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Ending the Slave Trade

A Caribbean and Atlantic Context

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THE ABOLITION of the slave trade was an improbable event. Before the late eighteenth century some Europeans felt unease about the thought of shipping enslaved Africans, but most viewed the practice as morally indistinguishable from shipping any other commodity. In the 1783 trial concerning the *Zong*, a slave ship in which sailors threw overboard 133 enslaved Africans to claim the insurance, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield stated that “the case of slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard.” When the first Quaker petition for abolition arrived in Parliament in the same year, the Commons categorically dismissed it. Yet, within a decade, the same body voted overwhelmingly for it, even though full success had to wait another fifteen years. The African slave trade, long considered the foundation of Britain’s colonial economy, suddenly became superfluous.¹

Unexpectedly, too, abolition occurred as the slave trade was booming. At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the transatlantic slave trade, the largest forced transoceanic migration in history, was at its height. From 1780 to 1810 an annual average of eighty thousand shackled Africans traversed the Atlantic. In those three decades, just over a half the Africans came in ships flying the flags of Britain, the United States, or Denmark. Yet by the second decade of the nineteenth century almost no Africans crossed the Atlantic in such ships—for each of these three nations had abolished the

trade. The Atlantic slave trade died an unnatural and quick death. A massive withdrawal from transatlantic slaving occurred with astonishing rapidity.²

The mention of the three nations that abolished the trade in the first decade of the nineteenth century merits a brief recapitulation. The first slave-trading state in Europe to abolish the trade was Denmark. In March 1792 the royal Danish government issued a decree banning the import of slaves into the Danish West Indies and their export from the Danish establishments on the Gold Coast. The law was not to take effect for ten years—not till 1 January 1803—reflecting the gradualist tendencies in eighteenth-century antislavery. The prime mover behind this decision, the minister of finance, Ernst Schimmelmann, was a reformer, but he was also the largest slave owner in the Danish West Indies and a prominent shareholder in the Danish slave-trading company. The slave trade was insignificant to Denmark's overall economy; the maintenance of the forts and factories on the African coast was costly; and, perhaps most important, the Danish authorities were convinced that the British and French would soon abolish the slave trade and anticipated that they would then exert pressure on the smaller slave-trading nations to do the same. Anxious to avoid a maritime clash with the major powers, the Danish action was a preemptive strike.³

The campaign against the Atlantic slave trade began, however, not in Denmark or Britain but in North America. After the Seven Years' War, settler elites from Massachusetts to Virginia took steps to restrict or halt the importation of slaves. Their actions can be traced to the emergence of antislavery opinion but owed even more to the long-standing desire in North America to exercise control over who came to colonial shores. In all these colonies, too, the slave population grew naturally and the import of Africans had become largely unnecessary. Still, attempts to block the Atlantic slave trade before the American Revolution largely represented a demand for colonial self-determination. Without the prior anxiety about the impact of slave imports on colonial society, and the lack of necessity for African newcomers in most places, the moral case against the Atlantic slave trade would have carried far less weight. After the revolution, each state, some quickly, others laggardly, passed prohibitory or restrictive legislation against the slave trade. Moreover, when the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in 1787, they included a compromise slave-trade clause, "weighted with circumlocution and ambiguity," that confirmed Congress's power to regulate

foreign commerce, permitted importation of Africans, yet set a probable target date for the slave trade's prohibition—twenty years hence, in 1808—an even more gradualist measure than the Danish decree. When Congress passed the slave trade act (on 2 March 1807), three weeks before the British House of Commons, the United States was a minor player in the transatlantic slave trade; most Southern planters were not threatened by, indeed favored, the halting of slave imports; antislavery activists mounted no tumultuous battle against the inhuman traffic; and the nation was more preoccupied with ex-vice president Aaron Burr's plans to stir the Southwest to fight for independence and Napoleon's continental blockade than by the ending of the slave trade. This was the Quiet Abolition, as one historian terms it.⁴

The last nation of these three to act—but by far the most important—was Britain. Its abolition was anything but quiet: rather, it was national, broad based, and aggressive, compared to its localized, elite, and timid European and American counterparts. Indeed, British abolitionists mobilized one of “the greatest of all human rights movements.” Within the first year of the campaign, tens of thousands of men and women signed petitions against the traffic. At the bar of public opinion, abolitionists seemed to vanquish the slave traders almost overnight. If the question could have been put to referendum, perhaps the British slave trade would have been abolished in 1788. Despite the initial flush of enthusiasm, however, Parliament was only slowly persuaded that slave trade abolition would serve the national interest. In 1792, MPs voted by a large majority in favor of abolition, but it was gradual; they postponed the date of commencement for four years; and the House of Lords failed to ratify that decision. When in 1796 Parliament again took up the issue, France's abolition of slavery, its Reign of Terror, and the conflagration in St. Domingue rendered abolitionism suspect. Set back for a decade, British abolition did not reemerge powerfully until 1804, when another three years of maneuvering climaxed with the favorable vote on 25 March 1807.⁵

This brief account of these three nations' abolitions aims in part to show that ending the slave trade was international in scope, but also to demonstrate that it always involved political machinations, a mix of moral and material motives. Abolition is too often depicted as the selfless overcoming the selfish. Abolitionists conceived of their program this way. As a Rhode Island abolitionist put it in 1789, promoting abolition requires making “a much stronger impression upon the mind” of

public officials than any other topic, for there was no natural “abolitionist” constituency, “no private interest” behind abolitionism. This way of telling the story—the disinterested versus the interested—is gripping. It is David versus Goliath, the weak overcoming the strong. The achievement of abolition is seemingly an unusual example of morals triumphing over power, principles over pragmatism, ideals over economics. All the more so since historians have now demonstrated that slave trade abolition ran directly counter to Britain’s economic interests. But in fact effective opposition to the British slave trade, just like its defense, depended on the influence of powerful interests. Why otherwise would the antislavery writer William Dickson, before commencing his tour of Scotland in 1792, receive instructions from the London Abolition Committee to contact key people and work on their “interest”?⁶ So what were some of the key interests that facilitated abolition? One has already been mentioned—colonial aspirations for self-determination after the Seven Years’ War—but others deserving of consideration are (1) the improving tendencies of Caribbean planters, (2) entrepreneurial schemes for imperial expansion after the American Revolution, (3) slave resistance, most dramatically represented in the revolt in St. Domingue, and (4) strategic attempts by the British state during the Napoleonic Wars to achieve competitive advantage. These four interests will be the focus of this chapter.⁷

In suggesting that there were powerful forces opposed to the Atlantic slave trade, my aim is emphatically not to devalue the abolitionist achievement or to reduce moral principles to crass material interests. The extent of the moral revolution is captured in David Brion Davis’s words that, for thousands of years, “people thought of sin as a form of slavery,” but then, in the late eighteenth century, they began “to think of slavery as sin.” Furthermore, abolitionists unquestionably emphasized moral, as opposed to economic or political, reasons for action. While accepting that a profound moral transformation had occurred, I seek to expand the frame of reference beyond the narrative of abolitionist initiatives and to suggest that moralism and interests converged in complicated ways. Although abolition was ultimately a political decision at the center, broader forces far from metropolitan capitals shaped those legislative decisions.⁸

