

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-19581-2 - Defoe's America  
Dennis Todd  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## DEFOE'S AMERICA

The Americas appear as an evocative setting in more than half of Daniel Defoe's novels and often offer a new beginning for his characters. In the first full-length study of Defoe and colonialism, Dennis Todd explores why the New World loomed so large in Defoe's imagination. By focusing on the historical contexts that informed Defoe's depiction of American Indians, African slaves, and white indentured servants, Dennis Todd investigates the colonial assumptions that shaped his novels and, at the same time, uncovers how Defoe used details of the American experience in complex, often figurative ways to explore the psychological bases of the profound conversions and transformations that his heroes and heroines undergo. And by examining what Defoe knew and did not know about America, what he falsely believed and what he knowingly falsified, *Defoe's America* probes the doubts, hesitations, and contradictions he had about the colonial project he so fervently promoted.

DENNIS TODD is Associate Professor of English at Georgetown University. A specialist in eighteenth-century American and British literature and culture, he has written on Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, William Hogarth, John Arbuthnot, and early science. He authored *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (1995) and edited, with Cynthia Wall, *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture: Serious Reflections on Occasional Forms. Essays in Honor of J. Paul Hunter* (2001).

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-19581-2 - Defoe's America  
Dennis Todd  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# DEFOE'S AMERICA

DENNIS TODD



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-19581-2 - Defoe's America  
 Dennis Todd  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
 São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo  
 Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521195812](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521195812)

© Dennis Todd 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Todd, Dennis, 1944–  
 Defoe's America / Dennis Todd.  
 p. cm.  
 Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-521-19581-2

1. Defoe, Daniel, 1661?–1731—Criticism and interpretation. 2. National characteristics,  
 American, in literature. 3. Imperialism in literature. I. Title.  
 PR3407.T56 2010  
 823'.5—dc22 2010022106

ISBN 978-0-521-19581-2 (Hardback)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
 this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
 or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-19581-2 - Defoe's America  
Dennis Todd  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*To Barbara and Sasha*

## *Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
1 Defoe's America	1
2 Mastering the savage: conversion in <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	32
3 Servitude and self-transformation in <i>Colonel Jack</i>	76
4 <i>Moll Flanders</i> and the misrepresentation of servitude	118
Conclusion: Defoe, cannibals, and colonialism	158
<i>Notes</i>	180
<i>Bibliography</i>	205
<i>Index</i>	226

## *Preface*

Defoe was enthusiastic about the British colonization of the New World. He wrote extensively about colonization in his economic and journalistic works, colonial concerns infiltrated his religious conduct books, and England's colonial enterprise became the explicit subject of one of the last pieces he had his hand in, the massive *Atlas maritimus et commercialis*. Many of his novels have some sort of colonialist bent, and one of them, *A New Voyage round the World*, at times seems to have little more purpose than to promote one of Defoe's favorite projects, creating an English colony on the tip of South America. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Colonel Jack*, and *Moll Flanders*, too, have colonial American settings, all three taking place in what regional scholars call "the extended Caribbean" – the coastal region stretching from the eastern tip of Brazil north to the Chesapeake. This locale is the "America" of my title, and these three novels are my subject.

It is significant that these three novels take place here. The Caribbean of *Robinson Crusoe* and the Chesapeake of *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders* were plantation monocultures, societies organized around the cultivation of sugar and tobacco. As a consequence, they were utterly dependent on bound labor. With historical hindsight, we understand how important African slaves were for the growth and success of these British possessions, something Defoe knew, too. "Our Collonies in America," he acknowledged, "could no more be maintained ... without the Supply of *Negro Slaves* than *London* could subsist without the River of *Thames*." But, to his mind, more significant and certainly of greater interest was a second class of bound laborers, white indentured servants. Moll and Jack are indentured servants, and, in his own way, Crusoe is too.

It is the argument of this book that indentured servitude is central to these three novels and that Defoe uses indentured servitude, both as an institution and as a complex metaphor, to explore the spiritual, moral, and economic transformations that Crusoe, Jack, and Moll go through as

they move from being slaves of powerful psychological and social forces to masters of themselves and their environments.

