 'Cause why? What did poverty look like in Britain at that time?

**03:35 PS:** I mean, it was widespread. I'm paraphrasing here, but the historian Roy Porter uses, I think it's the phrase that, "Life in the 18th century was raw." Right? So to be wealthy in the 18th century was to be exposed to just an incredibly wide variety of potential calamities, and to be poor was even worse. So poor people in 18th Century Britain were especially vulnerable to enclosure, one of the major forces in 18th Century British history is the consolidation of land holding in Britain and the closing of what remained of common land and waste land, as it was called, which I guess tells you immediately one of the reasons for the logic of enclosure, that land that isn't owned by someone or cultivated by someone is waste land, even if the land is land held in common. And so people who lived in rural areas in Britain were experiencing dispossession, alienation from land that while they didn't have any official title to it, they had held it effectively as their land for centuries, or at least for familial memory.

**04:42 PS:** And so at the same time in British cities, the rise of what historians sometimes call the industrious revolution, so not necessarily the mechanization of production, but the intensification of production was making a lot of people's lives materially worse. And so the argument that the material conditions of life for enslaved people were better than the material conditions of life for poor Britains was something that got a lot of traction throughout the 18th and 19th century. And amelioration, as anti-slavery advocates promoted it, was a policy principally after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, that was intended to improve the material conditions of life for enslaved people until they could be kind of morally, spiritually and materially prepared for freedom. And there are all kinds of complications with that argument in and of itself, but the main one, I think, vis-a-vis its relationship to pro-slavery sentiment is that, that was effectively an argument that the lives of enslaved people ought to be made materially better, made at a moment when the lives of poor people in Britain were getting materially worse.

**05:47 PS:** And so the age of amelioration coincides with this era roughly from 1807 until the end of colonial slavery in 1834, and that's also a period of widespread food riots in Britain, massive drops in the standard of living, particularly for people living and working in cottage industries, so it's sort of the end of the the woollen industry in Britain happens in this period, the rise of the cotton factories happens in this period, so it was an argument that elite anti-slavery advocates made to improve the lives of enslaved people, but that made them very vulnerable to accusations of what Dickens would later call telescopic philanthropy, right? Like of looking only across the Atlantic for charity rather than at home.

**06:31 KO:** And so how was it supposed to change the lives of these slaves?

**06:36 PS:** Amelioration had two prongs. One was greater regulation from London of the specific laws related to food rations that enslaved people received, the amount of time they had off from work, the conditions under which women with children and pregnant women worked in the fields. I guess you would call them kind of work practices. The other prong of it was the widespread introduction of missionary teaching and the acceptance by slaveholders of the presence of missionaries on plantations. And both of those prongs of amelioration required pressure from London, because slaveholders argued, and ironically sometimes not untruthfully, that the material conditions of life on plantations had been improving since the 1780s and 1790s, but planters were almost uniformly hostile to the presence of missionaries because they believed that missionaries

would form slave rebellion.

**07:34 KO:** So the amelioration was a contentious topic. Was it contentious for reasons even beyond the missionary question?

**07:42 PS:** So the basic kernel of British anti-slavery, and when I say British anti-slavery, I'm sort of short-handing to refer specifically to what historians tend to treat as the kind of core of the anti-slavery movement. So a group of people like William Wilberforce, like Thomas Clarkson, like Hannah More, a kind of core group of mostly interrelated, mostly wealthy, mostly evangelical white Britons. There are a lot of people who signed anti-slavery petitions or went to anti-slavery rallies, but when historians think about British anti-slavery and the people who kind of spoke for the movement and published most of the documents that we have about it, they're talking about this core of people. And one of the core arguments of British anti-slavery was that emancipation had to be gradual, and it had to be gradual in order to preserve good order on the plantations, to make sure that when freedom finally came for enslaved people, it would come peacefully rather than with a kind of sudden paroxysm of violence like it did in Saint-Domingue, which became Haiti in 1804.