THE CARIBBEAN context most commonly linked to abolition is the so-called decline thesis, associated with historians Lowell Ragatz and

Eric Williams. They have argued that British abolition was preceded by a sharp diminution in the value of slavery, and hence of the slave trade, to the imperial economy. The planters suffered from limited and marginal resources for expansion, soil exhaustion, rising costs for their provisions and labor, falling prices for their sugar. Some of these characterizations were true: the Caribbean islands experienced lower returns during and after the American Revolution; a series of severe hurricanes devastated parts of the Caribbean in the 1780s, and planters in the older islands, with rather limited natural resources, faced acute problems, most especially from fierce international competition. Nevertheless, over the whole period from 1783 to 1807, the British slave system rebounded. It enlarged its frontier, its relative proportion of British trade, its imports and exports, its share of world sugar and coffee production, and its overall size, both absolutely and relative to other colonial systems. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the British Caribbean produced about 60 percent of the world's sugar and 50 percent of all coffee. The value of the slave trade and the slave colonies to Britain had never been greater; neither had their prospects for future growth been brighter when the British Parliament severed the umbilical link with Africa. British slavery declined, but only after the abolition of the British slave trade.⁹

If economic decline is not the relevant theme for linking the Caribbean to abolition, then arguably the alternative—improvement—is. This claim may seem fanciful, for was not the West Indian Creole, much like the East Indian nabob, a pariah? Each was stigmatized as profit obsessed, morally degraded, schooled in tyranny, not fully British. Countering this stereotype, however, are the extensive relief campaigns mounted by thousands of ordinary donors across Britain to aid British West Indian victims of perhaps the deadliest hurricanes they ever experienced. The increasing integration of the Atlantic world, an expanded sense of British nationalism that viewed far-off colonists as fellow subjects, wartime politics that suggested the importance of rewarding loyal colonists already suffering hardships, and the emergence of humanitarian sensibility (one symptom of which, of course, was the movement for abolition) help explain “the largest and most significant relief effort of the eighteenth century.” In 1781 one British official described the relief funds as “a striking proof of the warm affection borne by the People of England to their fellow subjects in the West Indies.” Perhaps trying to respond in kind, many planters increasingly styled themselves as enlightened paternalists, committed to the amelioration of slavery. In

1774 a Jamaican debating society had declared the slave trade contrary to morality. In part the planters' strategy was defensive, trying to stave off abolitionist attack and deflect their weakened political leverage that followed the American Revolution, but in other ways it owed more to economic concerns that predated the war and the abolitionist movement. Ironically, many West Indian planters came to share an interest in some of the same outcomes as abolitionists, even though they wanted to reform and buttress slavery, not end it.¹⁰

Amelioration took many forms. One aspect was diversification of the economy. Planters promoted alternatives to sugar, such as coffee and cotton. By the end of the eighteenth century the British West Indies produced almost 40 percent of the raw cotton imported into Britain; and by 1805 the old Dutch Guiana colonies supplied more cotton to Britain than all the British West Indies combined. Jamaican exports went from being 90 percent sugar in 1770 to less than 70 percent fifty years later. On some late-eighteenth-century plantations slaves spent only a third of their time on cash crops. Planters paid far more attention to livestock husbandry than ever before, and they introduced new pasture grasses to improve cattle fodder. With better-fed livestock, the plow could supplement the customary hoe, and more manure improved crop yields. Planters also encouraged locally grown food; many allowed their slaves more time to work their provision grounds, the average size of which roughly doubled from about 1750 to 1810. Native-born slaves made nutritional gains: they were on average three to four centimeters taller than their African counterparts. Many consequences flowed from diversification.¹¹

Changes in labor organization formed another part of the reforms. Planters hired jobbing gangs to work at the most arduous tasks, thereby conserving their own workforces. They tried to calibrate their gangs so that they were well adapted to the capacities of their slaves. In daily labor assignments, planters often divided slaves into smaller work groups, or squads. They sometimes overlooked typical European gender norms in order to choose the best and most experienced work leaders for the task at hand. Some planters tried to set production quotas, offering the gang the incentive of free time once benchmarks were met. One planter even suggested a semantic shift: slaves should be renamed assistant planters. By the end of the eighteenth century slaveholders worked their laborers harder than ever before, demanding that they learn the skills necessary to perform a variety of tasks, eliminating the highs and lows in annual labor demand by growing cash and provision crops and raising more

stock. While planters espoused humanitarian reform and searched for methods and tools to reduce burdensome work, the labor saved was always invested elsewhere. A growing attention to efficiency spelled an intensification of work for slaves.¹²

Agricultural reform contributed to a general culture of improvement, manifest in the introduction of new commercial and food crops, the rise of botanic gardens, the formation of agricultural societies, a burgeoning literature on plantation management, and the emergence of a class of professional estate attorneys and managers. Absenteeism was growing on some islands, but rather than just sapping the fiber of society—as many have assumed—the practice helped create a trusteeship that inducted merchants and lawyers into the plantocracy. It resulted in the introduction of improved accounting methods. Many absentees led the way in technological and investment innovation. In 1775 absentees owned 30 percent of Jamaica's sugar estates but produced 40 percent of the island's sugar and rum; this above-average performance was partly a function of scale, but it also owed something to managerial acumen. Planters read the ever-expanding literature devoted to management practices and scientific husbandry. Described by one traveler as “the best treatise on planting” and by Dr. James Grainger, author of *The Sugar Cane* (1764), as “an excellent performance,” Samuel Martin's *Essay upon Plantership* appeared in at least seven editions between 1750 and 1802. Martin urged planters to treat their slaves with “tenderness and generosity”; the aim was to induce “love” by setting an example of “benevolence, justice, temperance, and chastity.” When Janet Schaw, a Scot, visited Martin's Greencastle estate in Antigua in 1774, she described the eighty-year-old planter in rosy terms, as “a kind and beneficent Master,” who was “daily employed” to render the island “more improved.”¹³

