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William Lloyd Hupp April 1, 2015

‘Martial Race’ Theory: Nature and origins

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Abstract

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In nineteenth-century Europe, new ideas on race emerged which were highly influential in ‘scientific,’ philosophical, and socio-political thought. Specifically, racial categories emerged and were elaborated which distinguished Africans, Americans, Asians, and Europeans as fundamentally different. Under the British in India, this new trend was adapted to become ‘martial race’ theory, which held that only certain races of Indians would be effective as soldiers in the Indian Army. This thesis considers the primary documents exemplifying martial race theory, including letters and memos from high-ranking government and military officials; texts on the history of the British Indian Army; and handbooks on particular racial, religious, and caste groups. Previous analysis of the evidence describes what martial race theory was and how it affected the makeup of the army. This thesis reinterprets these texts in order to demonstrate that all of these colonial British authors took the theory of martial races in India as a fundamental premise, upon which they based subsequent arguments about the inherent characteristics of a certain group of Indians. The final section then demonstrates that the same ideas which supported martial race theory were developed earlier in Europe. These European ideas allowed the theory in India to establish its decades-long primacy, unchallenged by British thinkers from the late nineteenth century almost until Independence in 1947.

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Introduction

> *It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West, that in the East, with certain exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior. In Europe, as we know, every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort…. In the East, or certainly in India, this is not so.*
>
> Major George MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, 1911[1]

> *Since Hitler emerged from obscurity and became the Fuehrer of Germany, we have heard a great deal about racialism and the nazi theory of the herrenvolk. That doctrine has been condemned and is to-day condemned by the leaders of the United Nations. Biologists tell us that racialism is a myth and there is no such thing as a master race. But we in India have known racialism in all its forms ever since the commencement of British rule. The whole ideology of this rule was that of the herrenvolk and the master race, and the structure of government was based upon it; indeed the idea of a master race is inherent in imperialism.*
>
> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 1942-6[2]

Imperial ideology, Indian response: Only a few years prior to independence, Nehru observed the irony of British racialism. During a time when the world was condemning Nazi Germany's own racial policies, British imperialism in India relied explicitly on the assumption that the British were meant to rule, and the Indians were meant to be ruled. As Nehru put it, "The English were an imperial race, we were told, with the god-given right to govern us and keep us in subjugation."[3] This is how the British had justified the Raj, with the underlying orientalist notion that the East was fundamentally different from the West. But, although there may have been some parallels between German and British racialism in the 1930s and 40s, Nehru's concerns, and George MacMunn's own views, were based on a much longer history of racial thought and ideology.

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[1] George F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), p. 129.
[2] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: The John Day Company, 1946), p. 274.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 274.

From the late eighteenth century, the European understanding of race underwent a transformation. While race was previously employed as an ambiguous rhetorical term describing the people of a nation, it eventually adopted a biological connotation and became the object of a more specific scientific inquiry.[4] For the British in India, a race could include a particular caste, adherents of a religion, or—in some cases—an entire region of people; thus Brahmans, Sikhs, and Hindustanis all qualified as races, depending upon the given context. One of the most enduring manifestations of the reliance on apparently systematic descriptions of race was the reorganization of the army according to 'martial race' theory.[5] Exemplified in MacMunn's oft-quoted passage, cited as an epigraph above, martial race theory held that only certain Indians were suitable for military service, *contra* Europeans, based on the alleged racial degradation of much of the subcontinent. In general, it was believed that the northwestern portion of India contained the best 'fighting material,' while the southern and northeastern regions did not. This understanding informed British recruitment in India from the 1880s until Independence in 1947, and it arguably maintained its influence for a time afterward too. During this time, certain prescribed martial classes, like Nepalese Gurkhas and Punjabi Sikhs, were recruited well beyond proportion in the army, as has been demonstrated in previous studies.[6]

There was no one particular author or progenitor of martial race theory. Rather, the theory should be understood more properly as a set of beliefs or assumptions about Indians' martial abilities which, by at least the 1880s, had become commonly accepted among many British administrators. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, there is ample evidence of discourse on

[4] Crispin Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222.

[5] From here onwards, the quotations will be dropped, though they should always be treated as implied whenever discussing the theory or nineteenth-century ideas of race.

[6] Rajit K. Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 18.

the martial races from administrators throughout the subcontinent. This temporal and geographic diversity suggests that there were factors influencing official ideology which went beyond political considerations, as has been argued by past scholars.[7] After outlining the nature and extent of martial race theory, this thesis will then begin to explore the trends in European anthropological and scientific thought which made the implementation of martial race theory possible in the first place. These 'systematic' investigations into racial differences and characteristics during the nineteenth century, though hardly representative legitimate and thorough scientific inquiry, were ultimately what allowed martial race theory to be so easily accepted throughout the levels of the British military administration upon its official implementation in the 1880s.

Early twentieth-century British writings on the military in India were most importantly influenced by George MacMunn's 1911 study, *The Armies of India*.[8] MacMunn traced an imperial military history of India from the East India Company to his own time, with special focus on the Maratha wars and the 1857 Mutiny. His purpose throughout the work was, implicitly at least, to justify the military's role in the formation and expansion of the British Empire throughout India while describing the past and present organization of the army. He emphasized that, despite the Mutiny, most of the Indian Army had remained steadfastly loyal and supportive of British rule throughout its history. MacMunn made explicit reference to race at many points throughout the short text, which contains an entire chapter entitled "The Military Races of India" and more than 70 illustrations of various Indian soldiers and regiments, mostly in full military regalia.[9] The chapter on the military races briefly describes the history and military

[7] David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1994), 12.
[8] George MacMunn, *The Armies of India*.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 82-108.

qualities of Sikhs, Pathans, Gurkhas, and several other groups, relying on the assumption throughout that "in the East, with a few exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior."[10] These descriptions and illustrations represented MacMunn's attempts at thoroughness, and they are the primary evidence he provides to demonstrate the martial qualities of certain races.

MacMunn's project was in part revisited in Philip Mason's *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, its Officers and Men*.[11] Published in 1974, it provided a new, detailed history of the British Indian Army from the early colonial period through the Second World War. Like MacMunn's, Mason's book was "about Indian soldiers and about certain virtues—loyalty to comrades, fidelity to an oath, [and] courage under stress."[12] The description of the Mutiny, for instance, regards the event as a tragic breach of trust perpetrated against a magnanimous imperial power.[13] Mason argues that the relationship between the Indian subalterns and their British officers was always one of a child revering his father, making frequent reference to imperial sources. Also like MacMunn, Mason includes an entire chapter on "The Martial Classes," without once problematizing the term; instead he treats the concept of martial races as a given.[14] He makes the argument that Field Marshall Lord Roberts' implementation of martial race theory as policy in the 1880s was a practical consideration based on the views of his time.

