

To Admonish or Abolish: The End of Indigenous Slavery in British Columbia,  
1830-1890

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A Graduating Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements in the  
Honours Programme.  
For the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
In the  
Department  
Of  
History

University of Victoria  
May 3, 2023

Since time immemorial, slavery had been a fact of life for the indigenous nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America. From Alaska to northern California, the indigenous slave trade was an important institution. So, when Great Britain, which had started to abolish slavery in 1808 and by the 1840s had become the world's anti-slavery policeman, established their colony on Vancouver Island in 1849 it would be fair to assume one of their priorities would be to crush this practice. And slavery did largely, though not entirely, disappear during the colonial period.

So it is not surprising that the few historians' who have examined the end of slavery tend to attribute it to the vague notion of 'British efforts.' A book about James Douglas, when discussing slavery, adds in the footnotes, "Slavery was at one time quite general over the whole of the North-West Coast. By the devoted efforts of Christian missionaries and the establishment of settled governments in the British and American territories it has been blotted out."<sup>1</sup> Barry Gough, in *Gunboat Frontiers*, about British maritime policy in colonial B.C. and in an article that Gough wrote prior makes the argument that "The slave traffic [and liquor trade] could not be ignored by British officials who came to colonial British Columbia."<sup>2</sup> Gough says that the British response to slavery in B.C. was, indeed, an intentional abolitionist act. Although they could not end slavery quickly, British policies were crafted and enforced in such a way that the death of the institution of slavery was i



Before going further, it would be useful to discuss the historiography surrounding slavery in BC, as well as the nature of slavery as an institution. Leland Donald, an ethnographer whose work this paper will borrow heavily from, notes in his 1997 book *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America* that slavery has never gotten “full and careful treatment” in regards to British Columbia and the wider Northwest Coast.<sup>5</sup> Donald points to a number of texts that touch on slavery in the Northwest Coast from a cultural standpoint, but he sees their conclusions as insufficient to truly grasp the bigger picture of slavery as an institution among indigenous nations.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Donald seeks to position himself as the continuation of previous research into indigenous slavery, from an ethnographic perspective.

Donald is not the only one making such claims about slavery, either. While his discussion of the particular role and impact of slavery are somewhat unique, much of his analysis is not original to him. Slavery is omnipresent throughout much of the literature surrounding indigenous society in the Northwest Coast. It appears frequently in both oral traditions, such as those of Mary Rice, a storyteller of the Punaluxutth' who speaks in interviews with Beryl Cryer in the 1930s. It also appears frequently in the usual anthropological evaluations of indigenous society. Donald follows in the tradition of authors such as Philip Drucker, Homer Barnett, and Wayne Suttles.

Instead, what is unique about Donald is that he seeks to re-examine its place in our understanding of Northwest Coast indigenous societies. The argument he wants to





not all indigenous groups of the Northwest Coast participated in slavery at the same

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Donald outlines.

Other responses have problematized the notion of slavery even further. Rachel Flowers's 2012 paper on the "Apocryphal Slave" calls into question the very usage of the words slave and slavery in a Northwest Coast indigenous context, regarding them as a western imposition. This argument follows that the word slave was brought by Europeans and carries a particular meaning and cultural context that is simply not present in the Northwest Coast. The many languages of this vast area are bound to have words translatable to slave "whether or not that language adheres to hierarchy or notions of exploitation."<sup>15</sup> Still, slaves and slavery make appearances in the diaries, letters, and journals of British colonial officials and officers during their stay in the Northwest Coast and this cannot be ignored. Whether or not slavery is a western imposition cannot be answered by this paper, but this issue is important to raise nonetheless. Because this paper is designed to handle and address the British approach to slavery in the Northwest Coast and the subsequent disappearance of what they perceived as slavery, the central argument remains undisturbed by this terminology critique.