By the late eighteenth century, in part because of planters' pronatalist policies—providing relief immediately before and after childbirth, offering financial and other incentives for childrearing, buttressing family structures, reducing physical punishments, supplying better medical care—slave populations in some parts of the British West Indies began to grow naturally. Progressive planters now thought that slave births could exceed deaths. In 1786 a Barbadian plantation manual argued that slaves “fed plentifully, worked moderately, and treated kindly . . . will increase in most places” and “decrease in no place.” The following year, Rev. Robert Nickolls, describing himself as “a native of the West-Indies,” claimed that, “with tolerable treatment,” island blacks were “prolific and

long-lived.” Just over a decade later, the planter-dominated assemblies in islands as different developmentally as Grenada and St. Kitts claimed that slave reproduction could be improved so as to remove the need for African importation. A growing number of British Caribbean planters, much like their North American counterparts, then, saw no threat from the abolition of the slave trade and indeed had an interest in its cessation. West Indian planters were far from monolithic in their attitudes to abolition. In 1801 a Barbadian attorney, in discussion with an absentee proprietor, said he would as soon advise throwing money into the sea as recommending the purchase of Africans. Three years later a Barbadian resident reported that abolition would not harm his island but would halt the expansion of newer territories such as Demerara. For planters in the older islands, the desire to increase slave prices by limiting supply was a reason to favor abolition. By removing the least defensible aspect of the slave system, it was also possible to argue that the institution would be strengthened rather than weakened.¹⁴

Schemes to improve the lot of slaves became bones of contention between antislavery and proslavery forces. In 1775 Samuel Martin’s hope that he might be “a loved and revered father” to his slaves was tempered by the fear that metropolitan defenders of slaves could “instill such enthusiastic notions of liberty, as may occasion revolutions in our colonies.” Tortola slaveholder Samuel Nottingham’s decision to enfranchise twenty-five slaves in 1776, endow them their own land, and provide a cash inheritance resulted in either a model, self-sustaining community or a stark economic failure, depending on who was telling the story. Similarly, Joshua Steele’s experiments on his own estate in Barbados in the 1780s, which involved banning the use of the whip, offering premiums for task work, paying his enslaved workers, and establishing a system of copyhold tenancy, became in the opposing forces’ narratives either a noble experiment or an unrealistic pipe dream. Prominent abolitionists praised Steele; local planters portrayed him as eccentric, ignorant, and then, the harshest cut of all, of being tyrannical. A war of representation occurred over such figures. Even an ostensibly proslavery tract, such as the former overseer who signed himself SK and wrote about his experiences on the island of Antigua in 1789, provided “a rich fund of emotive material for anti-slavery writers,” indicating that he was “already affected by the dominant discourse of anti-slavery.”¹⁵

The Danish commission established in 1791 to consider the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade linked Caribbean amelioration to abolition.

While it was not prepared to make any statutory inroads into the masters' discretion in matters relating to food, clothing, housing, or medical care, since that would have been interfering in the individual's right of property, the commission recommended a royal order aimed at better propagation of the Gospel, enforcement of marriage among the slaves, and improved education of slave children. Individual planters in the Danish West Indies, like their British counterparts, proclaimed that slaves worked effectively when humanely treated and that natural reproduction was feasible. Count Schimmelmann, a key member of the commission and a concerned absentee proprietor, claimed that he rarely had to buy new Africans and that slaves on his estates were close to reproducing their own numbers.¹⁶

It is easy to dismiss these planter improvements as mere window dressing. The slave system at bottom depended on force and violence. Slavery was a vicious system of labor exploitation and the aim was to extract the greatest possible product from the enslaved people. Yet without the evidence that slaves were capable of freedom—which enlightened planters in fact promoted—the abolitionists would have had a much harder uphill battle. Moreover, Caribbean planters were the first to suggest that the empire as a whole, not merely slaveholders, should take responsibility for the slave system, a claim that ironically proved of great value to abolitionists hoping to make antislavery a public concern. The abolitionists viewed eradication of the slave trade as a vital building block in the creation of a new order. No longer able to recruit from Africa, planters would have to attend more carefully to their slaves as a means of encouraging natural increase. But planters had anticipated the abolitionists and were busily creating the new order—subject to the constraints imposed by their slaves. Thus, for example, by encouraging the so-called provision-ground system, in which areas of land were allocated to the enslaved on which they were required to produce most of their own food, those slaves able to take advantage of it developed an autonomous domestic economy and an internal marketing system that effectively provisioned all sectors of the population. By the early nineteenth century many Caribbean slaves effectively constituted a protopeasantry.¹⁷

In short, farsighted planters and industrious slaves provided important grist for the abolitionist mill. Abolitionists had an unshakeable faith that individuals worked more productively if moved by incentive rather than by force. The planters' schemes to make their slaves work more industriously—whether by task rather than by gang labor, or by greater

use of hired labor that might involve a form of wages, or by extending the opportunity for self-purchase—coincided with the abolitionists' optimistic assumption. Abolitionists also held sacred the right to self-possession, so planter plans to develop the slaves' provision grounds, encourage marriage, and promote fertility were more than compatible with abolitionist commitments. Finally, abolitionists had an unquestionable confidence in the human capacity for moral development, so again attempts to reform the worst features of slave laws and to encourage missionary activity met with approval. Planters and abolitionists had more in common than is commonly assumed; and planter interests were not as opposed to the ending of the slave trade as is often imagined. There was, of course, a "West India interest," but it did not always speak with one voice. Moreover, even as early as 1792, according to one influential report, the Society of West India Planters and Merchants "would have acquiesced" in the parliamentary vote to abolish the slave trade, if 1800, not 1796, had been the date set for its ending. Fifteen years before abolition occurred, apparently influential West Indians were sufficiently resigned to their fate to accept an eight-year delay in implementation.¹⁸

JUST AS the Caribbean became important in providing evidence of compelling alternatives, so Africa, from the abolitionist perspective, served a similar role. Schemes to colonize Africa or to promote legitimate commerce, while long present, proliferated in the 1780s and 1790s. They now appear whimsical, but at the time an almost delirious, speculative fervor gripped their promoters. Situated in the center of the globe, Africa allegedly would support the produce of both east and west; optimists thought that the cultivation of both tea and sugar would flourish there. Not just its central location, but its supposed rich soil and unbounded population, promising cheap labor for hire, made Africa the ideal commercial partner. Partnership is not quite the right term, for the abolitionist project was inherently imperialist. It involved a projected alternative course for the economic development of Africa and an assertion of the responsibility and right of Europeans to decide the future of that continent. Redemption was a key concept. Just as British antislavery as a whole became a means to redeem the nation, so West African locales became the target for separate schemes to rebirth both slaves and convicts as free people. But whatever the ultimate import of these metropolitan fantasies about vast plantations, profitable trade,

penetration of the interior, and redemptive utopias, their significance for abolition's prospects is evident. Without the long-standing hopes for a commercial empire in Africa, the abolitionists would have faced a much tougher struggle.¹⁹

