
The Wrong Empire

If there was one thing 18th-century British gentlemen thought they knew more about than port or racehorses, it was liberty. They basked in it. It was the reward, they told themselves, for nearly a century of civil wars. It helped make Britain the freest country in the world, safe from Catholic tyranny, absolute monarchs and standing armies. Liberty was their religion. They built temples in their gardens devoted to it. They even wrote it a hymn. Pity the rest of the enslaved world, deprived of its manifold blessings! But the real payoff of liberty had been riches and power from around the globe. With liberty had come trade. Trade had wrought perhaps the most staggering transformation of power in all British history. From being a tiny outcrop of insignificant islands off the north-west coast of Europe, Britain had expanded into a global power. The shadow of Britannia now fell across America, the Caribbean, the Indian Subcontinent. It had taken barely a century. And, unlike the Roman Empire they so admired, they dreamt of a British Empire that would endure. One based on trade, not on conquest. It would be an empire of liberty, they thought, Britain writ large, sharing its bounty with the world. So, how was it that in just over a century, the people that thought of themselves as the freest on earth ended up subjugating much of the world’s population?

How was it that a nation which had such mistrust of military power ended up the biggest military power of all? How was it that the empire of the Free became one of slaves? How was it that profit seemed to turn not on freedom, but on raw coercion? How was it that we ended up with the wrong empire? Ask any British gentleman in the middle of the 18th century to draw you a map of the British empire, and it would have looked like this. To the east, there were trading posts in India, tiny enclaves that had been there for 100 years, shipping home printed cottons and silks. A commercial enterprise run by the East India Company, not the government. There would be no colonies in Asia. But Britain could look west as well as east. And west was a whole different story. To the west was America - Britain West, in fact. Two million people between the Atlantic seaboard and the Appalachian Mountains. They came from York to New York, Hampshire to New Hampshire. And they all ate, slept, breathed the same mantra - liberty and Britishness. They had first arrived in the early 17th century, seeking their fortune or religious tolerance. Time enough to build farms, communities, towns, cities even. Certainly time enough to deal with the troublesome natives - to make alliances where possible, and, if not, to wipe them out, or drive them inland. Within the settlements and houses of the Virginia tobacco planters and Massachusetts merchants, the silverware was a little simpler, the furniture not quite so Hepplewhite as back home in England, but that very simplicity spoke to their origins, the quest for liberty and the drive for honest self-improvement. But it was rather small potatoes, shall we say, if what you really wanted was a palazzo in England, rather than a picket fence in New England. Suppose you wanted to make a serious fortune? Now, where could that happen? In the mid-17th century, the Caribbean was where. Nobody settled in the West Indies to read the Bible unmolested. This was not Massachusetts. No, you braved the fevers and swamps for one reason alone - to make yourself very rich very fast. Serious profits were already being raked in catering to Europe’s addictions - chocolate, coffee and, in England especially, tea. But, as a money spinner, nothing compared with the stuff you added to make them more palatable - sugar. Once seen as a luxurious drug, it was now a necessity, the cash crop of the empire. Barbados provided the perfect habitat to grow the sugar cane - tropical heat and saturating rains. So the British settled in the West Indies, transforming virgin forest into a patchwork quilt of sugar plantations. But Queen Sugar was a bitch, demanding absolute service before she’d spill her bounty. She took 14 months to get ripe, all eight feet of her. When she was ready, she was ready. Cut the cane at once, get it to the crushers before it spoiled. Boil the juice before it degraded.