**08:45 KO:** So gradual, because it could otherwise be a shock to the system?

**08:48 PS:** Yeah, it's a complicated idea. In part, because British anti-slavery had all of these very concrete material goals like the eventual abolition of slavery, but it also had a deep theological impetus to it. And William Wilberforce was not particularly well known as a theologian, but Wilberforce's kind of main contribution to theology was a book intended to reform the manners of the upper classes, so that there would be an appropriate example to the lower classes, so that the lower classes would find it easier to accept their role and their position within the society. So Wilberforce was content with material inequality in the kind of temporal world, because he was in terms of his vision of the afterlife quite radical. He saw the afterlife as being a moment of complete and total spiritual equality where every person would be on an absolute equal playing field. Because everyday life was so brief in comparison with eternity, he was content to say, "Well, the most we can hope for on earth is people accepting their God-given place within the social hierarchy."

**10:00 PS:** And so anti-slavery has these two competing push and pull forces within it. One which is a push for the material transformation in the lives of enslaved people, the end of slavery, the end maybe of plantation slavery, the end of the plantation as a way of producing sugar or other commodities, but it also has this theological impetus, which in a way celebrates inequality, because inequality is God-given. And so that internal tension within British anti-slavery is also an internal tension with amelioration because it's about making the material lives of enslaved people better and making the spiritual lives of enslaved people more like the spiritual lives of British evangelicals. But the end goal and at emancipation is not enslaved people becoming free and taking over the government of the colonies that had been built on their labor, the goal is the continuation of white supremacy and of white rule in these colonies, but with enslaved people as a free contented wage-earning workforce.

**11:02 KO:** Because that kind of radical equality that takes place, and through this theological imagination after death is not the aspiration of the moment, there's no interest in radical equality at that point. And in your research, you speak about the tendency to compare slaves to European

peasants. Is that part of the...

**11:20 PS:** Absolutely. And there's this kind of specificity to the way that British abolitionists used the word peasant, because when you say the word peasant, and when in fact most 18th century British political economists said the word peasant, they meant a kind of either a class of small holding farmers who owned their own land or a class of tenant farmers working on large estates, in the style of what you might have seen in Central or Eastern Europe at the time. But that's not what British abolitionists meant. When they used the term peasant, they meant a kind of, I guess, contented agrarian, wage-earning workforce. So it's not quite the same thing. And slaveholders also used the term peasantry to refer to enslaved people, and they also didn't mean land holding small farmers, they meant enslaved people who are living in this kind of agrarian plantation economy and are also content with their lot. So [12:16]       .

**12:17 KO:** So then the comparison doesn't upset any kind of racial hierarchy.

**12:21 PS:** No, not at all. I should clarify, right, there is a... And this is actually a hazard in teaching this stuff to undergraduates in particular, because you don't want to impart this lesson and then have the consequence be people thinking that the abolition of slavery or the abolition of the slave trade wasn't... Didn't accomplish anything, or wasn't worth doing. I think the more important point is to remember that anti-slavery doesn't mean anti-racism, right? And perhaps the most famous icon of the British anti-slavery movement is a cameo designed for Josiah Wedgwood of him as pioneer in the industrialization of pottery. And it's a symbol of an enslaved man kind of kneeling in chains, and the caption reads, "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" And that isn't meant to say like, "Am I not a man and equal?", it's meant to say, "Are we not..." Spiritually as human beings we're equals, but that says nothing about the relationship between a white Briton and an enslaved African worker before or after slavery. That kind of racial hierarchy is preserved, I think.

**13:22 KO:** In returns to that earlier bifurcation that you had about one's theological equality, but then within the social hierarchy, the two somehow don't relate to each other.

**13:36 PS:** Yeah, exactly. Wilberforce puts it fairly clearly when he argues that the best you can hope for on Earth is contentment with your position within the social hierarchy and an awareness that your time within that material social hierarchy on Earth is going to be extremely brief. And so what happens on Earth matters very little in comparison to what's going to happen in the afterlife. But at the same time, there's a certain generosity to people like Wilberforce, because 100 years earlier, a more austere Calvinist would have said, "Well, there's no use trying to abolish the slave trade because it doesn't make a difference what anyone does in the material world because everything has been predetermined and predestined." And Wilberforce isn't quite as rigid in his understanding of the relationship between faith and works.