The connection between abolitionism and African colonization is well evident among the Danes. From the time the Danish government began to negotiate the ban on the slave trade, it investigated in earnest the agricultural potential of the territory around the Danish forts. What helped make the ban feasible were glowing reports that new plantations in Africa could in time supply Denmark with sugar, as well as with cotton, coffee, and other tropical products. To be sure, the Danish plantations on the Gold Coast never amounted to much, but to dismiss them is to ignore the whole history of colonialism, which is full of uncertain beginnings and failures. Their promise undoubtedly bolstered Danish resolve to abolish the slave trade. In 1787, Paul Isert returned from a three-year tour of duty as fort surgeon in the Danish establishments on the coast, believing that if the cultivation of luxury tropical crops could be introduced on the West African coast, "the shameful exportation of Blacks from their happy fatherland could gradually be stopped." Isert returned to Africa the following year and began establishing a colony named in honor of the crown prince. Isert soon died but others followed. They experimented with sugarcane, coffee, indigo, and cotton, and they employed slave labor. Throughout the period of considering abolition of the slave trade, the Danish government actively pursued the planting of an agricultural colony on the Guinea coast. Essentially, Danish authorities hoped to transfer the basic structure of West Indian economies to the African littoral.²⁰

In England, schemes for exploiting Africa's agricultural potential had an even longer history. In the first decade of the eighteenth century Sir Dalby Thomas, the chief factor at Cape Coast, was, as Christopher Brown notes, "probably the first British official to espouse agricultural 'improvement' in West Africa." At midcentury Malachy Postlethwayt thought a British empire in Africa could liberate the continent from the Atlantic slave trade. A vast interior trade remained to be tapped, he thought, and the slave trade hindered the development of these more lucrative branches of commerce. He was not alone in imagining African colonization, particularly through contact with interior peoples, as the route to slave trade abolition. The American Revolution gave a major impetus to such visionary plans. As early as 1777 one British

parliamentarian juxtaposed the anticipated loss of an American empire with the prospective addition of an African empire in which the trade in goods would involve “quantities beyond arithmetical calculation.” In 1783, Henry Trafford thought all the staples of the Americas could be resituated in Africa and grown far more cheaply because of an African free-labor market. Six years later, a resident of Manchester argued for the practicability of substituting a trade in products for the slave trade, declaring it would “make us amends, ten thousand fold” for the lost colonies. An African empire could compensate for losses in America.²¹

Indeed, the 1780s saw, as Deidre Coleman has noted, “a torrent of utopian ideas and fantasies about the sorts of traffic and exchanges that might be conducted on the west coast of Africa.” Some schemes were fantastic. In 1781 Henry Smeathman’s quixotic modeling of labor on a West African termitarium (coincidentally the termite, a superant, just happened to be white) involved a disturbing, futuristic vision of the needs and values of Britain’s emerging capitalist order, regulating and disciplining the local Africans through the division of labor, and allied to notions of interracial propagation. While Smeathman in many ways looked to the future, Carl Wadström and his collaborators offered a plan that looked backward. They admired Africa for its feudal features and offered a labor model of “gentle Servitude” in which “every Native redeemed from Slavery shall be free after a Service or Apprenticeship of a few Years.” Far-fetched as many of these schemes undoubtedly were, they served a larger purpose. Abolitionists gained a hearing in part because they could refer to the existence of a seemingly powerful alternative to the Atlantic slave trade. Seduced by visions of what Philip Curtin called “tropical exuberance,” scores of ecstatic projectors thought West Africa a place of untapped wealth. If a commercial empire in Africa was not only “practicable” but “prudent,” to use Wadström’s words, then abolition was not such a risky proposition.²²

The Sierra Leone settlement established in 1786 as an asylum for black loyalists represented the most concrete result of this intensified interest in West Africa. The Sierra Leone Company thought of its black settler population as subordinate agents in a commercial enterprise. Most of the items in Thomas Clarkson’s famous chest, with its many compartments and trays, which he touted all across Britain, were devoted to the goods that could come from Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa: a score of hardwood varieties, ivory, musk, peppers, gums, cinnamon, rice, tobacco, indigo, cotton, and African manufactures. As Marcus

Wood notes, his chest was “both a moveable lecture kit and a beautifully choreographed travelling salesman’s sample case.” Similarly, Zachary Macauley, governor of Sierra Leone in the 1790s (and ex-overseer of a West Indian slave plantation), promoted the possibilities of coffee production. He thought the flavor of the African coffee bean equal to its West Indian counterpart.²³

The black loyalists, like so many freedpeople throughout the Americas, sought independence through the ownership of small farms. Frustrated with the small allotments of land, outraged at the imposition of annual quitrents, concerned with protecting their dissenting churches, suspicious of the emphasis the company placed on plantation development, and contemptuous of being treated as less than “free British subjects,” black settlers engaged in constant, running battles with the authorities. In part their actions seem a revival of republican principles, the transmission of American political ideology to the shores of West Africa, a “contentious little *America* in West Africa,” as Simon Schama puts it. Black loyalists rediscovered in Africa their true American selves, it would seem, but they also appealed for nothing more than what been promised them before departing for Africa. Above all, they wanted land, security, and autonomy. By contrast, the company had plantation-scale aspirations and emphasized sugar production—“Saccharomania,” as Wadström termed it. The settlers preferred small-scale agriculture, although they built ships, raised livestock, and expanded trade with native villages. After the rebellion of 1800 some moved to slaving forts to engage in commerce and many seemingly forgot their antislavery commitments, purchasing native children under the thinly veiled guise of apprenticeship. Their turn to commerce and embrace of slavery reflected values and behaviors that were as deeply rooted in the American societies from which they had escaped as were the communitarian visions that had earlier inspired them.²⁴

BLACKS PROVED powerful agents not just in Sierra Leone. The ten thousand or so blacks living in Britain in the era of abolition had a singularly important part to play, since they were so close to the seat of metropolitan power. Their resistance helped put the legality of slaveholding on trial in English and Scottish courts in the 1760s and 1770s. Fugitive slaves such as James Somerset and Joseph Knight effectively ended slaveholding in Britain one decade after the Seven Years’ War.

Notable individual cases of black activism occurred: Olaudah Equiano's bringing the infamous case of the *Zong* to the attention of Granville Sharp; Ottobah Cugoano's role as probably the first "to recommend that the Royal Navy patrol the Atlantic Ocean and intercept merchants trafficking in slaves"; or the anonymous black sailor's report that the British navy in the Caribbean routinely violated international law by selling as slaves free blacks and coloured sailors taken off French ships instead of treating them as prisoners of war. By their actions and their complaints, black slaves kept constant pressure on white abolitionists.²⁵

Similarly, resistance to the slave trade in Africa and on the high seas had an impact in Britain. Some Britons became aware that particular African kingdoms, usually for limited periods, prohibited enslavement and refused to sell slaves. That Africans distinguished between legal and illegal forms of enslavement also became evident. The growing practice of pawning was open to abuse, and where Europeans seized free persons as slaves, their African relatives went to great lengths to have them returned. Aggrieved Africans sometimes retaliated against European ship captains who they felt acted illegally. Reports of slave revolts on the Middle Passage, now known to have occurred on about one in ten slave-trading voyages, were commonplace. Of the six hundred or so reported shipboard rebellions or attacks from onshore, the vast majority occurred in the eighteenth century. Their frequency and success rate rose over the course of the century. That slave traders had to invest significant sums in preventive measures must have been widely known in slave-trading ports, and some people surely became aware that slavers avoided the African regions generating the most shipboard revolts.²⁶