There is another significant aspect to the American setting. Readers are often vexed by the fact that Defoe seems to have many purposes in these novels, so many that it is sometimes difficult to know what exactly these novels are: vindications of colonialist ideology, fictional autobiographies of spiritual conversions, studies of the psychology of moral growth and degeneration, or celebrations of material success through individual initiative. To his contemporaries, the American setting would make Defoe's purposes appear less variegated and random than they seem to us. In the twenty years preceding the publication of these three novels, events in the American colonies had pushed several issues to the fore. Imperial realities had made the civilizing and Christianization of the American natives the linchpin of British colonialist policy, something that could be accomplished, it was thought, only by the conversion to civil behavior and Christian belief of the white colonists themselves; religious leaders in England had begun to agitate for the education and conversion of African slaves; changes in policies of criminal punishment – and especially the passage of the Transportation Act of 1718 – had given new urgency to the belief that America offered indentured servants and transported criminals extraordinary opportunities for personal transformation, moral renovation, and economic advancement. Given these contexts, colonial policy, spiritual conversion, moral reform, and economic advancement are more intimately related to one another than they otherwise might appear to be.

Chapter 1 recovers something of the colonial contexts of these three novels and makes the case for the importance of indentured servitude for Defoe. Defoe's thinking about indentured servitude is complex, even contradictory, and the uses to which he puts it in his novels suggest tensions and contradictions in his thinking about larger issues, particularly about the mastery and freedom Crusoe, Jack, and Moll pursue. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on *Robinson Crusoe* and *Colonel Jack* respectively. Both novels are about the conversions of their protagonists (a religious conversion in the case of Crusoe, a moral conversion in the case of Jack), conversions which are played off against the parallel conversions of savage Others (an Amerindian in *Robinson Crusoe*, African slaves in *Colonel Jack*). In these two chapters, I show how these transformations are modeled on indentured servitude, which, as a metaphor and a reality, charts both protagonists' freeing themselves from being slaves of their own irrational drives to become masters of themselves and their circumstances. Simultaneously, I delineate the assumptions Defoe held about human nature and psychology

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-19581-2 - Defoe's America  
 Dennis Todd  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

x

*Preface*

that could explain how such radical transformations were possible. Chapter 4 examines the function of indentured servitude in *Moll Flanders* in order to account for the disparities between the literary use to which Defoe puts servitude in his three novels and the reality of the institution as it was experienced by actual indentured servants. Defoe's misrepresentation of indentured servitude is symptomatic of larger tensions and contradictions in his thinking about colonial matters, tensions and contradictions I attempt to elucidate in the Conclusion by putting Defoe's novels alongside some other fictional and nonfiction writings of the period which were also set in Defoe's America.

The first draft of this book was written at the Villa le Balze in Fiesole, Italy, and I am indebted to Michael Collins for making it possible for me and my family to reside there and to the staff of the villa for creating such a pleasant and productive environment. As always, the often twisted path of my research was made straight by the able staff of Lauinger Library, and especially by Jill Hollingsworth and Jeffrey Popovich, both of whom sprang to my aid whenever I got myself into a jam. Georgetown University provided me with two research grants that allowed me to pursue my research, and the Virginia Graham Healey Fund and the Grace Jones Richardson Trust awarded me grants that allowed me to finish the manuscript.

I could not have written this book without the friendship, support, and substantive contributions of my colleagues Lyndon Dominique, Leona Fisher, Jeanne Flood, John Pfordresher, Alvaro Ribeiro, Michael Ragussis, Jason Rosenblatt, Peter Steele, Penn Szittyta, and Kathryn Temple. Until his untimely death, David Kadlec patiently listened to my interminable rethinking of almost every detail of this project. Lucy Maddox was unflagging in her encouragement from beginning to end.

I am indebted to Linda Bree at Cambridge University Press for her patience and counsel and to two anonymous readers whose suggestions helped me make this, I hope, a better work.

My fascination with Defoe goes back over forty years when, as an undergraduate at the University of California, I sat in a class on the eighteenth-century English novel taught by J. Paul Hunter. Anyone familiar with Paul's groundbreaking study of *Robinson Crusoe* will immediately see how thoroughly his thinking has influenced me. Literally, this book would have been impossible without his guidance and continuing friendship.

My greatest debt is to my wife and daughter, and to them this book is dedicated – a skimpy return for their great gifts of love, patience, and faith.



## *Abbreviations*

- CJ*     *The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque*, edited by Maurice Hindle. Vol. VIII of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009.
- FA*     *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, edited by W. R. Owens. Vol. II of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008.
- MF*     *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, edited by Liz Bellamy. Vol. VI of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009.
- NV*     *A New Voyage round the World*, edited by John McVeagh. Vol. X of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009.
- RC*     *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, edited by W. R. Owens. Vol. I of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008.
- SR*     *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, edited by G. A. Starr. Vol. III of *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008.