**14:22 KO:** Well, there seems to be a real sense of a horizon or of a future with abolitionists where theologically, as you say, that doesn't... With a strict Calvinist interpretation, you wouldn't necessarily need to imagine the future per se, but there seems to be this future. What does that look like?

**14:38 PS:** So I think the future for that generation of abolitionists in Britain in the 1790s through until the 1820s is a future where the sugar industry continues, but where the people who had once been enslaved become a wage-earning imperial proletariat, although they would have never called them an imperial proletariat, but a wage earning class in the slave empire of Britain's slave colonies. But then with the passage of time and with the inexorable effect of wage-earning, freed people would become more like the British bourgeoisie. They would buy property, buy land, have possessions, organize their lives into nuclear families with a wage-earning man as the head of household. There's a kind of sense that freedom will transform the British Caribbean colonies into copies of British middle class bourgeois households, but that process of transformation might take hundreds of years, thousands of years, the temporality with which anti-slavery activists think in is very hard to pin down because they are terrified of the possibility of revolution.

**16:09 PS:** It's really important to remember that this movement comes of age during the French Revolution, it comes into full flower with the American Revolution, it really accelerates with the French Revolution, it's set back by the Haitian revolution. The Atlantic Revolutions that happen alongside the abolition of the slave trade in the British empire affect the people who lead the campaign in all kinds of profound ways, principally in ways that add on to a natural conservatism even more reluctance to make any kind of change that might result in revolutionary change.

**16:41 KO:** And the fear was a fear of revolution. There must have also been a fear that the very industry would go away, that the sugar plantation might not survive given the imagined upward mobility of these workers.

**16:56 PS:** The main worry for abolitionists in Britain was always that the theory that they implicitly posited about the consequences of and the process of emancipation would be proved wrong. It's also important to remember that in addition to being born in the era of the American, French and Haitian revolutions, British anti-slavery also comes to fruition in the middle of the British Enlightenment. So there's a spirit in the air of empiricism and a common sense philosophy and way of proving the validity of theories based on the observation of empirical data. And so there's an experimental character to British anti-slavery as well. So amelioration is supposed to be a way of proving that the theories of political economy advanced by anti-slavery activists are true. If you introduce missionaries to plantations, enslaved people will convert to Christianity. If enslaved people convert to Christianity, they will work more diligently and will be less likely to rebel against the people who claim to own them, provided of course that you also improve the material conditions of their life at the same time, and the combination of a rising standard of living and rising Christianization will eventually make enslaved people "ready for emancipation".

**18:16 PS:** And so every data point that seems to run against that theory was treated with shock and fear by abolitionists. So there were major slave rebellions, probably the three most substantial slave rebellions in the history of the British empire happened in the era of amelioration in 1816 in Barbados, in 1823 in Demerara in British Guiana, and then in 1830, 1831 in Jamaica, Britain's largest and most important sugar colony. And each of those rebellions was in some way connected to a white missionary. It was very easy to find a white missionary who could be blamed for the rebellion. And that on the one hand takes away all of the organization and collective action of enslaved people and places the cause of the rebellion has to be a white person because it couldn't possibly have been organized independent of a white person. But at the same time, it terrorizes

white British abolitionists, because it seems like a data point against the theory of amelioration, because if the presence of white missionaries is actually encouraging rebellion, then maybe amelioration won't lead to the kind of peaceful emancipation that it's supposed to.

**19:24 KO:** And these white missionaries, they're guilty in quotes of mixing those two streams, of the theological and the social, to say that, "No, in fact, it's not about what your lot in life is here, there's something more profound kind of equality."