Over the next two decades, the field of Indian military history gradually adopted a wider perspective, problematizing the British perspective rather than accepting its inherent biases

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[10] *Ibid,* p. 82.
[11] Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, its Officers and Men* (London: Trinity Press, 1974).
[12] *Ibid,* p. 13.
[13] *Ibid,* 16.
[14] *Ibid,* 341-361.

uncritically. Charles Lindholm's 1980 article, "Images of the Pathan: The Usefulness of Colonial Ethnography,"[15] evaluates nineteenth-century British writings on the Pathan peoples of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. Citing apparent inconsistencies in various different British accounts, Lindholm importantly notes that these apparently contradictory views can actually reveal a larger societal or theoretical framework within which each of these authors was writing. His article will thus provide an important framework for this thesis. While the factual nature of colonial writings can be largely discarded, what these authors *chose* to write about is more telling than *that which* they were writing about. Furthermore, Lindholm emphasized that the impressions of certain native peoples on British commentators is similarly important; regardless of the way the British perceived certain groups, these peoples *were impressionable*. Lindholm therefore urges scholars not to reject colonial ethnographic writings wholesale because they contain important insights into the colonial mindset at the time.

One of the most important works for the study of martial race theory is David Omissi's *The Sepoy and the Raj*.[16] Omissi investigated Indian participation in the British imperial military, arguing that the army was a crucial instrument of colonial control and that the soldier-officer relationship functioned as an analog for the colonized-colonizer relationship. He included one of the first critical overviews of martial race theory and its impact on the Indian Army, also noting that the theory came to the fore during Lord Roberts' tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1885-1893. Omissi argued that this reevaluation of the Indian Army was primarily inspired by fears of a Russian invasion of India from the north. Omissi therefore provided the framework for subsequent scholars of martial race theory. Like previous British

[15] Charles Lindholm, "Images of the Pathan: The Usefulness of Colonial Ethnography," *European Journal of Sociology* (vol. 21, 1980), 350-361.

[16] Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*.

military historians, Omissi took as his sources the documents of British officers and administrators in India, though unlike certain predecessors he applied a more critical approach, challenging the ideas within these documents in many ways rather than accepting them as facts. Omissi, however, did not deeply explore the origins of these ideas and instead focused on how they shaped the subsequent makeup of the Indian Army during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A number of studies emerged in the following two decades which continued this attempt to tell Indian history with a more balanced perspective. These included monographs specifically looking at the relationship between the development of Punjab and the growth of the army.[17] Heather Streets-Salter also introduced a comparative approach to the study of martial race ideology with her book, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, which considered the experiences of Punjabi Sikhs, Nepalese Gurkhas, and Scottish Highlanders in various British armies.[18] Looking at British imperial sources as well as a number of subaltern letters and perspectives, Streets-Salter argued that, in India, martial race theory operated as a device to stoke the military aspirations of certain Indian groups. Streets-Salter's comparison with Scottish Highlanders is useful because it indicates that martial race theory was not in fact entirely based upon preexisting notions of race and masculinity within Indian society. These recent works have expanded the field of Indian military history by incorporating into it important social and political considerations.

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[17] For instance, Tai Tan Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government, and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (New Delhi; California: Sage, 2005) and Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*.

[18] Heather Streets-Salter, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

Some recent scholars have also suggested that martial race theory was not a purely Indian phenomenon. One of the newest works to take the idea of martial races into consideration in a non-Indian context is Myles Osborne's *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present*.[19] Osborne attempts a comprehensive history of the Kamba 'tribe' in Kenya before, during, and after British rule. His treatment of martial race theory emphasizes the agency of colonized subjects, noting that empire was a two-way street in terms of the exchange of ideas. In the context of military service specifically, though the British may have imposed certain ideas upon their subjects, the decision to accept these ideas or to join the imperial military was ultimately in the hands of local populations. While Osborne may go too far in this direction, downplaying the role of imperial dominion to the point of irrelevancy, the basis of his argument is important. And, though the scope of his work does not extend to the subcontinent, it can be helpful to contextualize the development of martial race theory as it reached other major centers of the British Empire. Osborne's investigation lends further weight to the idea that the British colonizers, not the colonized peoples, were primarily responsible for the idea of martial race theory.

A question that remains, however, is that of the factors which made martial race theory possible to give it such a considerable impact on British recruitment policy in India. Mason's assertion that "The division of the [Indian] people into 'martial' and 'non-martial' [classes] was not an invention of the British; it was the recognition of something already implicit in the Indian social system" is clearly outdated.[20] Even Omissi agrees, however, that "The martial-race discourse had at least some basis in the customs and self-image of the many Indian communities

[19] Myles Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[20] Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 24.

who had a martial tradition quite independent from the colonial encounter."[21] What Mason ignores, and what Omissi fails to make explicit, is the crucial difference between, for instance, Sikh aspirations to a warrior culture and British projections of inherent manliness—or lack thereof—onto Indian groups wholesale. This former case, native self-identities, had significantly less of an impact on British theory and policy than British predispositions to categorize certain peoples in the first place. What, then, compelled the British to bridge this rather wide gap between identity and perception? From the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries the emergence of new social and racial theories in Europe immediately preceded martial race discourse in India. What is the interplay between these European ideas and their Indian counterparts? While some previous writings have confronted these questions at least implicitly, these have yet to be answered in any satisfactory way, and it is for this reason that I take up these important questions of Indian military and social history in the present thesis.

The subjects of this thesis will be primarily British, male, and educated. It is, however, important to state that this is not to deemphasize the agency of the Indians who primarily composed the Indian Army, pursuant to Osborne's concerns above, nor to ignore certain questions of gender expression and perception inherent in discussions on Indian masculinity. The focus of this thesis is limited to British ideas about martial and non-martial races: Indian attempts to meet or challenge these expectations have been evaluated elsewhere. In terms of racial or ethnic identity—itself fluid, not a static and immutable category—'actual' Indian identities were less critical than the way the British perceived them. Following Lindholm's work, certain Indian groups clearly left impressions on the British, such that the latter wrote extensively in order to comprehend these impressions. However, one must bear in mind that, ultimately, it was the

[21] Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 24.

British writing the letters, memos, and recruitment handbooks that guided martial race theory, and it is the nature and origins of these ideas with which this thesis is concerned. The evidence evaluated below will reflect this concern, with a focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British writers. Martial race theory had a real and demonstrable impact on British recruitment policy in India. It is therefore important to explore these ideas, despite the racism inherent therein, in order to explain some aspect of the nature of colonialism, and the relationship between the British and the Indians within the military.

From rebellion to nationalism

To start, it will be helpful to recount a brief narrative of the Indian military and politics to demonstrate their dynamic natures in the rough half-century with which this thesis is concerned. Three movements for military and political reform, originating within the British government and amongst Indians themselves, will be discussed in this section as examples of attempts at change directed at the colonial system. These examples are crucial because, where many aspects of India underwent considerable change during this period, it will be shown that racial theory did not similarly follow, instead remaining relatively static in contrast to simultaneous political and intellectual forces. Moreover, martial race theory must be evaluated against this backdrop in order to fully explicate its peculiar nature. In an atmosphere of rapid change and debate, British recruitment policy in India failed to follow suit for several decades.

The Rebellion of 1857 sent a shockwave through the British Empire which in some ways informed policy decisions in India for decades afterwards. Direct government by the Crown replaced East India Company rule. The military was also completely reorganized. Prior to the Rebellion, the Indian military was divided into armies which belonged to each presidency. There were thus three separate armies in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay. In Bengal, which became the locus of the Rebellion, high-caste Hindus dominated the ranks. Following the Rebellion, there was much debate as to how to avoid future upheaval, and a policy of balance was decided upon. Rather than privileging one group over another, British recruiters attempted to ensure various Indian groups were well-represented throughout the military.