If slavery is indeed a western imposition, it is potentially more useful to this paper as it will provide an understanding of exactly what the British brought to the Northwest

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<sup>15</sup> Rachel Flowers,

Coast and their approach to what they saw as slavery. Because of their inaction on slavery, an idea they brought and imposed, their actions are worthy of greater scrutiny. If slavery is an accurate term for the Northwest Coast, and not solely a western phrase, then we can accept Donald's definitions and proceed with the exact same understanding: that slavery was truly happening here and the British continued to do nothing.

Next, it is important to evaluate the historiography on slavery in B.C. If the word 'slavery' appears in historical records, it is usually in reference to Black slavery and the abolitionist sentiments among the British, with some sources using it as a critique or endorsement of the United States. A useful source on British attitudes to slavery, Frank Klingberg's *Anti-Slavery Movement in England* is devoted to the issue of African and Caribbean slavery. Several newspaper articles of the time in the *British Colonist* discuss slavery, but none of these regard indigenous slavery in the Northwest Coast. With respect to Indigenous slavery, even the diaries of Royal Navy captains who would be policing the slave trade seldom mention it. Government officials mention Indigenous slavery occasionally, but usually just in passing. James Douglas in 1840, before he was Governor of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, wrote a powerful declaration about the trade while on a trip with the Hudson's Bay Company, writing, "The abominable traffic in slaves, and the crimes it gives rise to, will never cease as long as the Indians can afford to purchase these unfortunate beings, unless there should occur a revolution in the moral and social state."<sup>16</sup> This statement, made during a trip in the 1840s with the

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<sup>16</sup> Walter N. Sage, *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930), 100.



Hudson's Bay Company, is the most aggressively anti-slavery statement anyone in B.C.

will make regarding indigenous slavery. To a certain extent, this statement by Douglas

could be seen as self-interested largely because the practice of slavery was

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cities like Victoria. If slavery was something the Royal Navy was truly concerned with, as Gough argues, then it should figure in the diaries of these Royal Navy officers. Yet, the topic appears infrequently while the liquor trade is frequently mentioned.

The role of missionaries is another important source of information to consult. Gough talks about missionaries briefly and does not assign them the importance that this paper will argue they should receive. This is not entirely surprising, as Gough's book and article focused largely on the maritime policies of the Royal Navy. Still, it is crucial to understanding British policy to see the role that missionaries played. Some even argued that during his term as Governor of the province, James Douglas "did not appear to have a[n Indian] policy except as supplied by [William] Duncan."<sup>21</sup> Duncan was a prominent Protestant missionary who founded the settlement of Metlakatla and had exceptional influence over several indigenous groups. These missionaries had strong influences both on the colonial government and on the indigenous nations they found themselves surrounded by. These missionaries, however, often saw themselves as too weak to enact real change as they were few in number and in far-flung communities.<sup>22</sup>

Before analyzing the diaries of both missionaries and Royal Navy officers, the final piece of important background is discussing British attitudes to slavery. In 1805, the British parliament passed a motion stating that slavery was "contrary to the

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Usher, *William Duncan of Metlakatla: A Victorian Missionary in British Columbia* (Canada: National Museums of Canada, 1974), 56.

<sup>22</sup> Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 244.

principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy and pledging abolition with all practicable expediency.”<sup>23</sup> The slave trade itself was banned but colonies like the West Indies had immunity from abolitionist laws. In the 1830s two subsequent declarations of even greater importance banned slavery in the British Empire.<sup>24</sup> Leading abolitionists used a definition of slavery that is strikingly similar to the status of slaves in B.C. “A slave in the ordinary sense of the word as a man who is the property of another, politically and socially at a lower level than the mass of the people, and performing compulsory labour.”<sup>25</sup>

Now, this anti-slavery fury was directed mostly at the African slave trade. Few, if any, abolitionist parliamentarians were thinking of the plight of indigenous British Columbians. Explicitly in the parliamentary debates in 1833 was a direction towards freeing black slaves from bondage in Europe, the West Indies, and the United States.<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely any of the British public would have been made aware of the conditions of slavery in B.C.. Douglas’s strong condemnation was not until 1840, seven years after the 1833 Abolition Act.