**19:41 PS:** I mean, that is definitely a charitable way of reading what happens within British Protestant missions in the slave colonies of the empire. And in both the Demerara and the Barbados rebellions, it's pretty clear that enslaved people are using the mission station in part as a conduit, an additional conduit for information from Britain. And they're aware that anti-slavery has become a major political issue in Britain, both because legislators in the Barbados Assembly or in the Executive Council of Demerara are talking about it all the time, it's appearing in colonial newspapers, and also because missionaries are receiving correspondence from London, from anti-slavery advocates. And what seems to have happened in both Barbados and Demerara is that enslaved people believed that they had already been emancipated, and that planters were keeping from them the proof of their emancipation. They often call them free papers, which is a kind of Pan-Atlantic phenomenon, where to prove that you're free, if you're of African descent, I mean, in the United States, until like 1865, you need to probably have freedom papers on your person, or risk re-enslavement.

**20:56 PS:** And so, they're looking for free papers, and when they don't appear, because, of course, they actually hadn't been passed in London, what was happening in 1816 was the Slave Registry Act, which was an act promoted by abolitionists to force planters to send to England a register of all of the people who they counted as their slaves every year. And then in the 1820s, there was a debate in parliament about passing a series of resolutions, affirming Britain's belief in gradual emancipation. So there was talk of anti-slavery, but it wasn't actual emancipation. And whether enslaved people knew that and ran with it anyway, or whether they genuinely believed that they were being misled, is sort of impossible to prove. But regardless, missionaries were primarily implicated as conduits of information, and also as kind of centers of organizing with the plantation communities.

**21:54 KO:** Why were White elites afraid that free people wouldn't be easily coerced into working?

**22:00 PS:** There's a really simple answer, and then there's a more deeper, more complicated answer. So the simple answer is, because working on a plantation was awful. It was, even in an 18th century of particularly hard work, sugar plantation work, in particular, required a huge amount of organized concentrated labor, particularly at the kind of beginning and end of the cycle of sugar planting. So, day-to-day cultivation of sugar canes was, I mean, this is only relative terms, a relatively easy work, but planting sugar canes and harvesting them and processing sugar required enormous amounts of just sort of raw physical power, and in terms of cultivating and processing sugar required around the clock processing.

**22:47 PS:** Sugar starts to ferment within the sugar cane within 24 hours of being cut down, so when you're producing sugar from sugar cane, the canes have to be cut down and processed before the

canes start to ferment, which means that sugar mills had to run 24 hours a day during crop time, so it's really hard work. The other worry, I think, is that by virtue of the way the plantation was set up, enslaved people would be able to retreat to their own provision grounds and gardens and just kind of cease working in the imperial sugar industry and support themselves, either as subsistence farmers or as small-time market gardeners or livestock herders, or even small-time sugar producers. So there was already kind of a culture of subsistence farming that made plantation labor under slavery possible. And both slaveholders and anti-slavery activists were worried that the existence of a kind of subsistence farming would make it possible for enslaved people, after emancipation, to just kind of cease working for the plantation, and nobody wanted that in Britain.

**23:52 KO:** It seems like a very convincing answer, given how intense the sugar plantation sounds.

**23:57 PS:** Yeah, from the perspective of an 1820s, 1830s era, when the demand for sugar is enormous, the value of sugar is vast and elastic, there's no limit to the amount of sugar it seems that Europe would consume in the 18th century. Even as the price kept falling and production kept growing, the market kept expanding. And in the absence of some kind of way of either inculcating the desire to work on plantations within enslaved people, or making it impossible for recently emancipated people to actually leave the plantation, then the sugar industry simply wouldn't survive. And that's baked into emancipation policy, that's the sort of core of the Emancipation Act of 1833, is a series of provisions that make it very, very difficult for emancipated people to not work on sugar plantations.