This policy remained in place for two decades, at which point the perceived threat of a Russian invasion in India reanimated the debate on the composition of the Indian Army. It was at

this point that martial race theory began guiding recruitment in India—the possibility of a European army challenging British rule in India inspired administrators to rethink the efficacy of the native garrison.[22] This initiated a decades-long effort of identifying the bravest and most physically fit Indians, based on prevailing ideas of immutable racial characteristics. The Russian threat never materialized, but the First World War represented the first major engagement between European armies and Indian soldiers fighting for Britain. Martial races composed the majority of the Indian contingent, although for an engagement on such a scale as this, quantity was valued over quality, and non-martial groups were also recruited, particularly later in the war.[23]

Major political developments in India are important to keep in mind to contextualize this discussion of martial race theory. Whereas the theory went unchallenged in British military thought for decades, during this same period Indian elites were contemplating colonial reform, nationalism, and independence. In the later nineteenth century, these conversations began in full force with the establishment of the Indian National Congress and subsequent nationalist and independence movements. A handful of issues surfaced with the formation of the Indian National Congress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Immediately precipitating the first meeting of the Congress was the reaction to the Ilbert Bill of 1883. This bill allowed Indian magistrates to try European defendants in court, causing significant backlash and inflammatory responses from many British subjects in India. This increase in Anglo-Indian tensions compelled the Indian intelligentsia to organize for the cause of greater representation in British administration, though not yet for full independence. Further controversy around the issues of

[22] David Omissi, "'Martial Races': Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India, 1858-1939," in *War and Society* (New South Wales: Australian Defense Force Academy, 1991), vol. 9 no. 1, 13.

[23] *Ibid,* 20-21.

cow slaughter and the age of consent—issues which the early Congress sought to avoid on the grounds of their divisive nature—increased tensions in the 1890s and damaged Congress credibility.[24] The partition of Bengal in 1905 had similar effects on political relations: Hindus and Muslims were physically divided by the partition, and the moderates of Congress expelled the extremists from their ranks soon afterwards.

Due to their inoffensive and exclusive nature, these moderate reformers never aroused a profound sense of national pride amongst the Indian masses. Hindu revivalism, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with efforts to establish a stronger, more political concept of Hindu culture, tradition, and identity. In contrast to the loyalist reformists, the revivalists were anti-British. The revivalists' political sentiments were particularly aroused by the Age of Consent Act of 1891, which raised the age from ten to twelve. They interpreted this as an instance of imperialist policies explicitly infringing on religious rights and customs. In response, particularly in Bengal and Maharashtra, revivalists called for a boycott of British-made goods, and many agitated for *swadeshi*, the promotion of local goods.[25] Revivalists also attempted to repaint traditional Hindu figures as proto-nationalists. Krishna, for instance, typified the "ideal man, culture-hero and nation builder."[26] Hindu revivalism thus stood in sharp contrast to Indian moderate politics. Though they both recognized the necessity of changing Indian-British relations, the latter did so within an Anglicized context whereas the former attempted to appeal exclusively to Indian Hindus.

The reformers and revivalists represented the main current of political opinion until about the turn of the century. After 1905, though, extremist politics became increasingly relevant. In

[24] John McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, p. 130.
[25] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, p. 69-70.
[26] Ibid, p. 72.

the west, Bal Gangadhar Tilak gained a significant following because of his vehement resistance to British rule and his support for *swaraj*, and in the east, Aurobindo Ghosh led the ideological push for violence and terrorism, among other tactics. Though both radical, these two men differed considerably in their approaches to extremist politics. Tilak, a member of Congress since 1890, was not opposed to working with other political groups, as he did in Poona when he allied with the revivalists against the Age of Consent Act. He also respected the established processes of Congress. While he and other extremists may have disagreed with some moderates, they never formed a splinter group—even when their bid to elect Tilak as Congress president was defeated by Naoroji in 1906—until extremist-moderate tensions came to a head in 1907. His advocacy for Indian capitalism as a means of resistance to British hegemony also widely appealed to many other political affiliations throughout India, and following his imprisonment in 1908, he was one of the most popular politicians in western India.[27] When he was jailed on charges of sedition, though, his politics were dampened somewhat, and Tilak became more of a constitutionalist following 1914.

Perhaps the closest that martial race theory ever came to being explicitly contested during its early stages was in the context of the native volunteer movement of the 1880s, which Mrinalini Sinha examines as one of four case studies in her important work, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*.[28] Sinha argues that colonial ideas on masculinity were the result of the colonial encounter itself; the British and Indians experienced a mutual engagement on what it meant to be manly. From this exchange the concepts of the 'many Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali'

[27] Richard Cashman *The Myth of the Lokmanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*, Berkeley, 1975, p. 187.

[28] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York (1995).

emerged, though they were not discrete categories. The effort for greater native involvement in the volunteer force in India further illustrates the absence of debate about martial race theory within British colonial discourse despite concurrent developments in Indian political and social thought. Indians sometimes successfully petitioned to volunteer, but there was no official Indian volunteer force during the later nineteenth century. Enlistment of Indians in the volunteer forces was justified because the force would primarily respond to internal problems, since Indians were fit to fight against other Indians. Widespread enlistment was avoided, however, due to fears of vulnerability in case of another mutiny.[29]

The native volunteer movement represented a challenge to certain existing colonial ideas, but only amongst elite, educated Indians.[30] However, the mere presence of Indian resistance to these ideas is important as it stands in contrast to the widespread acceptance thereof amongst British writers. Sinha observes that because British administrators could not explicitly use racial exclusivity as a justification for denying enlistment in the volunteer force, they turned to "the logic of colonial masculinity" and an explanation based on martial race theory.[31] The idea of 'effeminacy' was articulated as an inherent trait of the Bengali. Thus, even while the British continued to use martial race theory as a means by which to exclude certain Indians from military service, these very Indians attempted to assert their masculinity in British terms, despite simultaneously being rejected by the British colonial administration. Martial race theory ultimately won the day, but the native volunteer movement stands as just one important instance in which the theory was challenged.

[29] *Ibid*, 70-72.
[30] *Ibid*, 70.
[31] *Ibid*, 79.

These examples of competing ideas about how best to pursue political representation and independence, or even how best to organize the Indian Army, ought to demonstrate the animated atmosphere of political thinking, nationalist debate, and administrative assertion in India around the turn of the twentieth century. This should thus act as a foil to the forthcoming section, in which it will appear that discourse on the martial races contained no trace of such lively debate. Interestingly, in this context of political controversy and dialogue, martial race theory was almost never challenged, changed, or adapted by its proponents. With these debates and challenges in mind, the forthcoming section will evaluate the rather static nature of martial race theory as it existed amongst British officials, from its earlier manifestations to its later popularization.