All very messy and very dangerous. By the side of the crushing mills hung a sharpened machete, ready to sever the limbs of anyone who got caught in the rollers. What she needed was a combination of strength and lightning speed. What she needed were human beasts of burden, strong, quick, durable and uncomplaining. One commodity would be reaped by another. By slaves. Sitting in a plantation house, next to mills turning sugar into liquid gold, what did you care if you had to go to West Africa to buy the slaves and ship them back across the Atlantic? Oh, yes, the logistics were difficult. Nothing the greatest seafaring nation in the world couldn't handle. The British were good at commodities. A couple of thousand pounds bought you 200 acres of Barbadian cane fields, a mill and a 100-odd slaves. Within a few years, it returned an equal amount every year for the rest of your life. You were now among the richest men anywhere in the British Empire. The slave economy in the Caribbean wasn't just a side-show of empire, it was the Empire. 3.5 million slaves were transported in British ships alone. They went to British plantations, to make British profits and build British cities... Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, where the cult of liberty was still on everyone's lips in smart coffee houses. Apart from the occasional visiting Quaker and exiled Puritan, there was a deafening silence in the land of liberty about turning fellow men into work animals. The scale of profits sealed the conspiracy of silence. Well, here's a little thing of devilish prettiness. It's silver. It might be jewellery. A hat pin or something like that. But it's not. This is an object which marked the passage of a human being to a thing. It's a branding iron. Once the initials were burnt into your flesh, you were no longer a person. You were an object, a commodity. You were a beast of burden. Your journey into hell started months earlier in Africa. It's described in one of the few surviving accounts by Olaudah Equiano, one of the millions to experience the nightmare. Captured as a small boy, he was separated from his sister... then dragged to the coast and a waiting slave ship. When I looked around the ship and saw a mylilityde of black people of every description, chained, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate. Quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck. To make the venture profitable, the slaves were stacked in two layers in the hold, with only about two feet between the planks below and above them. The air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves of which many died. This deplorable situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains and the filth of the necessary tybs in which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered it a scene of horror almost inconceivable. You're a ship's surgeon. It's your job to go into the hold of a morning and examine the cargo. What do you find? For a start, you find a lot of dead slaves, some of them manacled together, living and dead, chained as one pair. What do you do then? You take the pair on deck, strap them to the grating, sort out the living from the dead, throw the dead overboard. There are the sharks, always the sharks, waiting, grateful. If you were one of those who made it to land alive, your troubles had just begun. Naked but for a loincloth, you were once again paraded and pokéd at, your teeth inspected like horses. Violence, the threat or application of it, ran the system. Women were the objects of particular terror. In one year, a Jamaican overseer of a plantation, aptly called Egypt, gave 21 floggings to women, each no less than fifty lashes. Equiano says it was common at the end of the beating to have the victims kneel and thank their masters for the treatment. The same overseer also recorded, with the same matter of fact manner, that he'd had sex with 23 slave women that year, not including his regular mistress. Only Sundays offered some moments of joy. The market and music let slaves recreate some sense of community and the Africa they had left behind. At no time was there more joyous music than at a funeral, because death, at last, was liberty. Death was the return home. (BASS VOCALIST) # Deep river... It was very important for such a momentous journey to have something like this, African, though made in Barbados. # .Jordan... A necklace of teeth, shells and bones, discarded trinkets, copper and bronze rings.

# ..I want to cross over it to campgroynd...
So, a people who legally had no possessions at all reserved what they'd hidden away for this last important journey, so their spirits could return to Africa with dignity.

# ..I want to cross over it to campgroynd #
For the British, it was the perfect set-up. Their ships dominated the oceans, their slaves brought them profit, the world was their oyster. But someone else was eager to prise it open - the French. They'd fought for centuries and they would fight again. The Hundred Years' War of the Middle Ages would become the Seven Years' War of the 18th century. Agincourt, fought, not on a muddy field, but in battles around the globe. It turned out that the combo the British most despised - Jesuits, professional soldiers and bureaucrats - were stealing the empire before their very eyes, starting with continental America. Singing patriotic anthems wouldn't stop them, only war would. And war, as the Romans discovered, changes everything. The first victim is liberty and the second is profit. The French had been in North America for as long as the British, based in Canada to the north, and Louisiana to the south, and exploring the Mississippi and the Ohio River valley in between. It didn't take a genius to work out that a cordon of French forts linking Canada to Louisiana would box the British colonies in. It would be death by slow strangulation. The days of the ad hoc empire were drawing to a close. Empires were not for sharing. The British would have to fight to keep theirs.