Religion was a prime mover of the abolitionist cause, with the British Anti-Slavery Society being led by a deeply religious motive.<sup>27</sup> The chair of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a British evangelical colonial society, Henry Venn, was a dedicated

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<sup>23</sup> Frank J. Klingberg, *Abolitionist Movement in England* (United States: Yale University Press, 1968), 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 206.

<sup>25</sup> Klingberg, *Abolitionist Movement*, 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>27</sup> Klingberg, *Abolitionist Movement*, 185.

abolitionist and was a leader figure in the CMS for decades following the Abolition Act.<sup>28</sup> The CMS was not the only source of colonial missionaries, but it was among the most influential as it was an Evangelical Protestant organization. All of this is to say that abolitionism was a cause near and dear to the heart of the British public, and that the cause had a religious core to it. This will help to understand the feelings of the British colonists and missionaries as they arrived in B.C.

The early days of colonization saw, actually, an increase in indigenous slavery. As indigenous societies gained access to new markets and new goods to use for establishing status through potlatching or to benefit themselves, such as firearms, slavery increased. Slaves could provide direct profit to their owners, such as the “industry” of prostituting slaves during the gold rush.<sup>29</sup> With an increasing European presence came an increase in demand for furs, and slave labour was increasing in demand. The British need for furs.<sup>30</sup> Even the British fur traders themselves, despite their seeming abolitionist tendencies, employed slaves as late as the 1860s.<sup>31</sup> Yet, this uptick in slavery was not to last. Disease, increasing numbers of runaways, and the decline in intergroup warfare brought on by the British would kill the practice.

A vastly important part of the decline of slavery in B.C. in addition to a decrease in warfare and increase in escaping slaves, is the introduction of disease into the

colony. Smallpox first struck the Northwest Coast in the 1780s. Up to one third of the indigenous population of B.C. died in the outbreak of smallpox in 1836.

epidemic, according to Robert Boyd.<sup>36</sup> As a result, there are many records of abandoned villages and a consolidation of the surviving population.<sup>37</sup> Not only would slavery have been impeded by the sheer loss in population, other parts of indigenous culture and life were severely disrupted. Some interpretations propose that it “served as a final blow to the Native peoples of British Columbia.”<sup>38</sup> A populat



The difference in treaties compared to the U.S. is an interesting one. The Douglas treaties may be better understood as a land purchase, which somewhat shifts



to practically achieve this, he believed he would need to anger the indigenous population, which would impede business with the HBC.<sup>46</sup>

Douglas also welcomed missionaries with great enthusiasm. Beginning in his days at Fort Vancouver, Douglas had a long history of good relations with Christian missionaries of all stripes. He welcomed Catholic missionaries into Fort Vancouver, and subsequently British Columbia.<sup>47</sup> It was mentioned that he had a deep partnership with William Duncan, a Protestant sent by the Church Missionary Society. As well, Douglas and the Royal Navy actively worked alongside Bishop Hill, an Anglican. There was a Catholic priest present with Douglas on his first trip to Vancouver Island.<sup>48</sup> This long standing relationship with missionaries ( pr)7e(i)6 (es)4 ( DTJ-3 -2.)6 (d)10 ho1 (t)16 (c)4 ( (or)7 (h)1

great deal of money' by sending their slaves to work for the whites, and appropriating

over slavery, as the Company was keen to keep relations cordial.<sup>53</sup> Direct confrontations would have impeded business interests, which were still the primary motivator for the HBC. Douglas's orders, while not absolute, did hold some sway over the affairs of the Navy. In letters with his father, E. H. Verney, a Royal Navy captain, is warned of the power of the colony over the Navy, commenting that "many of your [Verney's] duties appear to be more connected with the Colony than with the Navy."<sup>54</sup>