In search of "the very best men"

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise date of inception of martial race theory because it followed seemingly naturally from existing racial ideas in Europe. However, evidence from at least the 1880s to the 1930s contains reference to the martial races in India. Lord Roberts is typically held responsible for first implementing policies based on martial race theory in India.[32] It will be demonstrated later that Roberts' views were neither unique nor revolutionary given the European context of broader racial ideas, but this section will treat his articulation as one of the first instances of a British administrator in India propounding such a theory. This section will also consider George MacMunn's *The Armies of India*, looking at the specific language MacMunn uses to discuss martial races in general. The numerous and continuously reprinted recruitment handbooks written by British military officers serving in India are also valuable sources for the study of martial race theory. The authors of these handbooks were either military or ex-military men, and they were all British. Their authority is claimed from personal experience with their subjects—Pathans, Sikhs, Mappillas, and so on—vaguely supplemented by the scholarly works of other authors. The intended audience of these handbooks was almost exclusively fellow military officials at various levels, so they can provide some insight to the military-imperial mindset. Though almost every previous scholar of British military policy in India has focused on these handbooks to some degree, this section will reinterpret these documents, not for their specific content on the various Indian races, but for the similarities in discussing the qualities and characteristics thereof. In these handbooks, as well as in Roberts'

[32] See, for instance, Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 12.

writings, martial race theory was an uncontroversial topic—authors never attempted to defend their application of the theory to certain peoples, instead treating it as a basic assumption.

A number of the letters and memos of Lord Roberts to government and military officials prior to and during his tenure as Commander-in-Chief contained in unambiguous language his belief in certain martial races. As an addendum to a letter to the adjutant-general, India, in 1880, Roberts noted, "It is impossible to conclude without recording my opinion that, in physique and fighting power, the Bombay sepoy generally is unfit for service in Afghanistan."[33] Writing two years later to Sir Donald Stewart (Commander-in-Chief 1881-1885), Roberts described the diminution of the fighting ability of South Indian people, indicating that "nearly 100 years of peace have almost quenched any martial spirit there may have been in him."[34] Stewart responded that "There is not a word of that letter in which in the main I do not concur." These sentiments were echoed in documents up until at least 1890, marking a period of at least ten years during which martial race theory was reflected in Roberts' writings.

Roberts and Stewart were administrators, and there was necessarily some debate as to the best political and military actions to take, but, as regards martial race theory, both treated it as an established truth. This concordance is crucial: There was no argument between Roberts and Stewart as to the logic of whether or not certain races were more suited for military service than others. Not even was there disagreement as to how racial degradation occurred. One interesting point of contention between the two is the martial status of Bengali soldiers. Whereas Roberts lamented the limited numbers of Bengalis recruited since the 1857 Rebellion,[35] Stewart

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[33] Frederick Sleigh Roberts to Adjutant-General India, September 20, 1880, in *Roberts in India: the military papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts, 1876-1893*, ed. Brian Robson (Stroud: Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1993), 220-222.

[34] Roberts to Stewart, July 21, 1882, in *Roberts in India*, 262-266.

[35] *Ibid*, 265.

advised—as Roberts' superior—that the "non employment of this class [the Bengal Hindustani] since the Mutiny has no doubt impaired their military qualities or perhaps it would be more correct to say that officers in general do not estimate their military qualities as highly as they did before the Mutiny."[36] Even when there was a point of contention, then, it was a question of how they become was martial or non-martial, rather than whether they actually were so. This exchange demonstrates that there was room for disagreement only within the context of martial race theory.

Within a year of assuming the position of Commander-in-Chief himself, Lord Roberts published two successive notes to government officials in India which laid out his proposal for improving the Army in India. Given the necessity of strengthen the native garrison coupled with budgetary constraints, Roberts' solution was to organize the army more substantially according to martial race theory—prioritizing quality of the force over quantity of the forces. As has been observed elsewhere, Roberts was concerned by the prospect of war with Russia: "Hitherto, our casualties have not been quite so serious because we have only been fighting against Asiatics, but in a war with Russia we must be prepared for heavy losses; and unless there is some system of reserve, it will be impossible to fill up the gaps with efficient soldiers."[37] Roberts notes the difference between "Asiatics" and Europeans almost in passing as an obvious explanation for why casualties from the recent fighting in Burma were relatively low. "If our troops are to encounter a European enemy," Roberts further clarifies, "it is absolutely essential that they should be as efficient as they can be made."[38]

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[36] Stewart to Roberts, August 3, 1882, in *Roberts in India*, 266.

[37] Roberts, "Note on the necessity of carrying out the proposed increase to the Native Army, and of forming a sufficient reserve," 12 September 1886, in *Roberts in India*, 349.

[38] *Ibid*, 349.

These sentiments are further echoed in note on a similar topic two weeks later: "For such a service [against a Russian force] we must have the most efficient Native troops that can be formed, and by 'efficient' I mean men drawn from *the best fighting races* who have been embodied long [enough] to be thoroughly trained" (emphasis added).[39] Roberts refers to the superlative martial races twice more in this short note. Discussing the reorganization of the Presidency armies, Roberts "would get rid of every sepoy, not required for local purposes" from the Madras and Bombay Armies, "replacing them with soldiers of the most warlike races."[40] And, with the events of thirty years earlier in mind, Roberts ends this second note with an analysis of cost and benefit: "Should it be urged that these measures would have the effect of increasing to a dangerous extent the more warlike races in our armies… I would reply that whatever weight this argument may have, it sinks into insignificance when compared with the peril of confronting a European enemy on our frontier, without an army fit in all respects to cope with him."[41] Roberts therefore acknowledged that the army in India itself represented a potential threat to the British presence in its own right. But, he argued, organizing the army according to martial race theory would offset this danger by increasing the army's readiness against a European foe, which appeared to be a more impending threat at the time. Once again, as with Roberts' correspondence with Stewart from several years earlier, there is no question that martial race theory is a useful guide of recruitment, only to what extent it ought to be implemented.

When he wrote his own work on the Indian Army in 1911 George MacMunn's description of the nature of certain races in India further indicated a wholesale acceptance of martial race theory:

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[39] Roberts, "Note on the necessity for increasing the efficiency of the Native Army," 25 September 1886, 352.

[40] *Ibid,* 352.

[41] *Ibid,* 353.