**24:53 KO:** Yeah. So how did these British abolitionists hope to keep these free people coerced?

**25:00 PS:** So I think there are two strains within British anti-slavery, one that's sort of more deeply religious than the other. So the very kinda deeply religious abolitionists who really believed in the transformative power of Christian conversion and missionary work, believed that you didn't really need additional rules, because conversion to Christianity would itself be enough to inculcate the kind of discipline and desire to labor that was necessary to keep the sugar industry running and to keep the sugar colonies relevant to the British Empire. But I would say that represents a relatively small minority of abolitionists at the kind of top. But within Parliament, the plan for emancipation hinges on the idea of apprenticeship. The entire Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833 is, I would argue, largely devoted to compensating slave owners. And it literally compensates slave owners by establishing a fund of 20 million pounds that slave owners can apply to and receive compensation for a proportion of the capital value of enslaved people on their plantations at the time of the last census, which I think was in 1827.

**26:17 PS:** And the rest of the compensation comes through apprenticeship. So, enslaved people, on August 1st, 1834, are no longer enslaved, but they all become apprentices. And as apprentices, they're required to continue working for a fixed period of time for the people who had once claimed to own them, for people who were working in skilled trades or in... As kind of enslaved domestic servants, it's four years, and for people that worked in the fields, it's six years.

**26:44 KO:** So, apprenticeship, for me, calls to mind the idea of a novice, or someone who doesn't understand the trade then learning the trade. Obviously, these people knew full well how to work on a sugar plantation. So what were they really learning?



**26:58 PS:** It's an apprenticeship not even in a trade so much as in all of the other economic apparatus that surrounds a trade. So, it's an apprenticeship in being a farm worker for wages, rather than an enslaved farm worker. So the apprenticeship is not in any particular craft, it's to teach formerly enslaved people how to accept a wage and what to do with it. And that's a very generous interpretation of what apprenticeship means. The other interpretation means that it's basically a meaningless term that is conjured up...

**27:29 KO:** Sure.

**27:29 PS:** 'Cause it sounds better than modified slavery...

**27:34 KO:** Sure.

**27:34 PS:** Or attenuated slavery, or something like that, which is effectively what apprenticeship is.

**27:36 KO:** At its base, it's coerced labor.

**27:38 PS:** Yes, it's coerced labor for 45 hours a week, sometimes read as 40.5 hours a week, because the language of the Act is vague. The language of the Act says 40 and a half hours a week, so it's not even really clear from the language of the Act what that term of hours actually is. And moreover, there are hardly any clocks in the West Indies, and very, very few on sugar plantations, in a part of the world where most days are 12 hours, give or take a few minutes.

**28:05 KO:** Sure. It's right on the Equator.

**28:06 PS:** Exactly. So, the working day starts at 6:00 AM and ends at 6:00 PM, effectively. And within that 12-hour span, there are... Maybe a particularly wealthy plantation might have... The overseer might have a wrist watch, there might be a clock in the great house or a clock in the sugar-boiling facilities, but there isn't gonna be a clock out on the fields.

**28:26 KO:** And it's a far cry from clocking in and clocking out...

**28:28 PS:** Absolutely. And yet...

**28:29 KO:** Industrial labor.

**28:30 PS:** And yet, shift work is a new idea in Britain at this time. People aren't hired for an hourly wage in Britain, they're paid according to a season, or a year. Even at the most sophisticated factories that rely the most on a very specific division of labor between employees, there isn't a kind of 12-hour working day measured in quite the same way. So, I think that for people in Britain, the sugar empire, the slave empire, is a kind of realm of fantasy. Very few of the leading abolitionists have spent any time outside of Britain. Among the hardcore of that first generation of abolitionists, as far as I know, Zachary Macaulay is the only person who has spent time in both West Africa and the British Caribbean. He's the governor of Sierra Leone, [29:21]       .

**29:22 KO:** And so, it's literally a world of fantasy that they are just imagining through books and conversations what this could be like.