It is this period where British efforts to suppress the slave trade in the Atlantic are taking a proper shape. Committees were debating actively the use of military force in suppressing slavery.<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that these debates were not considering the Pacific Northwest and were solely focused on dealing with ships coming to or from Africa. Despite the debates taking place, slave patrols were witnessing a period of great effectiveness. According to contemporary reports in 1842, over half of all ships attempting to take slaves were captured and roughly one-fifth of all those taken as slaves were liberated.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the Royal Navy set out to sever the supply of slaves by making treaties with African leaders and destroying stores where slaves could be kept.<sup>57</sup> While the British presence in West Africa never managed to quell the trade completely, their efforts severely reduced its capacity and profit. Such efforts will never be undertaken in B.C.

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, *Father of British Columbia*, 26-27, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Edmund Hope Verney, *Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney*, Allan Pritchard, ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Pearson, "Waterwitch: a warship, its voyage and its crew in the era of anti-slavery," *Atlantic Studies* vol. 13, no. 1 (2016), 112.

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In the 1850s-1860s we saw much more activity from the Royal Navy in the Northwest Coast. Gough makes two claims about this period. One, that the Royal Navy was more effective at suppressing slavery than the liquor trade,<sup>58</sup> which will be demonstrated to be incorrect. The Royal Navy is unable to quell completely the liquor trade, but the important part is that, unlike the slave trade, the Royal Navy is taking efforts to actually stop the whisky smugglers. Secondly, that the Royal Navy was obliged to act on the directives of the Governor to impede the slave trade,<sup>59</sup> which will also be shown to be false.

Richard Mayne, a captain of the *Plumper* who spent 4 years in B.C. from 1858-1862, says very little in his diaries about slavery. His attitude is clearly one of disapproval towards slavery, but this was not an uncommon fact for most British settlers. Most of his time is spent observing the progress of 'civilization' and the spread of the Christian faith. To figure out how he viewed slavery, we can look at two incidents that he reports on. In 1859, Mayne responded to a small crisis brewing between two indigenous groups. A woman was taken as a slave by one group from another as recompense for some kind of insult.<sup>60</sup> Mayne, speaking through an interpreter, scolded the aggressive tribe (the slave takers) for their conduct. He said that James Douglas was very upset with them and was going to punish them if they did not improve.

tries to do is end the fighting between the two groups. Interestingly, the chiefs he is speaking to offer to end the practice of “making slaves” if other nations also agree to do the same.<sup>61</sup> This offer could have been a misunder

Mayne clearly does not approve of this practice, but he does not make any mention of an attempt to abolish or prevent it in any capacity. In neither of these two incidents does Mayne attempt, from the start, to bring about a change in the institution of slavery. He regards it negatively and is not unhappy when the chiefs offer to abolish it, but he does not pursue this outcome. It is the same with the slave prostitutes; he condemns this practice, but does not seek to do anything about it.

G.H. Richards, a naval captain in B.C. from 1860-1862, supposedly had a mandate to “intervene in matters of intertribal warfare and the taking of slaves”<sup>63</sup> but this is not what appears in his diaries. Like Mayne, Richards notes only two incidents in regards to slavery and intertribal warfare in his whole 3 year tour. The first is an interesting observation where Richards notes that having 50 men like William Duncan in B.C. would be just as effective as the same number of man-o-wars.<sup>64</sup>

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by force from the tribe they were among, yet if they escaped to the Mission [Metlakatla] or on board ship he would consider himself justified in protecting them.”<sup>66</sup> This passage is both contradictory and very revealing. Clearly slavery did persist in this part of the empire. The Admiral of the Pacific fleet, the man in charge of all the Royal Navy’s affairs in the Pacific Ocean, did not wish to take any proactive measures to emancipate slaves. Whatever the Admiral meant by it, it is very clear that he was not interested in pursuing with any ferocity the abolition of slavery in B.C. Porcher similarly expressed no judgement towards the Admiral for this statement, nor any judgement about slavery in the colony.