> It is extraordinary that the well-born race of the upper classes in Bengal should be hopeless poltroons, while it is absurd that the great, merry, powerful Kashmiri should have not an ounce of physical courage in his constitution, but it is so. Nor are appearances of any use as a criterion. Some of the most manly-looking people in India are in this respect the most despicable.
>
> The existence of this condition, therefore, much complicates the whole question of enlistment in India. It renders any form of levy *en masse* impossible, or any form of Militia service, while it emphatically forbids the English system, whereby the well-to-do pay for the lower orders to do their fighting for them. In India itself certain classes alone do the soldiering and kindred service.[42]

There are two propositions here which MacMunn is making. First, there is something more intrinsic than position or appearance which dictates whether an Indian is good enough for military service. MacMunn expresses apparently genuine surprise that the "powerful Kashmiri" is allegedly devoid of the courage one might expect of a person of such a disposition. Meanwhile the "well-born" Bengali is similarly unfit to fight despite being in a position of high social status. In both of these instances, MacMunn is essentially observing a difference between East and West. An Englishman who is born into a high-class family or a Scotsman of good physical build would be expected to fight well. A Bengali or a Kashmiri of similar circumstances cannot be relied upon as such, due to the inherent difference of Indians. This inherent difference is explicit in MacMunn's second, related point, that a levee en masse would fail to be an effective method of recruitment in India due to the inability of many classes to fight. Here the comparison to England is evident. MacMunn uses martial race theory here as the very explanation for the failure of mass recruitment—unlike in England, only certain Indians are capable of fighting.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, martial race theory was still intended to guide recruitment explicitly and forcefully, as was demonstrated in a number of recruitment handbooks during the time. As one author put it, "It is a matter of supreme importance that men enlisted for

[42] MacMunn, *Armies of India*, 82-83.

the service should not only belong to races whose martial qualities are well authenticated, but also that they should, socially and physically, be the very best men of their class."[43] This line is copied verbatim in a separate recruitment handbook produced more than thirty years later.[44] In the earlier work, the passage is preceded by an even broader claim: "The fighting capacity of most Asiatics depends to a large extend upon hereditary instinct and social status."[45] In a 1918 reprint of a recruitment handbook on Brahmans, the sentiment is echoed: "Fighting capacity is entirely dependent on race, therefore it is essential that every effort should be made to obtain the very best men of that class which a regiment may enlist."[46] And, at the end of the nineteenth century, "[The Sikh's] value as a military Sikh depends on what stock he came of, i.e., is heredity."[47]

Several inferences may be made from these texts. They cover a period of at least forty years, but the general propositions and arguments are similar. The reprints and updated editions of these handbooks indicate that the British military establishment still regarded these subjects as important for recruitment officers, so the fact that martial race theory guided each of these works suggests that it was a fundamental keystone of military policy. To this end, formal continuity indicates that there were certain boxes each handbook had to check in order to demonstrate the warlike qualities of a given race. Almost every handbook therefore prefaces the discussion with an ostensibly detailed description of the race's political history, tracing ethnic and geographical origins, as well as a topographical and climatological discussion of the race's present region.

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[43] Pomeroy Holland-Pryor, *Recruiting Handbooks for the Indian Army: Mappillas* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1904), 56.

[44] George E. D. Mouat, *Recruiting Handbooks for the Indian Army: Madras Classes*, rev. ed. Gilbert Kennedy Cassels (New Delhi: Government of India, 1937), 75.

[45] Holland-Pryor, *Recruiting Handbooks for the Indian Army: Mappillas*, 56.

[46] Alfred Horsford Bingley and Arthur Nicholls, *Recruiting Handbooks for the Indian Army: Brahmans*, (Calcutta: Intelligence Branch, QMG in India, 1918), 47.

[47] R. W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of Regimental Officers* (Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1896), 61.

These considerations follow from prevailing conceptions of racial characteristics and their origins, as will be discussed in further detail below. Cultural practices are often recounted in some detail, such as marriage and death ceremonies.

It must be clarified that these handbooks are all documents explicitly declaring and implicitly presuming the martial qualities of certain races, rather than setting out to prove them anthropologically or otherwise. This is evidenced in the above quotations as well as by the race-specific content of each handbook: The 'Madrassi' is loyal, devout, and durable.[48] The Mappilla is sturdy and well-built, "with distinct traces of Arab blood," though he suffers from poor stamina.[49] The Pathan is manly, hospitable, courageous, cheerful, and loyal.[50] The Garhwali "when carefully enlisted… is of good physique, has great powers of endurance, and if kept up to the mark is capable of great energy and alertness."[51] The Dogra is courageous, simple, manly, obedient, somewhat weak, and brave.[52] The Brahman is smart and thrifty, though not terribly physical.[53] These laundry-list descriptions operate on two fundamental ideas. Firstly, there is no distinction between the group and the individuals composing it. This is why each author is able to use third-person singular pronouns to represent a plurality. Secondly, these prescribed qualities are inherent, either due to heredity or to climactic factors. An individual cannot therefore change oneself; a Mappilla will always have poor stamina and a Brahman will always be physically deficient.

The attempts to provide detail within each text gave an author the veneer of scholarly thoroughness enhanced by considerable rhetorical flourish and multiple examples to illustrate his

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[48] Mouat, *Madras Classes*, 8.
[49] Holland-Pryor, *Mappillas*, 47.
[50] R. T. I. Ridgway, *Recruitment Handbook for the Indian Army: Pathans* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1910), 14.
[51] J. Evatt, *Handbook on Garhwalis* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1924), rev. ed. K. Henderson, 37.
[52] W. B. Cunningham, *Handbook on Dogras* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1932) 89-90.
[53] Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, 47.

point about given subject. However, the standards to which these nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors conformed certainly did not amount to any careful inquiry. Rather, these details the authors provided were hardly more than unsubstantiated assertions which were made ostensibly legitimate through repetition within and amongst handbooks. It is for this reason that certain phrases and statements are copied from one text and inserted into another: By repeating one claim in a succession works, its veracity became more difficult to challenge merely because an author could reference several other works in which the same ideas were echoed. Martial race theory owed its acceptance in part to this conflation of repetition with truth. The existence of martial races was therefore treated as a given throughout the time period considered within these handbooks, and it was this key premise above all else that informed both recruiters and those handbook authors guiding the recruiters.

These details were also importantly intended to give recruiters tools by which to identify 'true' members of a given race. The implication here was that an Indian may lie—consistent with the trope of the deceptive Oriental—claiming the status of a privileged military class despite 'actually' being of non-martial origin. Recruiters were often warned about these instances, for wanting to enlist in military service was never enough; desire had to be coupled with membership in a prescribed martial race. Even then, only certain tribes or sub-castes were recruited, based on their origins, occupations, and tendency to intermarry.[54] That an authentic racial background was such a concern demonstrates the crucial importance of martial race theory to nineteenth- and twentieth-century British military officials—racial background was believed to have had such an impact on the fighting abilities of Indians that a martial race's tendency to

[54] See, for instance, the handbooks on Madras Classes and Sikhs.

marry with a non-martial race would influence whether a member of the former race was eligible for recruitment.

The power of the British government of India lent further supposed legitimacy to these handbooks in particular. Each author had some association with the military, and, beyond that, each handbook was published by a press operated by the government. As the government was massively invested in acquiring knowledge—demonstrated, for instance, by the immense effort the government undertook in producing a decennial all-India census report—it could claim a degree of authority as regarded inquiry on its Indian subjects. In publishing these recruitment handbooks, martial race theory was thus officially sanctioned by the government, and this in turn gave the theory wider currency amongst its practitioners.

It is significant that the above authors all accepted martial race theory uncritically—enthusiastically, even. Short of assuming a widespread and persistent conspiracy,[55] a simpler explanation is that the concept of martial races was so apparent to these British military men that they needed not to do any more than treat it as a given. Where, then, did their presumption of martial race theory come from? The next section will explore certain nineteenth-century scientific and anthropological trends in Europe that allowed martial race theory to take hold in British India.

[55] See Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India", 221.