**29:27 PS:** Yeah. Yep. And a huge volume of correspondence from missionaries.

**29:34 KO:** How did this model of emancipation and apprenticeship strengthened racial hierarchies?

**29:40 PS:** So, apprenticeship was designed to transform slave owners into sort of law-abiding, patrician employers, and to transform enslaved people into a law-abiding, peaceful, contented workforce that accepted wages. But it also formalized the idea that the people working for wages in the most low-paid, relatively speaking, low-skilled positions within the sugar industry, would be people of African descent. Realistically, that racialized capitalism was made by slavery, but it definitely wasn't unmade by anti-slavery. If anything, apprenticeship preserved that basic relationship between who owns lands, who owns the means of production, and who works on it as something that was explicitly racialized.

**30:36 PS:** And it's something that carried through in the history of the British Caribbean, until the colonization and after decolonization. Because after the end of slavery in the British Empire, and especially after the consolidation of free trade in the 1840s, the Caribbean just didn't matter to Britain anymore in quite the same way as it had done in the past. But at the same time, in the Caribbean, you would think the stated goal of the abolitionists in the 1830s was to eventually create colonies that had been slave colonies, where enslaved people would become the voters, and the politicians, and the governors of the colony. And what actually happens, and it's particularly acute in Jamaica, is that throughout the 19th century, as more and more people, particularly people of mixed European and African descent, but also people of African descent, acquire more and more property, the qualifications for voting, the bar is raised higher and higher, and the qualifications to hold office are raised higher and higher.

**31:32 PS:** And meanwhile, London occasionally fiddles with the rules for land ownership in order to make it harder for, especially people descended from slaves, to buy and hold land. And Jamaica is the only colony in the British Empire that has an elected assembly at the beginning of the 19th century, and doesn't at the end of the 19th century. After a major labor revolt called the Morant Bay rebellion, in the 1860s, London decides to remove Jamaica's assembly and make Jamaica a Crown colony, until decolonization in the 1960s. And so, the idea of a representative government within the British Empire, led by someone who was of African descent, when that became possible in the 19th century, the response from London was to cut that off at the knees. So, I would argue that if you take amelioration, the era of amelioration seriously, you have to recognize that the claims to race blindness of liberalism in this kind of dawn of the Victorian era are completely speciest. It is, at its core, assumes and enforces a racial hierarchy within the Empire.

**32:43 KO:** And does that carry on? I mean, I'm some wondering how did the conditions set by emancipation in the Caribbean, how did it shape the lives of the free people and lives of their descendants, moving on?

**32:56 PS:** So, apprenticeship collapses in 1838. So it's supposed to extend until 1840, and it collapses in 1838 for two reasons. The first is a groundswell of opposition in Britain to the practices of corporal punishment that are still being practiced under apprenticeship, particularly the flogging of women. That becomes a major point of contention between the anti-slavery lobby in Britain and the imperial government in London. That's one of the things that amelioration is supposed to do, is get rid of the punishment of women within the slave colonies, which is rooted in a British enlightenment vision of civilizational order advancing, based on the treatment of women. So, the treatment of women for people like Hume or Adam Smith is a major indicator of the degree of "civilization", in inverted commas, of the society that's being examined.

**33:53 PS:** So that's one thing that caused apprenticeship to collapse. And the other is that the planters just won't follow any of the regulations that London sets out, and it's leading to a constitutional crisis. Because, in theory, the colonies of the Caribbean that have legislatures, places like Jamaica and Barbados, parts of the Leeward Islands, Saint Kitts, these are places that have a tradition of self-government, and are unwilling to accept the regulations being laid out for them from London. And London is in a position where they can't impose martial law, because that would be an enormously expensive and humiliating climb down for Britain, so they kinda give in and they offer the legislatures the possibility to just end apprenticeship early, on kinda favorable terms for trade. And they accept it, and then slavery ends. So, slavery ends, not with a bang, but a whimper. August 1st, 1838, is still crucial and much remembered date for people in the Caribbean. But when August 1st, 1838, came in the Caribbean, it didn't come because of any kind of groundswell of organized opposition, except for organized opposition led by planters, against regulations being imposed from Britain.