It was commonly thought by politicians that war was coming, but it wasn't a prospect anyone relished, except someone who made global victory his alpha and omega. And that man was William Pitt. For better or worse, it was William Pitt, neurotic, gouty, irascible, either manically hyperactive or collapsed in a paralysing gloom, who was the British Empire's true visionary. He believed with an almost feverish intensity that what was at stake in the struggle between France and Britain was not just who would get the lion's share of wealth, but whether the world would be conquered by liberty or despotism. The first rounds went badly for the forces of liberty. British troops were wiped out in the backwoods of New York State by the French and their native allies. So Pitt unleashed his biggest weapon - his war chest. He would fight the first world war with columns of figures as well as columns of soldiers. Pit spent £18 million a year, twice the government's annual income. This flew right in the face of the Empire's basic principle - that it shouldn't cost. But, as Pitt calculated, you can't make a profit from empire if it's not your empire. After one more setback, there were nothing but glories. 1759 was a year of military miracles. The French Empire's strongholds fell, one by one, to truly British forces. Highland regiments often leading the way in India, the French sugar islands, West Africa and Nova Scotia. Horace Walpole boasted: Oyr bells are worn threadbare with the ringing of victories. But there was no victory as sweet or as significant as the one that broke the back of French power in North America for good - General Wolfe's conquest of Quebec. It was exactly the kind of thing Pitt adored. An attack so improbable that Wolfe himself assumed it couldn't work. He'd designed it more as a glorious death than a likely victory, climbing the sheer cliffs that protected the city and surprising - and were they surprised! - the French. After a suicidal charge, the defenders were cut down in a monstrous volley. (GUNFIRE) True to his script, Wolfe took a shattering shot to the wrist, then bullets in the guts and chest. Bleeding into the arms of his brother officers, he died as the first imperial romantic martyr, duly set in marble in Westminster Abbey. Victory in Quebec and then Montreal totally transformed the British Empire in North America. Pitt had made America, as he supposed, British forever. And he must have felt he'd made the world safe for liberty to triumph. The age of imperial Britain as a world power was about to dawn, was it not? There was reason for the new young king, George III, to be the first Hanoverian to admit out loud that: I glory in the name of Britain. Even an American in London like Benjamin Franklin couldn't help but agree. He wrote that: The foundations of the fytyre grandeyr and stability of the British Empire lie in America. 17 years later, he was signing the
American Declaration of Independence. So, what went wrong? How could it all have been thrown away in less than a generation? Pitt would learn that even victories come at a cost. And, in Britain's case, that cost would be America. Perhaps the resources of the British Empire were now terminally over-stretched. Perhaps that young empire might turn out to be a 30-year wonder. At any rate, if they were going to defend the status quo, they were going to need a huge transcontinental army and even bigger navy. And if that army and navy were to be funded, the burden of taxes had better not just fall on the British themselves. So, the colonists, who were supposed to enjoy their protection, would have to cough up their share of the money. And they’d do it through taxes. Taxation, the very thing that had triggered the British civil wars, would do so again, this time in America. The taxes may have been different, but the result would once again be disaster. What happened in America was really Round Two of those wars, the civil war of the British Empire, with the Hanoverians playing the part of the Stuarts and the Americans the heirs of the revolutionaries - of Cromwell and of William III, the inheritors of a true British liberty that had somehow got lost in its own motherland. One such American was John Adams, a Boston lawyer and politician, deeply read in history and philosophy, and one of the most eloquent patriot leaders in the colonies. He believed fervently in those hard won liberties - no taxation without consent, no standing armies, no martial law. When he looked at what Britain had become, he no longer recognised a pristine temple of liberty, and no wonder. Thanks to the unrelenting wars with France, Britain had become a huge military state, supporting a massive army, navy, and an insatiable tax collecting machine. Adams's Britain, the shrine of freedom, was, of course, a fantasy, a dream Britannia. But this was a dream that John Adams woke up with every morning. And from such nagging visions comes action. He would not pay the taxes, and he was not alone in this struggle. Angry, wealthy Boston in the 1760s was exactly the kind of place that might breed a revolution. Adams, his friends and neighbours, argued about everything. They attended public meetings in droves. Gossip flew around the cobbled streets in minutes and roused the citizens to use their muscle - fast and fierce in opposition to British taxes and those who tried to enforce them. Stunned by this strength of feeling, the British hit on a tax by stealth. One only of interest to bureaucrats, something the mob couldn't possibly notice, or so they thought. So, when the British government decided to put a stamp on the paper which official documents, handbills and newspapers were printed on, what in London looked harmless enough, in Boston seemed like a tax on knowledge. In that dangerously over-informed city, it really lit a fire. After all, who uses official documents and reads newspapers? Well, only every single lawyer, merchant, minister, publisher and pamphleteer across the 13 colonies. Anyone who has to deal with an official document now hates you. And who are they? Only the best educated and loudest of the colonial population. Their leadership was prepared to mobilise anger on the Boston streets. The mob tore down the house of the Governor of Massachusetts. In Britain, this violent opposition divided parliament almost as strongly. The government was outraged at the insolence of colonials who were protected by our care, and demanded that they should yield obedience. Up got William Pitt, the man who'd done most to make America British, to demand the repeal of the Stamp Act and save his empire. I rejoice that America has resisted. I would argue that even under former arbitrary reigns, parliaments were ashamed of taxing a people without their consent. The gentleman asks, "When were the colonies emancipated?" Byr I desire to know, when were they made slaves? As the war for public opinion escalated, the American politician and publisher, Benjamin Franklin, produced an image that quickly seized the public imagination - a nightmare vision of a dismembered Britannia ruined by alienating her colonies. Tensions rose in London and Boston. Parliament did eventually
An incredibly fateful moment.