E. H. Verney, another captain that served in B.C. from 1862-1865, like the others had very little in his diaries to say about slavery. Interestingly, the editor of his diaries notes that Verney’s ship HMS Forward and its sister ship played an important



smugglers received exceptional attention from the colonial government, with some instructions coming right from Governor Arthur Kennedy.<sup>69</sup>

Aside from the liquor trade, Verney was involved in a curious incident in 1865 in Comox. The Laich-kwil-tach had been camped two miles from Comox and refused to leave. They had been stealing potatoes and were causing nervousness among the settlers. When the chief was approached by a missionary, he said that Verney's ship, the *Forward*, had driven them away a few times already and that they would now kill any man who tried to send them away again. After they refused to leave after another order by the local police constable, the Royal Navy responded with incredible force. The following is the result, "The commander-in-chief of the Pacific Station, Rear-Admiral Joseph Denman, decided, as he later stated, that he should visit in person 'a place where so many ineffectual remonstrances had been made.'"<sup>70</sup> The Laich-kwil-tach were sent away, by force (although they were later allowed to return). Using several gunboats, an unprecedented amount of firepower, the Royal Navy showcased its ability to respond to threats.

This obviously raises an interesting question since the Royal Navy, as has been demonstrated, exercised tremendous hesitation to respond with any physical force to incidents involving slavery. Why was this incident in Comox worthy of such firepower, but freeing slaves was seen as an unjustified endeavour? The reason is that the Royal

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<sup>69</sup> Allan Pritchard, "The Royal Navy and the Comox Settlement," *Journal of the British Columbia Historical Federation* vol. 40, no. 2 (2007), 25.

<sup>70</sup> Pritchard, "Comox Settlement," 25-26.

Navy was not concerned with slavery. Instead, their interest was in ending the liquor trade and protecting settlements. Because of this, it makes sense to use force to protect settlements rather than attack slavery.

The decade of the 1860s saw some changes come to slavery. The killing of slaves was mostly eradicated by the 1860s, but in some instances it does continue well beyond this point.<sup>71</sup> Yet this was not achieved by British pressures. Slave killings around HBC forts continue, despite direct attempts by HBC officials to have the ritual killings cease.<sup>72</sup> This is because killing slaves was almost always part of rituals or potlatch ceremonies, which explains why it was impossible to suppress the practice entirely at this time.<sup>73</sup> Neither the HBC nor the Royal Navy had any real impact on religious practices among indigenous communities. British pressures did achieve some gains, however. Among certain indigenous nations, the reduction of intergroup warfare was achieved. The British received mutual guarantees from among the “Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, and other tribes...” and served as peacemakers.<sup>74</sup> Philip Drucker, in his study on the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, noted that warfare had ceased completely by the 1870s.<sup>75</sup> Preventing intergroup warfare was a big goal for the British at this period, but not because, as Gough proposes, they sought to end slavery.

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<sup>71</sup> Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 35.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

<sup>73</sup> Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 235-237.

<sup>74</sup> Gough, “Send a Gunboat!” 163.

<sup>75</sup> Philip Drucker, *The Northern and Central Nootkan Tribes* (United States, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), 318.

During the 1850s as well, the ships in West Africa resorted to very different methods. Few ports along the West African coast were open to the slave trade.<sup>76</sup> In order to close the few holes remaining, the Royal Navy no longer desired to employ blockades, but sought to make diplomatic treaties. When their treaties were refused, such as was the case in Lagos, in present day Nigeria, the Royal Navy was willing to intervene in the kingdom's internal affairs to either dethrone their king or force a treaty upon them.<sup>77</sup> This attack was indeed launched, but was a complete failure. Nevertheless, the British willingness to not only consider, but actually launch, an attack for the sole business of putting an end to the slave trade says a lot about their approach in Africa. Only Verney's example of a show of force, not quite an attack, at Comox comes close to the dedication of the Royal Navy in Africa to the cause.