**35:08 PS:** So, the whole history of British emancipation is incredibly fraught with contradictions, and it's full of these kind of dead ends, and sort of things grinding to a halt or falling apart, rather than ending in any kind of dramatic, or cataclysmic, or satisfying way, which I think is why Britons now remember the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 much more fondly, and with much more patriotic brio than they do the abolition of slavery in 1834. And that was actually the case in the 19th century. In 1807, Britons celebrated the end of slavery across the entire political spectrum. Or rather, celebrated the end of the slave trade. But then, the end of slavery, I think, there were people who were very deeply skeptical about emancipation, in a way that most Britons would have seen the end of the slave trade as being a patriotic triumph.

**36:02 KO:** So much of your research talks about how to get people to work, how to coerce them, and how to think about the different motivations that actually make people work. And what's interesting is that it's not just creating apprenticeships for recently freed people to learn how to become wage laborers, but also there's kinda of a pedagogy of even slave owners and former slave owners, of how to manage wage labor. Now we're in an era where we don't have anxieties about getting people to work, we have huge anxieties about people not working.

**36:36 PS:** Yeah.

**36:36 KO:** This effort, 150, 200 years ago, to teach us to want to work has seemed to have really gotten into us in a way, that we have real anxieties about people who can't find work, who can't fit within to the economy. Does your work provide you perspective on the contemporary situation?

**36:57 PS:** That's one of the things that draws me to somebody who I find otherwise kind of a pretty repellent figure, Thomas Carlyle, and I have a long-term project, I'm writing a biography of Carlyle. And I think that Carlyle's moment of flourishing as an essayist in the 1820s, '30s, '40s, there are a lot of parallels between that era and the present day. This is an era when the basic features of the economy are changing in profound ways that are displacing and discomforting huge swaths of the population. And Carlyle argues effectively... Carlyle is sympathetic to slavery, but he's sympathetic to slavery because it gives people a position that they can occupy reliably. It's like he has a famous comparisons between Ireland and Jamaica, which actually is a comparison that's made an awful lot in the 19th century, in the 18th century. Two of Britain's earliest island colonies.

**37:54 KO:** Yeah.

**37:54 PS:** And Carlyle's solution to a time when nobody knows exactly what's gonna happen economically is to turn the clock back to the Middle Ages, when although life was miserable for most people, at least people knew where they stood. And I think that that anxiety about a changing economic order and that retrenchment and resurgence of really kind of hoarse, reactionary conservatism is something that we're seeing now. People respond to economic fracture in ways that are often deeply reactionary. And so, I think that that moment at the turn of the 19th century, and in the first three or four decades of the 19th century, when everyone with a stake in these kinds of debates in Britain was very, very anxious about what would happen to the supply of labor, what would happen to workers, what would happen to cities, as Britain transformed itself from agrarian, if heavily capitalized, 18th-century economy, into a sophisticated 19th-century industrial economy.

**39:07 PS:** And because the West Indies were this realm of fantasy, it was a place where anti-slavery activists could set aside the blunt realities of dealing with workers in Britain and project onto workers who had never worked for wages. You could start at year zero and build a wage-earning society without all of the kinds of problems that were leading wage-earners in Britain to be massacred at Peterloo, to break mills in the North, to set fire to cornfields in agrarian protests, what's called the Swing Riots, and the same economic forces that are shaping the lives of workers in Britain are shaping the lives of enslaved workers in Jamaica, but in very different ways. And so, those kinds of protests at the industrial core and the commodity-producing periphery are still with us, and they're still... They're getting more and more acute by the day, in the present.

**40:04 KO:** Thanks so much, Padraic.

**40:05 PS:** Yeah, no problem, thank you.

[music]

**40:10 YR:** That was Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, in conversation with Professor Padraic Scanlan, from the University of Toronto. On our next episode, we'll talk to Professor Naor Ben-Yehoyada, to discuss how to reframe the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean to reduce the loss of life. Please subscribe on your favorite app so you won't miss it. This monthly podcast was brought to you by the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto.

Ep13\_BetweenAcrossThrough\_ScanlanAmelioration

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