understood that it was indeed very shrewd about this, campaign and the leaders of the patriot leaders. For those who knew, the stuff straight into the water. They used hatchets, which they climbed aboard with lanterns. blankets still in place, ships. Indians, dressed in blankets as Mohawk and a group of patriots, the doors burst open at a pre-arranged signal, swallowed much less to brew it, was to swallow slavery along with a cuppa. At a pre-arranged signal, the doors burst open and a group of patriots, dressed in blankets as Mohawk Indians, urged the crowd to storm the ships. About 30 to 60 of our Mohawks, with their faces all blackened up, blankets still in place, climbed aboard with lanterns. They used hatchets, which they called, of course, tomahawks, to break open the chests and poured the stuff straight into the water. For those who knew, and the leaders of the patriot campaign were very shrewd about this, understood that it was indeed an incredibly fateful moment. John Adams said:

"This was the most magnificent moment of all, "that I cannot but call it an epoch in history."
How right he was.
To punish Boston, the British now closed its port, galvanising all of the American colonies to come to the distressed city's aid.
Cartloads of food came from colonies north and south.
George Washington declared: The cause of Boston now is, and ever will be, the cause of America. And yet, still, there was hesitation on the brink of catastrophe. Few wanted irrevocable divorce from the motherland.
In London, King George III and his government believed rebellion had already started and had to be nipped in the bud. In parliament, William Pitt made a last-ditch plea for sanity and reason. Did their lordships not understand that in fighting the Americans, they were fighting their own ghosts, the ghosts of English liberty past? What, thoughy yoy march from town to town, province to province, thoughy yoy shall be able to enforce a temporary submission, how shall yoy be able to secure the obedience of the country yoy leave, to grasp the dominion of 1,800 miles of continent, poploys in nymbers, possessing valoayr, liberty and resistance? The spirit which resists yoyr taxation is the same spirit which called all England on its legs and, by the Bill of Rights, vindicated the English constitution. This glorious spirit animates three millions in America who prefer poverty with liberty to gilded chains and sordid affllyence, and who will die in defence of their rights as free men. George III's ministers were having none of it. Parliament's authority as government of the Empire was at stake, and, if necessary, it had to be backed up with bullets. So, few were surprised when the first blood was shed at Lexington, outside Boston, on April 19, 1775. Redcoats had been sent to seize militia arms. They arrived just before dawn. Nobody knows who, but inevitably, someone fired. And, in response, the British shot their muskets straight into the ragtag group of militiamen gathered before them. The Redcoats stormed nearby Concord, but were then forced back to Boston in bloody shock, peppered with fire all the way! The dream of somehow remaining British and still being free had died along with the militiamen at Lexington and Concord. Now there was a different dream, a dream of a new country. It was an American dream. Once those shots had been fired, many more bodies would be laid beside those in Concord. It would be a war fought, not just with muskets, but with words and ideals. Adams and his fellow colonial leaders, including Benjamin Franklin, meeting in Philadelphia, would publish their Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Yes, when the declaration accused a king, in this case, George III, of being a tyrant, it did sound remarkably like a chapter from a British history book. But that's not what everyone remembers. What we remember is something fresh, something profoundly American. We hold these tryths.
to be self evident,
that all men are created equal...