Once in the Americas, the slaves, by their defiance, their attempts to escape, their Maroon communities, and their revolts, challenged the fictions of domination and submission around which slavery was constructed. In 1788, West Indian planter and MP Sir James Johnstone argued in favor of prompt abolition to reduce expectations among the slaves that emancipation was imminent. He had heard that Grenadian slaves proclaimed, "Mr Wilberforce for negro! Mr Fox for negro! Parliament for negro! God Almighty for negro!" Slaves also gave essential ammunition to abolitionists, who made much of the tales of planter persecution and savage repression. Since abolitionists, like most planters, took it for granted that Africans, rather than Creoles, were especially prone to rebel, a pragmatic reason existed for abolishing the slave trade.²⁷

On the other hand, activist slaves wreaking vengeance could be counterproductive to the antislavery cause. For this reason, antislavery iconography foregrounded the kneeling supplicant, a far more palatable figure than the armed slave. Furthermore, as a constant, slave resistance can hardly explain why the abolition of the slave trade came to the fore of public debate in the late eighteenth century, unless it was simply by cumulative weight of example. The American War of Independence, it is true, marked a decisive upturn in slave restiveness, with plots uncovered everywhere from Pennsylvania to Georgia, from Jamaica to Antigua; thousands of slaves escaped North American slavery, leading one historian to term it “the greatest slave rebellion in North American history.” But the last four years of the war saw no actual slave rebellions, and there were none during the 1780s, when abolitionism as a movement took hold. This twelve-year period of seeming quiescence in the British West Indies has been described as “probably the longest interval of apparent peace between masters and slaves in the entire slave period.”²⁸

That intense slave resistance might have been counterproductive is also suggested by the Dutch example. Colonists from the Netherlands probably confronted the most vigorous slave resistance of any imperial power. For more than a century, they faced the largest Maroon community per capita in the Americas; their Guiana colonies were a “theater of perpetual war”; and in 1763 a slave uprising in Berbice was probably the largest, longest and most successful slave revolt in Caribbean before St. Domingue. Despite—or perhaps in part because of—widespread and long-lived slave rebelliousness, Dutch abolitionism never took hold.²⁹

Arguably, far more important than the simple incidence of slave resistance was its changing character. The revolutionary era’s ideals of liberty and equality created a radically new climate. Seemingly, slave resistance assumed a new, ideological dimension. It was evident in Jamaica’s great slave rebellion of 1776, the first on that island to be led by skilled native-born or Creole slaves, who, according to one resident, had been much influenced by “disaffected” whites who openly expressed their sympathy for the mainland patriots. As one merchant put it, “Can you be surprised that the Negroes in Jamaica should endeavour to Recover their Freedom, when they dayly hear at the Tables of their Masters, how much the Americans are applauded for the stand they are making for theirs.” In 1791 a worried Jamaica resident reported that “a body of Negroes . . . had assembled drinking King Wilberforce’s health out of a cat’s skull.” In Dominica in the same year, a slave revolt

supposedly occurred in pursuit of “what [the slaves] term their ‘rights.’” “These doctrines, which are novel among the negroes,” the account continued, “have originated from the new language and proceedings in this country [England] respecting the Slave Trade.” Reflecting on the impact of their own Revolution, one Virginian put it well when he said, before the event, slaves “fought [for] freedom merely as a good, now they also claim it as a right.” In past slave societies, slaves had attempted to overthrow slavery, but never before had slaves challenged slavery, speaking the language of natural rights.³⁰

More common than slaves emphasizing their rights, however, was their claim that they merely sought to gain a freedom already granted them by the king, but which the colonists were withholding. The myth of a benign monarch betrayed by others is of course a commonplace, but it may have had special resonance for slaves because of their homeland traditions of chieftdom and monarchy. Thus slaves often tended to present themselves as defenders of church and king rather than as seekers of the rights of man. Claiming a freedom bestowed by royal writ is not the same as asserting a universal right to individual liberty, although Laurent Dubois has a point when he notes that “evocations of the king did not necessarily imply a rejection of the language of republicanism.” He has found evidence of ideological syncretism, but still the slaves’ discourse can often seem extremely traditional. Perhaps the best that can be said is that slaves spoke with several voices and had multiple aims. Most fundamentally, of course, they simply sought freedom. The ideals of the democratic revolutions resonated most clearly with the free blacks and free coloureds of the Caribbean, and with some of the most creolized of slave leaders. Slaves wanted freedom; the free people of color wanted equality with whites and were the ones demanding equal rights.³¹

If slave resistance within the British Empire cannot really help explain abolition too readily, perhaps the greatest slave revolt of all time—that of St. Domingue, beginning in 1791, which in turn inspired a great wave of slave revolts lasting throughout the decade—was pivotal. It was undoubtedly a turning point in the history of New World slavery and marked the first major blow to Atlantic slave systems. Its impact has been likened to the Hiroshima bomb, a never-to-be forgotten event. Its import was magnified because it occurred in the wealthiest Caribbean colony, the true powerhouse of the Atlantic economy. What, for slave owners, was their worst nightmare, was, for blacks, the inspiration

that self-liberation was possible. News of the revolt spread widely and rapidly. Within a month of the 1791 uprising, Jamaican slaves had composed songs about it. Slave owners soon began complaining of a new “insolence” on the part of their slaves.³²

But its impact on the antislavery movement in Britain was mixed. In the beginning, the massive revolt seemed to favor abolitionist arguments: they could point to slaves vindicating their humanity, they could stress that the revolt was a direct result of the huge influx of Africans that immediately preceded it. Precisely those arguments held some sway in Parliament and help explain the favorable 1792 vote against the slave trade. But abolitionists were soon on the defensive because, as news circulated from St. Domingue, freedom for blacks seemed to bring only economic ruin and indiscriminate slaughter. Despite the later romanticization of Toussaint-Louverture, the overriding image of the Haitian Revolution was negative: the atrocities committed by the slaves, their continuing poverty, and constant political upheavals lost them sympathizers. Moreover, the outbreak of war between Britain and France in 1793 inevitably pushed reform off center stage; abolitionists had to be wary of seeming to be associated with Jacobinism. Furthermore, by the spring of 1794 British troops in the Caribbean had great initial successes, taking French Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and roughly one third of St. Domingue, with prospects of taking the whole in short order. Grandiose visions floated of restoring the British Empire to the commercial heights of before 1776. Imperial patriotism squelched abolitionism.³³