On the origin of racial theories

As has been shown above, martial race theory was established and popularized during the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century—but it was never challenged or problematized amongst European writers and thinkers. The commonality amongst the various editions of the recruitment handbooks, the letters of Lord Roberts, and the works of British writers like George MacMunn was that they all accepted the theory of martial races uncritically. Even into the twentieth century, when the two World Wars brought the danger of extreme racial ideology to the popular consciousness, Indian critics like Jawaharlal Nehru identified the irony of British racialism in India, likening it to Hitler's policy in Nazi Germany.[56] For more than one half-century, martial race theory had a definite and significant impact on British policy in India.

As there was no one particular author or progenitor of martial race theory, the theory should be understood more properly as a set of beliefs or assumptions about Indians' martial abilities which, by at least the 1880s, had become commonly accepted among many British administrators. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, there is evidence of discourse on the martial races from administrators throughout the subcontinent. This temporal and geographic diversity suggests that there were factors influencing official ideology which went beyond political considerations, as David Omissi has argued previously.[57] Systematic investigations into racial differences and characteristics earlier in the nineteenth century were ultimately what allowed martial race theory to be so easily accepted throughout many levels of the British military administration upon its 'official' implementation in the 1880s.

[56] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: The John Day Company, 1946), p. 274.
[57] David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1994), 12.

How did it come to be, then, that the doctrine of martial race theory remained functionally static in official writings on India for more than a half-century from the 1880s to the 1930s? It is important to emphasize that this particular theory arose during a time when ethnography, phrenology, and anthropology were becoming increasingly popular as subjects of public and scientific interest in Europe and the United States.[58] Of particular importance to the rise of these schools of thought were two theorists, George Combe and Samuel George Morton. Combe, Scottish by birth, worked from the beginning of the nineteenth century and helped to establish the study of phrenology in Britain. Combe was educated at the University of Edinburgh, as was Morton several years later. Morton worked in the generation following Combe, specifically popularizing the study of craniometry in the U.S., with influence in Britain as well. He famously had a personal collection of skulls on which he based his arguments about human racial differences. Morton influenced such subsequent American scientists as Josiah Nott, who dedicated an introductory section of his own monumental edition, *Types of Mankind,* to Morton in memoriam.[59] After laying out a brief sketch of the anthropological and phrenological theories leading up to the nineteenth century, we will explore more thoroughly the works of these two highly influential thinkers.

One of the first people to attempt to conceptualize the different races was the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. As early as 1777, Kant defined races as "deviations that are constantly preserved over many generations and come about as a consequence of migration (dislocation to other regions) or through interbreeding with other deviations of the

[58] Crispin Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222.

[59] Henry S. Patterson, "Memoir of the Life and Scientific Labors of Samuel George Morton," in *Types of Mankind*, Josiah Nott and George Gliddon (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1854), xvii-lvii.

same line of descent, which always produces half-breed off-spring."[60] Even here we see echoes of themes already explored above, such as regional or geographical location being a determining factor in human difference. In terms of his own philosophy, though, Kant's classification of humans was an effort to explain the apparent disparate capacities of intellect and reason amongst different groups of people.

Such attempts to describe the differences between separate groups of people simply grew out of new interactions between these groups. Bates traces the beginnings of these scientific modes of inquiry from the eighteenth century, based in part on colonial interactions with new peoples.[61] There came to be understood four main categories of race—European, African, American, and Asian—into which all humans could be grouped. The phrenological work of George Combe, it will be demonstrated, linked certain physical and cultural features to inherent 'national characters'. Others, Samuel George Morton included, concerned themselves with a more empirical observation of the different races, with especial emphasis on craniometry. This new method introduced the practice of cranium measurement as a means by which to identify various races' intellectual capacities.

The idea that certain traits are inherent was one central to George Combe's popular *A System of Phrenology*, one of his first and foundational works. Originally published as *Essays on Phrenology*, this work contained a collection of Combe's essays on the function of the brain and subsequent traits associated therewith. Within four decades of its original publication in 1819, the book had been released in five editions, and in 1845 an American edition was published in two volumes.[62] Combe's work was therefore popular both in the United States and Britain,

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[60] Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Races," in *The Idea of Race*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lott, trans. by Jon Mark Mikkelsen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1999), 9.

[61] Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India," p. 223.

[62] *Ibid,*224.

influencing scholars of phrenology, anthropometry, and craniometry on either side of the Atlantic.

Most of *A System of Phrenology* is concerned with describing the locations of various traits within the brain. For instance, in the case of philoprogenitiveness, or the trait of loving one's offspring, phrenologists argued that there was a specific region of the brain which corresponded to this characteristic. Citing the work of Franz Joseph Gall, Combe explained that, "in the human race, the upper part of the occiput is in general more prominent in the female skull than in the male; and [Gall] inferred, that the part of the brain beneath must be the organ of some feeling which is stronger in women than in men."[63] Combe identified this feeling as philoprogenitiveness.

Even when discussing such apparently non-racial characteristics, however, Combe suggested that "persons who have resided in countries where monkeys are common have also observed it [philoprogenitiveness in monkeys], and remarked that it leads them to bestow caresses even on the young of the human species, especially Negro children."[64] This subtle (not to mention, unsubstantiated) inference that apes would sometimes confuse "Negro children" for their own offspring lent further support to Combe's secondary argument, elaborated in full later in the work, that these characteristics ultimately culminated in the differences between the races—not least of which was intellectual capacity, of which Europeans were naturally the paragons.

A feature recurring throughout the 1853 edition of Combe's work is his use of illustrations of skulls as evidence for his arguments. Combe consistently used examples of well-known Europeans, often Englishmen and Scotsmen—never women—who, he argued,

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[63] George Combe, *A System of Phrenology* (Boston: Marsh, Capon, and Lyon, 1834), 114.
[64] *Ibid*, 115.

personified the given trait which he was describing. Writers like Robert Burns and military commanders like Napoleon Bonaparte often appear. By means of comparison, Combe exhibited beside the aforementioned examples skulls or anecdotes of people in whom a given trait is apparently lacking. Unsurprisingly, these latter examples were never Europeans. Furthermore, they were never named—rather, their regional origin was taken as their only identifying feature, and this feature was extrapolated to be exemplary of the entire group from which the skull was taken. Describing the quality of destructiveness, Combe inserted a comparison of the skulls of the pirate Jacques Alexander Tardy and a Sri Lankan boy, stating, "The subjoined figures represent the skulls of Tardy and a Cingalese [Sri Lankan]… Tardy was a bloody pirate, and in him [the organ of destructiveness] is very large. In the Cingalese, who are mild, it is deficient."[65] In juxtaposing a fully-grown man who spent his life as a pirate with a young boy, Combe of course fell victim both to selection bias and to confirmation bias—though this apparently did not trouble the nineteenth-century scientist.