They are endowed by their
creator
with certain unalienable rights...
..that among these are life, liberty
and the pursuit of happiness.
In April 1778,
faced with the undoing
of his life's work,
an alliance between the old
enemy,
France,
and the new dominion of liberty,
America,
Pitt tried to make one last
parliamentary speech
which would put some gumption
into his demoralised compatriots.
He struggled to his feet,
but, before he could pronounce,
he collapsed back again
into the arms of his fellow peers.
When he died a month later,
the right empire, the empire
of liberty, died with him.
It would take George
Washington,
now commander of the American
forces,
seven years of bloody fighting
before independence became a
reality.
In that time, the Americans
suffered
as many defeats as victories,
but gained the crucial support
of France, Spain and Holland,
eventually forcing the British
to surrender
at Yorktown in Virginia in 1781.

It may have been the end
of one kind of British Empire,
but another one
was waiting to be born.
20 years after defeat in America,
the British found themselves
ruling millions in Asia.
They hadn't planned it, they
hadn't
even dreamed it was possible.
Why would they?
Since the British had first come
to India, early in the 17th century,
they thought of nothing but trade.
Their only presence
was the East India Company,
a commercial body
there to make a profit.
From toeholds on the south-east
and western coasts,
they bought brilliantly-printed
silks
and cottons and shipped them
home,
where the parlours and bodies
of the polite classes
were suddenly transformed
by splashes of Indian colour.
A nice business, but anything
more
ambitious was out of the
question,
for there already was
an empire in India,
one of the most spectacular
in the world.
The Mughals,
The Moslem descendants
of the Mongol conquerors of
Asia.
At their head
was the Emperor in Delhi.
Across the land, a network
of governors loyal to him, the
Nawabs.
They had to give their permission
for the East India Company to be
there.
To the Mughals, the British
merchants
were just extra pocket money,
supplying silver
to take Indian goods home.
No more than a gnat
on the elephant's rump,
specks of bothersome dust
on the Emperor's peacock throne.
But in 1739, that throne
disappeared
in the plunder
taken by Persian invaders
when they sacked Delhi
and slaughtered its inhabitants.
In the decades that followed,
other invaders,
Afghans from the north-west,
rode deep into the Indian
heartland
waging war and fighting battles
on an unimaginable scale.
The gorgeous fabric of
the Mughal Empire frayed and
tore.
Left to their own devices, the
Nawabs
took advantage of Delhi's
weakness,
raising their own armies,
creating their own mini-states.
18th-century Mughal India
was not some howling anarchy
begging for the British
to come in and stop the rot.

It was a patchwork of successor
states, elegant, robust, vigorous,
many of them still using Persian
law
and Persian court style.
And it was
these up and coming states,
not the corrupt petty kingdoms
which
the British always complained
about,
into which the East India
Company
smashed its way
with a ferocious, unstoppable
mixture
of arrogance, ignorance and
political cunning.
No one in Delhi saw it coming,
no one in London wanted it,
but then enter the French,
enter trouble.
It was the 1740s.
Anglo-French rivalry was going
global.
What the French had been doing
with native North American
tribes,
interfering in wars and alliances
to steal a march on their rivals,
they would now do
in the Asian subcontinent.
From Pondicherry,
their base in the south,
the French
jumped into Indian politics,
learning that a well-engineered
coup
could replace a neutral local
governor with a tame Nawab,
one who would not just help
their business prospects,
but shut out the British.
So the British had little choice
but to join this game of trump the
Nawab.
To act was risky, but failure
to act was commercial suicide.
Not everyone in the little
company
settlements, like nearby Madras,
was biting his nails
at the idea of an Indian war.
There was one young man, who'd
been
sweating it out as a company
clerk,
for whom the drum roll of battle
was an irresistible serenade.