Finally, the late period of Royal Navy involvement (the 1870s-1880s) coincides with a dramatic decrease in the indigenous population due to disease.<sup>78</sup> This is also the final period of Royal Navy policing, as the last efforts to use the Royal Navy to police indigenous nations ended in the 1880s.<sup>79</sup> Donald remarks that slavery all but disappears from the coast of B.C. by the 1890s, shortly after these patrols end.<sup>80</sup> By 1900, Donald claims that there were "probably" not any slaves left in B.C.<sup>81</sup> There are no diaries left behind from the Royal Navy that can help shine a light on the condition of slavery as they saw it. Slavery, by this point in time, had mostly disappeared due to a

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<sup>76</sup> Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slavers*, 205.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery* 245.

<sup>79</sup> Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 238.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 245.





of those came in a canoe. Doing so would have exposed them to the dangers of being taken as a slave.<sup>91</sup> With the limited resources available to the Royal Navy, and their preoccupation with supporting settlement initiatives and combatting liquor smugglers, they were unable to provide much protection to travellers to and from Victoria. This has changed by the time of Brabant's arrival and more British presence in the area. Richard Mayne observes what could have been a slave raid in 1858 that is dispersed by the appearance of his vessel.<sup>92</sup> The 1865 incident that Captain Verney witnessed at Comox supports this idea. They didn't do it often, but the Royal Navy had demonstrated a willingness to use force. Additionally, Mayne notes that in some attempts to retrieve 'stolen' slaves, having a Royal Navy vessel nearby aided in what could have been sour negotiations.<sup>93</sup> One final incident worth noting is an 1851 shelling of a village by two

with Douglas is the longest standing, it may be prudent to begin with the history of Catholic missionaries in B.C. Two records will be turned to in particular to understand the role of the Catholic Church in impacting slavery, the history of the Oblates written by Vincent McNally, and the diary of August Brabant. McNally argues that the Oblates, a group of lay people and priests associated with Eugene de Mazenod's Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate society, had an exceptional impact on the trajectory of Catholicism in B.C.<sup>95</sup> Gough claims that the missionaries provided a "remedy" by preaching the "equality of souls" and pushing for new economies that were free of slavery.<sup>96</sup> This claim, as will be demonstrated, is mostly true, but the way Gough frames it is incorrect. The conversion work was mostly concerned with bringing 'civilization' rather than "equality of souls" as a counter-balance to slavery. The new economies pushed by missionaries were also not designed to end slavery. They would, indirectly, by uprooting the traditional indigenous economy, stop the slave trade in these areas but that was not the focus of the missionaries.

The Oblates arrived in B.C. in the late 1850s after their decision to abandon efforts in the Oregon territory of the United States as a result of a difficult relationship with the U.S. government and the local indigenous population.<sup>97</sup> One of the first notable missions conducted by the Oblates was Louis D'Herbomez's 6-week trip to the Saanich people in 1859. He claimed it was a tremendous success and that he had extracted from this nation a promise to renounce gambling, shamanistic medicine, murder, and

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<sup>95</sup> McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard*, xxii, xvii.

<sup>96</sup> Gough, *Gunboat Frontiers*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard*, 23-24.

drinking.<sup>98</sup> Notably this coincides with the peak period of Royal Navy involvement and there is no note about slavery from D'Herbomez. What the Oblates were quite active in pursuing was the abolition of the liquor trade and the habit of drinking more generally among indigenous nations. Bishop Hill, an important figure for Anglicans in B.C., commented on how the Oblates were extremely active in lessening drunkenness.<sup>99</sup> In 1863, James Douglas praised the efforts of the Oblates, stating that he had “never seen the Indians so sober.”<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the two ‘sins’ most reported by Oblate missionaries were polygamy and drinking.<sup>101</sup> Suppressing the consumption of alcohol was among the largest priorities of the Oblates, alongside proselytizing.