Combe himself was further unabashed in his argument for the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans. Returning to the example of philoprogenitiveness, Combe included illustrations of the skulls of Robert Burns and an unnamed Peruvian. While introducing the skulls, Combe included a footnote: "It is proper to bear in mind, that these and all other contrasts, are given in this work not so much to prove phrenology to be true; as to represent the appearances of the organs *in different degrees of development*" (emphasis added).[66] Even in this monumental work of phrenology, then, Combe was concerned not only with bolstering the legitimacy of the science but also with emphasizing that Europeans and non-Europeans were at fundamentally different stages of human development. Combe therefore revealed that the major

[65] George Combe, *A System of Phrenology*, 5th ed, 256.
[66] *Ibid*, 194.

project of his work was not only to elaborate on the science of phrenology, but also to present an argument for the inherent difference between human groups based on the 'developed' nature of Europeans and the 'underdeveloped' nature of all other groups. This argument had implications not just for intelligence, but for almost every other characteristic of one's personality.

Combe's assertion of 'national'[67] difference achieved its full force in a chapter entitled "On the Cerebral Development of Nations."[68] This chapter enumerated various 'national characters' and their corresponding brain development: "The mental character of an individual, at any given time, is the result of his [*sic*] natural endowment of faculties, modified by the circumstances in which he has been placed."[69] Here Combe combined two influences on mental character, arguing that both 'nature' and 'nurture', as it were, had an impact on an individual's personality and intellectual capacity. Combe further justified his use of certain 'national' skulls to be representative of the entire nation: "A nation is composed of individuals, and what is true of all the parts (which in a nation preserve their individuality) must hold good of the whole."[70] Thus, though individuals certainly existed within a nation, Combe argued that certain traits were common amongst all of the individuals of a given nation.

Combe employed not only craniometrical or phrenological examples, but also semi-historical examples to advance his proposition that certain races were less developed than Europeans:

> The American savage [*sic*], besides, as already noticed, has rarely been found a member of settled society, but has continued a wanderer since the sun first rose upon him in his deserts till the present day. Even contact with Europeans, surrounded by arts and enlightened by intelligence, has scarcely communicated one trace of improvement to this miserable race. When Europe has been conquered, the victorious and the vanquished have in a few ages amalgamated together, been blended into one, and have at last formed

[67] It must be clarified that, in many instances, the appellation 'nation' is an imposition.
[68] Combe, *A System of Phrenology*, 561.
[69] *Ibid*, 561.
[70] Combe, *A System of Phrenology*, 561.

> a single and united people. The native Americans have, on the contrary, almost uniformly receded before the Europeans.[71]

Combe advanced several arguments in this example. In the first sentence, he observed that, for as long as Native Americans had been in existence as a race, they had made little civilizational advancement, if any. This stasis, Combe argued, continued during the period of European colonization and settlement, despite the introduction of European culture and intellectual ideas. As he did when he used craniometrical data, Combe then juxtaposed the Native Americans with the Europeans, the latter of which, he observed, tended to interbreed with conquering or invading powers, forming a united people. The Native Americans failed to deal with the Europeans in a similar way, which Combe included as further evidence of their racial degradation.

In describing the various 'nations' of humans, Combe included a section on the 'Hindoo'.[72] These people he described as "remarkable for want of force of character, so much so, that a handful of Europeans overcomes in combat, and holds in permanent subjection thousands, nay millions, of that people. Power of mental manifestation bears a proportion to the size of the cerebral organs, and the Hindoo head is small, and the European large, in relation to each other in conformity with the different mental characters."[73] This race was therefore both physically and intellectually deficient due to the weakness of their characters and the small size of their brains. Implicitly at least, Combe's description of their physical inability to defend their own 'nation' carries the assumption that these 'Hindoos' were themselves to blame for the contemporaneous British domination of the subcontinent.

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[71] *Ibid,* 573-4.

[72] Here, as previously, we see another manifestation of Combe's biases—the use of the singular Hindu rather than the plural Hindus is further, if more subtle, evidence of Combe's own belief that any individual could act as a stand-in for the nation to which he or she belonged.

[73] *Ibid,* 567.

Samuel George Morton offered a more general scheme of racial categorization, popular during the time, in his *Crania Americana*.[74] These categories included the Caucasian race, the Mongolian race, the Malay race, the American race, and the Ethiopian race. To these races belonged various families, including Germanic, Indo-Chinese, Polynesian, Toltecan, and Negro, respectively. Morton attributed these differences to "hostile invasions, the migratory habits of some tribes, and the casual dispersion of others into remote localities, [which] have a constant tendency to confound these peculiarities; and the proximity of two races has uniformly given rise to an intermediate variety, partaking of the characters of both."[75] Morton was therefore in support of the idea that race was not immutable—it could certainly change over time—though the specific races he was describing corresponded to certain "primitive distinctions," or original varieties of humans.[76]

Like Combe, Morton included a section on the 'Hindoos', contained within his description of the Indo-Chinese race. However, unlike Combe, Morton allowed some room for variation among the Indians: "There are perhaps no people on the globe who present more varied physical traits than the Hindoos."[77] And, also, "[the] moral character of the Hindoos varies much in the different sections of India."[78] Morton thus recognized that, even among a given 'race' or 'family', there could be significant differences. Morton identified the Todas, the Rajputs, the Sikhs, the Malabaris, and the Singhalese as particularly noteworthy, in turn praising or disparaging each group.

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[74] Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana: or, A comparative view of the skulls of various aboriginal nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839), 5-6.
[75] *Ibid*, 3.
[76] *Ibid*, 3.
[77] *Ibid*, 32.
[78] *Ibid*, 32.

However, Morton concurred with Combe as to the static nature of Indian civilization, attributable in part to the caste system: "The Hindoos are among the oldest nations of the earth. Their present civilisation, with its institution of castes—their religion, which is Brahminical—and their language, which is Sanscrit, may all be traced to an antiquity of nearly three thousand years."[79] These three aspects—caste, religion, and language—were essentialized as the basis of Hindu culture, and thus taken to represent the entirety thereof as unchanging from ancient times to the present. Indians, by inference, had failed to develop significantly over the span of three-thousand years, and although Morton identified certain positive aspects of Indian 'national character', he argued that they were still clearly inferior to Europeans.

This section has sought to explain the scientific ideas which became popular in the early nineteenth century and ultimately made martial race theory so popular and recognizable later in British India. Importantly, George Combe and Samuel George Morton helped to lay the foundations for the British theorists of the martial races in India later in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the fact that the ideas contained within their writings bear striking resemblance to certain texts which proclaimed the existence of martial races. As popular thinkers writing in English, their ideas gained wide currency in the United States, England, and Scotland. A number of the themes which Combe and Morton identified in their important works, such as the alleged physical inadequacy of many Indians, or the noticeable variety even amongst these Indians, were made more explicit later by martial race theorists. Of course, Combe and Morton were not necessarily in agreement with one another on every aspect of racial characteristics or human development. What was important to the development of martial race theory, however, was less their specific arguments and more their general insistence on the differences between Europeans

[79] *Ibid*, 35.

and other groups, and their 'scientific' propositions about inherent traits relating to national character.

Such ideas about these differences between East and West influenced ideologies like martial race theory in an important way. These differences were echoed in writings like those of George MacMunn, who claimed, "It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West, that in the East, with certain exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior. In Europe, as we know, every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort…. In the East, or certainly in India, this is not so."[80] Fighting ability, then, was taken as one of those inherent qualities which was dependent upon national character. Though MacMunn may not have explicitly cited the ideas of Combe or Morton, these latter two scientists had an undeniable impact on subsequent British writers who focused on racial theories. Martial race theory, then, owed its existence and acceptance to Combe, Morton, and other writers who developed earlier and broader theories on the natures and characteristics of different races.