Robert Clive, like the East India
Company itself, you might say,
was never really cut out for
business,
made it out of the town in time. Most of its residents since 1690 - Calcutta.River at the mouth of the Hooghly established settlement that had been In 1756, he attacked the British something about this threat. Siraj-ud-Daulah, decided to do Bengal, the young impulsive Nawab of Up the coast to the north, was a cuckoo in the nest. What it had got fledgling. with a feeble little merchant that it was no longer dealing with no food or water and virtually no air, in the height of the Indian summer. Few came out alive, and the Black Hole of Calcutta now entered British history's lexicon of infamy. One survivor, John Zephaniah Holwell, wrote a book about the Black Hole on his way back from India to England. When it was published, in 1758, it became an instant best seller. Holwell exaggerated the number of those who suffocated on that night, multiplying them by about three, from around 40 to 120. I don't think he was simply kicking up the number for sensationalism. He was making a point. The point was that a regime that could do that, that was so cruel, so inhuman, scarcely deserved the name of a government at all, in fact, scarcely deserved to survive. Clive sailed north in Royal Navy ships, recaptured Calcutta and pursued Siraj-ud-Daulah upriver. In June, 1757, he took on an Indian army that outnumbered his ten to one. But Clive had been in India long enough to know there was more than one way to fight a battle here. The Battle of Plassey has gone down in imperial textbooks as one of those stellar victories, with a handful of European soldiers pulling off a long-shot victory against massed elephant cavalry. What happened was that Clive cut a deal with Abdullah's second-in-command - "Make sure your soldiers disappear and you can be the next Nawab." Well, of course, he went for it. The soldiers duly evaporated and that was that. Courtesy of his tamed new Nawab, Clive helped himself to a quarter of a million pounds reward. It made the delinquent from Market Drayton one of the wealthiest men in Britain, and Baron Clive of Plassey. When challenged, years later, at the scale of his plunder, Clive replied: An opulent city lay at my mercy. Vaylts were thrown open to me, piled on either hand with gold and jewels. At this moment, I stand astonished at my own moderation. The new Nawab would have disagreed. Clive cost him his independence, as well as his jewels. The British could and would replace him at their whim. As Clive turned from a general into a power broker, an Indian Caesar, suspicions began to mount back in London. Was this an economic exercise in damage containment or was it empire building? For empires notoriously came with long bills. But Clive was one step ahead of them. He would solve all their problems by turning Bengal into a money-making machine for the company. Not by trade, but by collecting its land taxes. The temptation was not just for company men to build private mega-fortunes, it was for the company itself to want to grow rich, fast. This was just so much easier for the business. Increasingly, the main trade of British India was not spices, not cloth, but taxes. Taxes would pull down one empire in America,
but now they were going
to set one up in India.
In 1765, the company
was granted the right
to collect the land tax
across all of Bengal.
For the British, it marked
the shift from trading to ruling.
The theory of empire
had been turned on its head.
Trade can only thrive,
that theory had said,
when it's not lumbered
with government or an army.
"Trade can only thrive in India,"
whispered Clive,
"when it hooks up with
government,
when it runs a tax system,
"and when it supports an army."
And it was in stark contrast to what
occurred in America at the same time.
In Boston, they were sending
protesting mobs into the streets,
but in Bengal, the money men
were falling over themselves
to bankroll the British.
The local land-owning tax
collectors,
or Zemindars, as they were
called,
would happily keep harvesting the rupees,
as they had for the Mughals.
The British even imagined that
under their enlightened supervision,
Bengal would be turned
from a place of grinding toil
into a model of progress.
In theory,
everyone was going to be happy.
If the Zemindars could know for sure
exactly how much tax they would owe to the government,
they could go easy on the peasants.
The peasants, in turn, would be able
to be thrifty and industrious
and produce a surplus for the market,
and plough back the profit
into self-improvement.
The only problem with this was that it was a total fantasy.
The Zemindars' main interest was,
and always had been,
in shaking as much money as possible
from their peasants,
which they continued to do.
So, instead of beginning
a chain reaction of benevolence,
it started a pyramid of extortion.
The government screwed the Zemindars,
who screwed the peasants.
The Zemindars went broke,
the peasants were evicted
and died in hundreds of thousands.
So much for good intentions.
And, in short order,
famine arrived in Bengal.
Walking ribcages on the trunk roads,
saucer-eyed children
dying in baked mudholes,
flocks of kites landing
on the carcasses of cattle.
Perhaps a quarter of the population
of Bengal perished, millions of people.
Perhaps the British didn't cause it,
but they certainly didn't help.
Guilty or innocent,
one fact was indisputable -
Bengal now belonged to the British.