The French National Convention’s outlawing of slavery in all its colonies in February 1794, however, changed everything, particularly the nature of the war. By 1795, French armies that included large numbers of emancipated slaves seriously threatened British Caribbean colonies. In that year impressive struggles erupted in two nominally British West Indian islands—Grenada and St. Vincent—that Britain had acquired from France in the 1760s. There, extraordinary alliances between white and colored proprietors and the mass of slaves destroyed more lives and property than any other slave uprisings in the history of British slavery. At the same time, the largest Maroon community at Trelawney Town in Jamaica also rose in revolt. These rebellions could be explained away as involving those groups least integrated into the British plantation system: the francophone free blacks and slaves in the Ceded Islands, the black Caribs, and the Maroons. In imperial consciousness, these rebellions were largely French invasions, and policymakers dispatched them out of

mind much as they did the black Caribs by deporting them to Roatan and the Maroons by shipping them off to Nova Scotia. Nevertheless, when the 1792 resolution calling for an end to the slave trade in four years came up for discussion in the mid-1790s, the times were unpropitious for abolitionism.³⁴

Furthermore, in 1795–96 the British government responded to the dangers in the Caribbean by sending the biggest expedition yet to sail from British shores. They managed to save the British islands but suffered defeat in St. Domingue at a staggering cost. Major rebellions and devastating white mortality were the predominant features of the Caribbean in the 1790s; neither helped the abolitionists.³⁵

BUT OTHER aspects of the long war in the Caribbean were more helpful to the abolitionist cause, especially if they could be presented as being in the national interest. At least five such developments fit the bill.

First, in the mid-1790s, in response to the heavy mortality of white troops, the British began recruiting their own slave troops—by war's end twelve regiments—who provided up to a third of the colonial garrisons. They proved their worth and helped save the British regime of slavery in the Caribbean. Ironically, the British government was, for the most part, buying these slaves from transatlantic slavers—making it the largest single purchaser of African arrivals and giving the British government a direct stake in the perpetuation of the trade. But, at war's end, abolitionists not only made the case that the British owed a debt to these slave soldiers, but that their courage and fidelity undercut all the stereotypes of slaves in general. There was a nice symmetry when, in the same year that the British government abolished the slave trade, it also emancipated the entire ten thousand men of the West India Regiments.³⁶

Second, by the early nineteenth century British national security interests had shifted away from the Caribbean. The British withdrawal from St. Domingue in 1798 was part of that decision. Another occurred in 1802, when by the terms of the Treaty of Amiens, Britain returned all her West Indian conquests, except Trinidad. When war resumed the following year, the Caribbean assumed a lower priority, because of its reputation as a graveyard for soldiers and a realization that overseas adventures could undermine European strategy. Moreover, after so much blood and money had been spent on the Caribbean, too, the post-American independence argument that Parliament should not interfere

in matters strictly colonial lost some of its force. The swing of formal empire to the east occurred not after the American Revolution but after the Anglo-French War in the Caribbean.³⁷

Third, the Haitian Revolution's role in weakening French commercial competition was an important prerequisite for British politicians' responding to abolitionist pressure. The defeat of Napoleon's expeditionary force meant that the French were no longer a significant threat in the Caribbean. Patriotic hostility to France also ennobled antislavery, since Napoleon had restored slavery and the slave trade in what remained of the French Caribbean; Toussaint's betrayal by the French and his death in a French prison (1803) also evoked sympathy. In addition, the war helped destroy the French navy. Surely, as Michael Duffy notes, it was no mere "coincidence that the slave trade was finally abolished by Britain in the very year that the size of the French navy fell to its lowest point."³⁸

Fourth, the declaration of Haiti's independence in 1804 undoubtedly led to a resurgence in British abolitionism, making the cause seem both "more necessary" (because of the example of violent self-liberation) and "less problematical" (lessening fears that the French would or could step into the breach if the British withdrew from the trade). Pro-slavery and anti-Haiti up to that point, the *London Times* suddenly switched in favor of abolition.³⁹

Finally, while ending the supply of slaves to foreigners had emerged as a proposal as early as 1792, abolitionists were able to extend the argument to newly conquered territories (on the grounds that they were often returned at peace and that the British had merely strengthened competitors) and thereby promote both aims in terms of national and military self-interest. Thus in 1802, Parliament limited the future supply of slaves to Trinidad, which, as Roger Anstey notes, was "the first major attempt by the abolitionists to achieve significant lessening of the slave trade specifically to British possessions on grounds other than the general principle." Three years later, they were able to do the same by gaining an order-in-council limiting supplies to the newly conquered Dutch Guiana. And finally, in 1806, Parliament ended the British slave trade to foreign colonies and conquered islands, which at that time amounted to about three-quarters of all British slaving. A year before final abolition, then, the abolitionists had succeeded in ending the bulk of the British slave trade by emphasizing the strategic interests of the British state in wartime.⁴⁰

In short, the Haitian Revolution had contradictory effects. For British abolitionism, it was at first encouraging, then set back the movement

for a decade, before finally Haiti's emergence as a weak state in 1804 created a more favorable antislavery moment. In general, St. Domingue's destruction was an immense boost to plantation slavery. It created a huge economic opportunity for planters throughout the hemisphere to take advantage of the resulting high prices; planters, with access to undeveloped land everywhere from Cuba to Brazil to Jamaica, clamored for more African slaves. Such certainly explains South Carolina's decision in December 1803 to reopen its slave trade. South Carolinians anticipated a bonanza with large planter demand for slaves from the west, a direct consequence of the Louisiana Purchase, which was of course predicated on the defeat of Napoleon's army in St. Domingue, and thus a direct example of the stimulus the Haitian Revolution gave to the demand for more African slaves. At the same time, however, the rest of the United States was shocked and angered by South Carolina's action. The Haitian Revolution thus strengthened the political argument for pressing Congress to outlaw the American slave trade in 1807. The Haitian Revolution's economic impact was primarily to augment plantation slavery, but its political impact went in the other direction—facilitating attempts in both Britain and the United States to curtail that same expansion. After the reverses in the Caribbean campaigns of the 1790s, imperial policymakers began to think defensively. There was no strong political impulse to open new plantation frontiers. They took Trinidad as a base for contraband trade with the Spanish Main.⁴¹

THIS QUICK sketch of some larger contexts and three abolitions—four, if you count the Haitian—has suggested some of the cosmopolitan, international flavor of the movement to end the slave trade at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Abolition was hardly a parochial British affair. Danes, Americans, Haitians, and Britons knew and responded to what the others were doing. Planters and slaves in the Caribbean, black settlers and white adventurers in Africa, black rebels throughout the Atlantic, the St. Domingue slave revolt, and strategic national interests shaped abolitionist discourse and metropolitan actions. The coincidence of four countries abolishing the slave trade in the first decade of the nineteenth century also suggests that the British antislavery movement was no mere “historical accident,” “a contingent event that just as easily might never have occurred.” Such a claim is surely an exaggeration. To say that the abolitionist campaign

“had its roots in a distinct and distinctive moment in British imperial history” is true, but that the same decision occurred in other countries at roughly the same time indicates broader forces were at work.⁴²