[80] George F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), p. 129.

Between east and west

Even given these investigations, however, martial race theory still represented something quite distinct from the standard explanations of the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans. Whereas Combe and Morton were primarily concerned with listing certain characteristics of broad racial categories, writers like George MacMunn and Lord Roberts experienced a separate difficulty. Some Indians were naturally war-ready, and others were not—all Indians could not be included within a single category. Indian peoples thus represented a curious middle ground between conformity to the prescribed tetrad of races—African, American, Asian, European—and a recognition of traits belonging to individuals. Subgroups, castes, and tribes became alternative ways by which to understand Indian peoples which did not quite conform to previous understandings of race as a uniform identity. This was in large part due to colonial attempts to comprehend India's ethnic and cultural diversity, which therefore made it difficult to subsume every Indian within a single racial category.

Three levels of difference distinguished India from other parts of the world, contributing to the nineteenth-century perception of India itself. The first was the typical dichotomy of East and West, which has been explored above. The second was India's own position within the East, as it was believed to be frequently overrun by invasions from northern forces. The third involved those aspects of Indian culture which were understood to withstand these multitudinous invasions, namely Hinduism and the caste system. These three factors contributed to the idea that India was a unique land which could be comprehended through an evaluation of its history and the current status of its peoples.

George MacMunn described India's uniqueness in terms of martial race theory as a result of millennia-old forces: "Presumably the great conquest of India way back in the mists of time by the Aryan race and the subjection of the original inhabitants is at the bottom of this [difference between the Indian races]. Only certain races were permitted to bear arms, and in due course of time only certain races remained fit to bear arms."[81] Samuel Morton also gave an explanation for Indian racial complexity based on this theme of invasion, though he began with the more recent examples of Chingis Khan, Timur, and Babur. Over time, Morton continued, "the northern Hindoos, having mingled for centuries with the Mongol-Tartars, received in common with those people the conventional name of *Moguls*, which embraces Persians, Greeks of Bactriana, and Arabs, who are called Moors."[82] Thus by the nineteenth century, an Indian could have quite a variegated racial background, complicating the investigation of contemporary racial theorists attempting to parse out the 'true' nature of the Indian. This contributed to the compulsion to divide India into subgroups—geographical origin could indicate which invading peoples had likely contributed to a given group's ethnic background.

Hinduism and the caste system also influenced perceptions of Indian distinctiveness because it seemed to indicate a tradition many centuries old. Morton declared that "the Hindoos are among the oldest nations of the earth. Their present civilisation, with its institution of castes… and their language, which is Sanscrit [*sic*], may all be traced to an antiquity of nearly three thousand years."[83] As Morton understood it, Hinduism was an ancient and widespread aspect of Indian life which contributed to the present constitution of Indian society. MacMunn elaborated on this point further, describing the races from which the British typically recruited

[81] MacMunn, *Armies of India*, 82.
[82] Morton, *Crania Americana*, 36.
[83] *Ibid*, 35.

Indians: "Now the people by tribes from whom we take soldiers in India itself are as follows… The ancient Aryan races, who invaded India in prehistoric times, viz. Rajput (lit. sons of princes) and Brahman, who for practical purposes may be divided into two distinct classes, those of Hindustan and those of the Punjab."[84] MacMunn went on to explain that the Rajputs were originally called "Kshattryas" and were employed as soldiers for the Aryan invaders.[85] Though MacMunn described the Rajputs and Brahmans as individual races rather than specifically as castes, the distinction is undoubtedly one of word choice rather than meaning. James Mill's *History of India* prefaces the chapter "Manners of the Hindus" with a sweeping statement on the subject of Hinduism: "So much of the entire business of life, among the Hindus, consists in religious services, that the delineation of their religion is a delineation of the principal branch of their manners."[86] For Mill, then, all Hindus were so involved with religion that it dictated nearly their entire way of life. Taken together, these three British examples give the impression of a society which is not only inundated with religion, but which has been so, unaltered, for many thousands of years.

Indian society as it stood in the nineteenth century, according to the aforementioned writers, was therefore the result of an apparently fortitudinous ancient tradition influenced by centuries of invasion from Central Asian and Muslim empires. The institution of caste ensured a sort of original distinction between the fighting classes and others. Later, waves of incursions from outside peoples reorganized racial composition and social hierarchies, which further affected the fighting abilities of various groups. Given these distinctions, there appeared to be no singular race in India—as there was observed to be in China, for instance—so conventional

[84] MacMunn, *Armies of India*, 83.
[85] *Ibid*, 99.
[86] James Mill, *A History of India*, Chelsea House Publishers: New York (1968), 303.

racial wisdom had to be adapted. Such adaptation expanded inquiries such as those of Morton and Combe and, ultimately, to the normalization of martial race theory as the guiding principle of British recruitment in India.

Conclusion

Evaluating the nature of martial race theory and drawing subsequent conclusions about its origins have demonstrated that the theory was a product of prevailing nineteenth-century trends in scientific thought. Proponents of martial race theory—which is to say, nearly all British military officials serving in India—were simply participating in a wide European tradition of racial theorization and explanation. Martial race theory followed naturally, though India's unique geopolitical position at the end of the nineteenth century necessitated a particular adaptation of existing racial ideas. It is no significant jump from describing certain inherent characteristics of races based on skull size, geographical origin, or ethnic heredity to attributing a specific characteristic, martial or non-martial abilities, to individual races of Indians, or even other racial groups. Martial race theory thus was made possible by European thinkers in the earlier nineteenth century, and ideas about the East generally and India in particular gave the theory its unique contours. Furthermore, racial debate in Europe during the nineteenth century was no ivory tower affair; it involved publications and museum exhibitions which drew attention of academics and laymen alike.

Previous writings on martial race theory have focused on examining how the theory operated in the context of the Indian Army. In contrast, this investigation has employed a new approach, instead analyzing the treatment of martial race theory during its apex and looking at the themes in Western thought which made the theory so widely recognized. From the 1880s to the late 1930s, British writings at various administrative levels and geographic regions accepted martial race theory largely as undisputed fact. Though there was no one specific theory enumerating the qualities of martial races, similar themes can be observed in racial theories

throughout the nineteenth century. East-West differences, inherent racial traits, and physical manifestations of internal characteristics represent three such themes. Discovering these origins has been important for the study of martial race theory because they help to understand that the theory did not arise in a vacuum. Martial race theory was a European theory transported to an Indian context. It acquired such prominence within British military policy precisely for this reason: It appeared to have its basis in popular investigations, supported by the evidence and observations of influential anthropologists and phrenologists. It built on familiar ideas, and was easily recognizable. Following Lord Roberts' propagation of the theory during his tenure as Commander-in-Chief, the scientific tradition of racial theories allowed martial race theory to have a significant impact on British recruitment policy from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. While India underwent substantial political and intellectual change in the seven decades prior to independence in 1947, martial race theory represents one aspect of British military policy which remained more-or-less static during this period.

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