Over the next 50 years,
most of the rest of India would follow.
New British armies would complete
the job that Clive had started.
For some who came after him,
India was more than an invitation
just to smash and grab.
Warren Hastings, the first to hold
the title of Governor-General,
was committed to the possibility
of repairing the broken body of India
the Indian way.
He learned Persian
and four Indian languages.
He founded the Asiatic Society,
dedicated to understanding Indian culture.
He commissioned the first
Anglo-Hindustani dictionaries,
translations of Indian law codes
and the Bhagavadgita.
And under Hastings' administration,
there was a tantalisingly brief moment
when the two cultures actually converged rather than collided.

British men had Indian mistresses,
even wives,
sometimes two,
one in Delhi, one in Lucknow.
They went to cock fights, smoked
hookah pipes with Indian princes...
..made deals with Hindu money men.
But for many of the British
who came to India,
there would be no home,
just a cenotaph...
their presence immortalised
only in stone.
Acres in central Calcutta are still occupied by Park Street Cemetery.
In the early days, one in three
wouldn't make it through the first monsoon.
In all, it's said over two million Europeans are buried in India.
And the imperial size
of their graveyard monuments
says something about a wish to be remembered,
to leave an imposing mark
on the subcontinent.
But neither translations of Hindu epics nor Mughal-sized tombstones
persuaded everyone that the British
really were Indianising themselves.
Many still saw them as conquerors
to be resisted to the death.
(MOSLEM CALL TO PRAYER)
They were rulers like Tippu Sultan,
who built up his southern Indian state of Mysore
into a dynamic Moslem power.
For 20 years, he bitterly
and effectively opposed British rule,
bloodying their armies and fighting
their soldiers to a standstill.
But it couldn't last.
Tippu Sultan, the tiger, would learn
that a new kind of British governor-general
had arrived at the end
of the 18th century,
contemptuous of Warren Hastings' tendency to go native,
and resolved to squash the least
sign
of local insurrection.
The most uncompromising of all
was Richard Wellesley,
the older brother
of the future Duke of Wellington.
Yet again, France provided
the impetus for action.
With the rise of Napoleon
Bonaparte
came the excuse
to stamp on anyone
who might be his Indian ally.
And so Wellesley dispatched
an overwhelming company army,
the vast majority of its manpower
Indian sepoys, to Mysore.
They stormed Tippu's island
fortress,
Seringapatam,
and overwhelmed the Sultan's
army.
Tippu was as good as his word
and fought to the death,
his body discovered where
the fighting had been fiercest,
shot in the head
and stripped of his jewels.
Over the next two decades,
Wellesley and his successors
moved relentlessly
across the subcontinent,
picking off Indian states one by
one.
In one of Wellesley's letters
to his wife,
you can hear the authentic voice
of the future of British India.
Farewell, dear soyl.
I am about to arrange the affairs
of a conquered country.
The foundation stones of a true
Raj
were laid by Richard Wellesley,
literally, in 1799,
when he decided that British
India
had to have the kind of building
that was fit for an emperor.
So he built a classical palace
in Calcutta,
complete with busts of the
Roman
Caesars and grand colonnades.
From it, Richard Wellesley
surveyed,
with triumphal satisfaction,
the stupefying immensity
of what had been done.
It might be pricey.
But Wellesley wasn't thinking
about double-entry book-keeping.
He was too busy measuring
his hat size for the victory
garland.
As far as he was concerned,
what he had wrought,
the empire he had carved out,
was the ultimate riposte
to Napoleon's jibe about the
English
being a nation of shopkeepers.
They were not. They were
a nation of empire builders,
an empire of arms,
of law, of engineering.
These men no longer cared
about an empire of liberty.
That now sounded dangerously
French,
suspiciously revolutionary.
Let the Americans play with the
tomfoolery
of democracy if they chose.
As for the empire of liberty's
twin,
the empire of trade,
surely it was understood now
that something grander was in the
offing
than money-grubbing business.
The Almighty had led them,
by crooked steps, to be sure,
toward their true destiny
as the modern Rome,
innocent to the benighted,
guardians of an empire which
would
make war to provide peace.
And just think, Roman culture
might
have reached Spain and
Jerusalem,
but British civilisation
would span the world...
.or so we told ourselves.