Furthermore, to explicate the domestic and international forces in play when the first decisions to end the transatlantic slave trade were made means attending as closely to interests as to abolitionists. British abolition took its first inspiration from colonial interests aimed at achieving political autonomy; by their commitment to improvement, Caribbean planters paradoxically found some compatibility with abolitionist aims, even as those commitments arose out of defensiveness and political weakness; slaves were natural allies of abolitionists, although ironically they seem to have impeded as much as furthered abolitionist goals; and abolition’s final realization in 1807 depended heavily on the enactment of earlier legislation that prohibited the British slave trade to foreign colonies in the West Indies, a decision that made sense to Parliament when Britain dominated the sea lanes and when supplying rivals with slaves was construed as strengthening competitors. By looking at slave trade abolition in this way, as a coalescence of interests and ideology rather than as a triumph of ideology over interests, it may no longer be possible to consider it an example of “the most altruistic act since Christ’s crucifixion,” as some contemporaries viewed it, or alternatively, using historian W. E. H. Lecky’s often-quoted words, as probably one of “the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations,” but perhaps an entangled world of pragmatism and principle is preferable to an ethereal realm of pure moral consciousness.⁴³

Notes

1. Documents Relating to the Case of the Ship *Zong*, 1783, 3, 21, REC/19, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. During the 1807 deliberations in the U.S. Congress over the slave trade, Virginian John Randolph argued that “the transportation of slaves must be considered like the transportation of indigo, coffee, or tobacco.” *U.S. Gazette*, 16 February 1807. For the course of British abolition, see David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 231–49; Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005). “An African Merchant” argued that the African trade was “the foundation of our commerce, the support of our colonies, the life of our navigation, and first cause of our national industry and riches.” African Merchant, *A Treatise upon the Trade from Great-Britain to Africa, humbly recommended to the Attention of Government* (London: R. Baldwin, 1772), 7.

2. For the most current figures, see David Eltis and David Richardson, “A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. Eltis and Richardson (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 2008), 1–60. Of course, 1807 did not end the slave trade, only parts of it—essentially its Northern Atlantic component. After 1807 the South Atlantic system strengthened, with about three million Africans—a quarter of all those carried across the Atlantic—reaching the New World, primarily Brazil.

3. Joshua Evans Loftin, “The Abolition of the Danish Slave Trade” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1977); Svend E. Green-Pedersen, “The Economic Considerations behind the Danish Abolition of the Negro Slave Trade,” in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 399–418; Green-Pedersen, “Slave Demography in the Danish West Indies and the Abolition of the Danish Slave Trade,” in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas*, ed. David Eltis and James Walvin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 231–58; Hans Christian Johansen, “The Reality behind the Demographic Arguments to Abolish the Danish Slave Trade,” in Eltis and Walvin, *Abolition*, 221–30; Erik Gøbel, “The Danish Edict of 16th March 1792 to Abolish the Slave Trade” in *Orbis in Orbem: Liber amicorum Jan Everaert*, ed. Jan Parmentier and Sander Spanoghe (Ghent: Academia Press, 2001), 251–63; Gøbel, “The Danish Edict of 1792 to Abolish the Slave Trade” (unpublished conference paper, 2007, in possession of author).

4. Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 107, 135–39, 142–44, 151; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16, 41–43 (quotation on 41), 135–49; Donald Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1979), 295–346; Matthew E. Mason, “Slavery Overshadowed: Congress Debates Prohibiting the Atlantic Slave Trade to the United States, 1806–1807,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Spring 2000): 59–81; Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 9–41; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 286 (quotation).

5. Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975); James Walvin, *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776–1838* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 97–123; Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783–1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 112 (quotation); Drescher, “Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade,” in *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament and People*, ed. Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin, and James Walvin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 42–65.

6. Thomas Arnold to Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 12 May 1789, in Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 25–26; William Dickson, “Diary,” 1792, inside cover, in Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756–1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 75. For the economic cost of British abolition, see Chaim D. Kaufmann and Robert A. Pape, “Explaining Costly International Moral Action: Britain’s Sixty-Year Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 631–68.

7. These interests are by no means comprehensive. Against the proslavery argument that the slave trade was the nursery of seamen, abolitionists argued it was their graveyard. The “maritime interest” could be enlisted on behalf of abolition. See Christopher

Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1968); Whyte, *Scotland and Abolition*, 96.

8. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 90; Seymour Drescher, "People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20, no. 4 (1990): 561–80.

9. Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Decline of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York: Century, 1928); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944). The most effective rebuttal is Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977). See also J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); John J. McCusker, "The Economy of the British West Indies, 1763–1790: Growth, Stagnation, or Decline?" in *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World*, ed. McCusker (London: Routledge, 1997), 310–31. The best effort at resuscitation of the Williams thesis is David Beck Ryden, "Does Decline Make Sense? The West Indian Economy and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (2001): 347–74, and *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a judicious summary, see David Richardson, "The Ending of the British Slave Trade in 1807: The Economic Context," in Farrell, Unwin, and Walvin, *British Slave Trade*, 127–40.

10. David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11–20; Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 147, 173 (quotations); Ragatz, *Planter Class*, 242; Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 239–48.

11. David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5–6; Michael Duffy, "World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793–1815," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 192; J. R. Ward, "The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748–1815," in Marshall, *Eighteenth Century*, 422; Ward, *British West Indian Slavery*, 62–95, 113, 195–98; Justin Roberts, "Working between the Lines: Labor and Agriculture on Two Barbadian Slave Plantations, 1796–1797," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2006): 551–86; Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 1:435–64; Heather Cateau, "Conservatism and Change Implementation in the British West Indian Sugar Industry, 1750–1810," *Journal of Caribbean History* 29, no. 1 (1995): 1–36. If diversification seems an unlikely ally of abolitionism, consider that Tench Coxe, who played a major role in formulating U.S. economic policy during the Washington and Jefferson administrations and who became secretary of the newly re-formed Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1787, made diversification of Southern agriculture the key to his hopes of ending slavery. See Jacob E. Cooke, *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 92–94, 106, 149.

12. Heather Cateau, "The New 'Negro' Business: Hiring in the British West Indies 1750–1810" in *In the Shadow of the Plantation: Caribbean History and Legacy*, ed. Alvin O. Thompson and Woodville K. Marshall (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2002), 100–120; *Gentleman's Magazine* 59 (1789): 334; Roberts, "Working between the Lines," 551–86; B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 187–211; Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 179–204; Philip D. Morgan,

"Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New World Plantations," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 189–220.