Another key focus for the Oblates was transitioning the indigenous economy from a non-sedentary lifestyle to sedentary farming communities.<sup>102</sup> These indigenous communities were self-reliant, but the perspective of the Oblates was to make them independent from cities like Victoria, too. They wanted to ensure these communities were not dependent on Western trade goods, and could be free of Western influence. This transition would remove slavery from the life of everyone in these communities. Yet, it is hard to claim that this was an intentional goal of the Oblates rather than a pleasant byproduct. Instead, the Oblates often sought to isolate indigenous communities from the evil influences of European cultures and cities, such as Victoria and New Westminster. They believed that indigenous moral issues like drinking and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 95-103.



gambling stemmed from their proximity to Europeans who brought these corrupting vices. However, these “reduction” communities were never truly established.<sup>103</sup> When “reduction” communities were established, on a smaller scale, the Oblates often hired indigenous men as policemen. Their job was to report on the behaviour of the adults of the group with a specific watch for gambling, adultery, drinking, failure to repay debts, and “especially” reporting to a shaman.<sup>104</sup> While it would make little sense for slavery to be operating in these “reduction” communities, it is telling that slavery does not make an appearance on the list of sins the Oblates and their policemen are looking for.

If they were looking to abolish slavery, another method would be to work with indigenous chiefs and elders to preach the equality of souls, as Gough argued. These Oblates held power in indigenous communities through their relationships with the elders. Elders looking to shore up their support could often gain more power by gaining the approval of a priest. At the same time, these priests sometimes would topple and replace elders when they were looking to gain more influence over an individual nation.<sup>105</sup> This would have presented a perfect opportunity to make a nation abolish the slave trade, but this never occurs. By McNally’s description, the Catholic Church through the Oblates had a lot of power in indigenous B.C. but never focused on abolitionism so long as they were operating.

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<sup>103</sup> McNally, *The Lord’s Distant Vineyard*, 58-59.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 84-85.

A curious case, and one worth investigating, is that of Father August Brabant. Brabant was a Catholic missionary who was preaching among the Nuu-chah-nulth from 1874-1900. He left behind much of his thoughts about the province and his work in a diary that has been republished several times in different editions. However, the curious note about this diary is that it is a propaganda piece with little to no correlation to real events.<sup>106</sup> So while this doesn't provide any good evidence for events, Brabant's writings are useful for understanding attitudes and values of the time. Since Brabant's time in B.C. comes after the Royal Navy's peak period of involvement, Brabant could have established himself as a renowned figure leading the charge at the end of slavery. He also could have bolstered his reputation by placing himself in the midst of quelling the liquor trade. Neither of these things are how Brabant chooses to portray himself.

Brabant makes note of slavery numerous times in his diary. Interestingly, he

their daughters as one would sell a canoe or a horse—just as of old the chiefs sold their slaves.”<sup>108</sup> This remark seems to suggest that simply 7 years into his mission, the slave trade has become a thing of the past. Not just the immediate past, but a thing “of old.”

On one hand, it seems that Brabant is suggesting that by 1881 the slave trade in B.C. was dead. The chiefs of old sold their slaves, but no longer. Another possible interpretation of this passage is that the slave trade is alive and well, as Brabant himself had shown in the previous years leading up to 1881. What this instead means is that the selling of slaves is no longer occurring, but slavery itself has continued. Whatever the implicatio (t)-4 (io)1 ()4 ( ( t )1 ()f(t)j0.004 Tc -,e)-4 (io1 (8 ( ( t ) ( as)4 58ta)10 (ns10 (f)-8 ( )S( )10 (m)-3 sf olt ins- oCC(d s)4C(W)-22 (h)10 (at)2 ( )110 (16 ol)6 doest (ot)2 (he)10 ((s)4 ( no l)one pr)17 astag













Indigenous oral histories do provide some counter-arguments to this narrative,



## Bibliography