13. David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 382–447; Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 264–308; B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750–1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 18, 22–29, 41–112, 137–293; Douglas Hall, "Absentee Proprietorship in the British West Indies, to about 1750," *Jamaican Historical Review* 4 (1964): 15–35; Trevor Burnard, "Passengers Only: The Extent and Significance of Absenteeism in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *Atlantic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2004): 178–95; Samuel Martin, *Essay upon Plantership, Humbly inscrib'd to all the Planters of the British Sugar-Colonies in America*. (Antigua: T. Smith, 1750); John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI, Codex Eng. 74, Thomas Hulton, "Account of Travels," 54; Thomas W. Krise, ed., *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies, 1657–1777* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 168; Richard B. Sheridan, "Samuel Martin, Innovating Sugar Planter of Antigua, 1750–1776," *Agricultural History* 34, no. 3 (1960): 126–39; Natalie Zacek, "Cultivating Virtue: Samuel Martin and the Paternal Ideal in the Eighteenth-Century English West Indies," *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diaspora* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 8–31; Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776*, ed. Evangeline W. Andrews and Charles M. Andrews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 103–6. For insights into late-eighteenth-century agricultural improvement, see John Dovaston, "Agricultura Americana, or Improvements in West-India Husbandry Considered," John Carter Brown Library, Codex Eng. 60; Nicholas Robson, *Hints for a General View of the Agricultural State of the Parish of Saint James, in the Island of Jamaica* (London: John Stockdale, 1796).

14. Edwin Lascelles et al., *Instructions for the Management of a Plantation in Barbados. And for the treatment of Negroes* (London, 1786), 2; Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, *Observations, Occasioned by the Attempts made in England to Effect the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (Kingston: G. Francklyn, 1789), 17 (and see 33–34 for a letter to Nickolls from a long-time resident of the West Indies that names ten estates that "kept up their stock of Negroes by the natural increase"); Sheila Lambert, ed., *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, 132 vols. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1975), 87:439; 122:70, 96; John Cobham to John W. Nelson, 31 October 1801, cited in S. D. Smith, *Slavery, Family and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 265; Samuel Watt to James Watt, 30 September 1804, cited in Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-slavery: 1612–1865* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 86. See also B. W. Higman, "Slavery and the Development of Demographic Theory in the Age of the Industrial Revolution," in *Slavery and British Society, 1776–1846*, ed. James Walvin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 164–94.

15. Samuel Martin, *A Short Treatise on the slavery of Negroes in the British Colonies* (Antigua: Robert Mearns, 1775), 11–12; Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 110–13; D. Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, 41–72; S. K., *A Short and Impartial Account of the Treatment of Slaves in the Island of Antigua . . .* (Cork: John Cronin, 1789); and Rodgers, *Ireland*, 180–81.

16. Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B. W. Higman (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1992), 192–93; Green-Pedersen, “Slave Demography,” 231–58; Göbel, “Danish Edict,” 251–63.

17. Christopher L. Brown, “The Politics of Slavery,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 220; Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 151–52, 180–213.

18. Karl Watson, “Capital Sentences against Slaves in Barbados in the Eighteenth Century: An Analysis,” in Thompson and Marshall, *Shadow of the Plantation*, 196–221; Stephen Fuller, *The New Act of Assembly of the Island of Jamaica* (London: B. White, 1789); Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 319. For the lobby, see Alexandra Franklin, “Enterprise and Advantage: The West India Interest in Britain, 1774–1840” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992); Andrew O’Shaughnessy, “The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution,” *Historical Journal* 40, no. 1 (1997): 71–95.

19. Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–133; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 259–330. See also John Hippisley, *Essays: I, On the Populousness of Africa . . .* (London: T. Lowndes, 1764); Hippisley, “On the Populousness of Africa: An Eighteenth-Century Text,” *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 2 (1998): 601–8; R. Mansell Prothero, “John Hippisley on the Populousness of Africa: A Comment,” *ibid.*, 609–12. Hippisley, who served as an officer of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa and briefly as governor of Cape Coast Castle, argued that Africa “could spare thousands, nay, millions more, and go on doing the same to the end of time.” He also hinted that traders should “soften the misery” of slaves “by every safe and reasonable indulgence that their humanity can suggest.”

20. Daniel Hopkins, “Peter Thonning’s Map of Danish Guinea and Its Use in Colonial Administration and Atlantic Diplomacy, 1801–1890,” *Cartographica* 35, nos. 3–4 (1998): 99–122; Hopkins, “Danish Natural History and African Colonialism at the Close of the Eighteenth Century: Peter Thonning’s ‘Scientific Journey’ to the Guinea Coast, 1799–1803,” *Archives of Natural History* 26 (1999): 369–418; Hopkins, “The Danish Ban on the Atlantic Slave Trade and Denmark’s African Colonial Ambitions, 1787–1807,” *Itinerario* 25, nos. 3–4 (2001): 154–84; Hopkins, “Denmark’s Prohibition of the Slave Trade and African Colonial Policy, 1787–1850” (unpublished conference paper, 2007, in possession of author).

21. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 266 (Thomas), 269–75 (Postlethwayt), 277–78, 279 (Trafford); Temple Luttrell, 28 May 1777, “Proceedings in the Commons on the State of the African Company, and of the Trade to Africa,” in William Cobbett, ed., *Parliamentary History of England from the earliest period to the year 1803*, 36 vols. (London: T. C. Hansard, 1806–20), 19, col. 306; British Library, London, Add MSS 38345, Henry Trafford, “Plan of an Universal Revolution of Commerce”; John Lowe Jr., *Liberty or Death: A Tract, by Which is Vindicated the Obvious Practicability of Trading to the Coasts of Guinea, for Its Natural Products, in Lieu of the Slave-Trade* (Manchester: J. Harrop, 1789), 32, cited in Coleman, *Romantic Colonization*, 2, 13–17. For an early American position, see James Swan, *A Dissuasion to Great-Britain and the Colonies, from the Slave Trade to Africa . . .* (Boston: E. Russell, 1772). For suggestions that Ireland concentrate on valuable African commodities, see [Frederick Jebb], *Thoughts on the Discontents of the People last Year respecting the Sugar Duties . . .* (Dublin: W. Wilson, 1781); *Observations on the Advantages which would arise to this country from opening a trade with the Coast of Africa, with a plan for the same by which the Slave-Trade may be Ultimately Abolished* (Dublin, 1785).

22. Coleman, *Romantic Colonization*, 28 (quotation); Carl B. Wadström, *Observations on the Slave Trade, and a Description of some Part of the Coast of Guinea . . .* (London: J. Phillips, 1789); Wadström, *An Essay on Colonization, particularly applied to the Western Coast of Africa . . .*, 2 vols. (London: Darton and Harvey, 1794–95), 1:iii (quotation); August Nordenskiöld, *Plan for a Free Community upon the Coast of Africa . . .* (London: R. Hindmarsh, 1789), 50 (quotation); Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850*, 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 1:60 (quotation).

23. Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade . . .*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 2:14–16, see also 1:302–4, 373, 383, 474; Marcus Wood, “Packaging Liberty and Marketing the Gift of Freedom: 1807 and the Legacy of Clarkson’s Chest,” in Farrell, Unwin, and Walvin, *British Slave Trade*, 203–23 (quotation, 218), 308–13 (the chest itself); Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, Macauley MSS, Zachary Macauley Journal, folder 16, 24 November 1796, folder 18, 5 January 1797.

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